

Respecting, remembering & celebrating someone's life

Ideas for a more
personal funeral service



Contents

- 3** Something a little more personal
- 4** Five simple alternatives
- 6** Five things to think about
- 10** 30 Celebration of Life ideas
 - An outdoor celebration
 - An indoor celebration
 - Public celebrations
 - Private celebrations
 - After the celebration



Something a little more personal

Gone are the days when everyone was expected to have a formal funeral service in a church or at a crematorium.

Years ago, a funeral service might be entirely sombre, with the coffin on show, people singing hymns and a eulogy from a minister or celebrant who perhaps hadn't even known the deceased.

Today, remembering someone can be a much more personal experience, and a service or send-off can be as formal or informal, serious or celebratory, big or intimate as you like.

The service can really reflect the life and personality – and wishes – of the loved one who has passed.

Let's take a look at what that might mean.

Five simple alternatives

Here are five areas where you can make the service a little more individual to the person:

1 Alternative venues

There's no need to have a service at a church or crematorium. Perhaps a village hall, or a favourite restaurant, or out in the open like the coast or near a favourite walk. There might be a venue nearby where you can hire a room, or you might have a send-off at the local pub or at home. Perhaps the person who has died loved a nearby zoo or a beauty spot where you could hold a remembrance.

2 Alternative transport

Examples include tandem bicycles, VW Camper vans, Victorian horse-drawn carriages or vintage cars. You don't have to hire a limousine or even go by taxi – depending on the venue, perhaps you could walk there together or decorate someone's car in a way that feels appropriate.

3 Alternative clothes

Guests might attend the send-off wearing fancy dress, bright coloured clothing, party wear or even the team shirts from a favourite football team – people who pass on their funeral wishes often ask those attending to not wear black and not make the occasion overly solemn and sad.

Funeral services can be unsettling for children, so letting them dress in their favourite outfit can really help them feel comfortable and more at ease.

4 **Alternative music**

Today, fewer people know or want to sing traditional hymns. And some people don't wish to sing at all – but that doesn't mean there can't be music. Perhaps playing songs by the deceased's favourite group or singer feels more appropriate, or the songs from a musical they loved. Sometimes people want the theme tune from a TV show they enjoyed played at their send-off. You might even know someone who plays an instrument who would be happy to play something at the send-off.

5 **Alternative coffins**

Pure Cremation uses eco-friendly pine coffins or suitable alternatives. There are also biodegradable coffins made from wicker, wool, bamboo and cardboard. Sometimes people ask for personal items to be included in the coffin with the deceased.



“

We had a gathering of friends and family to celebrate my wife's life about a month after she died. We had a nice buffet outside with photos of her that were taken over the years. The only rules were no speeches and no tears.

Mr Elsey

”

Five things to think about

Things to consider in advance – whether you're thinking about your own send-off, or organising someone else's:

1 Talk

Talking about death and funerals can still feel like a taboo in Britain. Whereas in many countries people are much more open, sometimes in Britain we are more reserved when it comes to talking about our own mortality.

But the truth is, we are all going to need a funeral of some kind one day. So it's really important to share with others what we want for our own funeral and send-off.

It's very stressful having to make decisions for someone who's died, about whether, for instance, everyone should wear black or bright colours at the send-off. But if we share our wishes, that makes it much easier for those we leave behind. Even if they're reluctant to have 'the conversation' about what happens after we've died, when the time comes, knowing our wishes will take away a lot of the pressure and heartache from them.

For instance, one of Pure Cremation's customers said to us recently that he has put a codicil in his Will (a codicil is a legal addition or amendment) that when he dies, his children 'take a couple of grand out of the estate and have a bloody good party.'

2 Tone

What kind of funeral service would you like? We've talked about how it could be formal or informal, solemn or celebratory, an intimate remembrance for just one or two people, or a larger gathering perhaps in an open space for everyone who ever knew you.

Whilst you might not have specific ideas of exactly what you want, the overall tone and type of service or send-off you want is a great starting point, and an important thing to share with family.



3 Time

If you are involved with arranging a send-off for someone, it's important to not feel rushed. One of the many benefits of a Pure Cremation funeral, for instance, is that the cremation is performed separately, without any funeral service.

That takes away the time pressure, because it means a service or send-off doesn't have to happen at the same time as the cremation. It could be weeks or months later. If there are people who want to attend but who live far away or who are very busy, being able to organise an event for when suits everybody can really relieve much of the stress. It can also give you more time to choose the venue, and book it if needs be.

4 Flowers

Flowers, floral arrangements and wreaths have featured at funerals for hundreds of years, to the point where many people 'expect' flowers to be at a funeral service.

But cut flowers can be very expensive and are often left behind to be composted after a service. Instead of that expense, it's sometimes possible to hire artificial displays more cheaply, or you could buy plants instead of cut flowers, that you can keep after the send-off and watch grow.

Instead of people bringing flowers to lay at a memorial, sometimes family ask mourners to make a donation to a cause close to the deceased's heart, as a way of making the remembrance more personal.

You can also buy dried flowers which last a long time, and which you might want to take home and put on display as a memento.



“

With the money left over, I will be able to host a garden party with all our families together to celebrate mum's life.

”

Kimberly

5 Urns

Most people today have a cremation rather than a burial – and that means their ashes will be scattered or kept in an urn. The urn can either be kept at home or it could be placed in an urn garden at a cemetery or a niche in a columbarium. It might be possible to add a memorial stone there.

On the BBC programme 'Inside the Undertakers', the presenter, Stacey Dooley, talked about how she liked the idea of her ashes being kept in an urn with her family, so she was always with them. She repeatedly referred to her choice of urn as being 'marble' – but there are dozens of types of urn available (just search online for inspiration), so you can find an urn that feels right.

At Pure Cremation, our urns give family another alternative – burial. That's because the urns we use are biodegradable, so families can bury them if they wish, perhaps in their garden under a sapling or other plant, or other outdoor space, knowing that it is environmentally friendly.



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My husband will be having a wonderful Viking theme party, it takes all the stress away of organising a funeral.

”

Donna

30 Celebration of Life ideas

Here are 30 ideas for a more personal celebration of life, whether outdoors, indoors, in public or private.

We'll talk about them from the perspective of arranging a send-off for someone else, but they are all ideas you might want for yourself one day too:

An outdoor celebration

- 1 A lantern, balloon, or paper boat release is a beautiful gesture, so choose something that suits the person's personality.
- 2 Planting a tree is an everlasting celebration of life memorial and you could choose a tree that symbolises their character or simply opt for their favourite.
- 3 Create a memory garden together, or give out flower seed packets so people can plant them in memory.
- 4 Hold a barbecue on the beach.
- 5 Have a picnic at their favourite picnic spot.
- 6 Go hiking in a place that meant a lot to them.

An indoor celebration

- 7 Host a family dinner and include their favourite dish.
- 8 Organise a bake-off gathering.
- 9 Have an afternoon tea party at your home.
- 10 Set up a family gathering and include activities children can join. For example, if your loved one had a favourite movie you could plan a movie night and watch it together.
- 11 Create a memory board and ask people to bring along photos, poems, notes and memories to add to it. Sharing memories and stories of a person's life is a meaningful way to remember them.
- 12 Have stones, quilt squares or Jenga blocks available for people to sign and write a message, then use them to create a unique memorial.
- 13 Ask people to bring an item or write down a memory to place in a memory box.



“

We arranged a family meal, and had a picture of her with a nice glass of wine sitting at the head of the table. It was lovely.

”

Susan

Public celebrations

- 14 Did the person have a favourite artist, band, opera, musical, or style of music? Buy tickets and go to a concert, maybe sing along to their favourite song.
- 15 Organise a charity event in your loved one's honour, such as a charity marathon, clothes donation, bingo, or karaoke session.
- 16 Organise a memorial donation to a favourite charity or organisation.
- 17 Organise a memorial tournament around a game they loved – anything from cricket to Monopoly.
- 18 Send your loved one's ashes up in a rocket and light up the sky with fireworks.



“

Instead of arranging a funeral over Christmas where many people would not have been able to attend, we are now planning a lovely celebration party where we can give all her family and friends plenty of notice.

”

Jacky

Private celebrations

- 19 Create or up-cycle a piece of furniture as a special place to remember them.
- 20 Fill a time capsule with notes, photos, and memorabilia and bury it along with their ashes.
- 21 Have memorial jewellery made, or wear a memorial necklace that holds a small portion of your loved one's ashes.
- 22 Have a pillow, cushion or teddy made from their favourite clothing.
- 23 Make a photo album or photo book.
- 24 Create a keepsake box (this is certainly something you can do for yourself, to pass on when you die – a box of memories and mementos).
- 25 Have a spare chair for them always.
- 26 Choose a picture that reminds you of special time together – this might be a painting of a favourite place, a lovely portrait taken from a photograph.



After the celebration

A celebration of life might be a one-time event, but remembrance will continue.

The anniversary of a loved one's death or their birthday can be a time for simple contemplation, family get-togethers and sharing stories and memories.

There are many ways you can choose to celebrate their life for many years after they have gone, including:

- 27 Writing a letter or poem or memory.
- 28 Play their favourite song.
- 29 Look through old photos.
- 30 Light a candle and reflect on your happy memories

We hope this guide to having a more personal funeral service or send-off has been useful. We have a lot more free articles and tips on our website at purecremation.co.uk/help-and-advice



If you'd like to know more about Pure Cremation and the funerals and funeral plans we offer, please call us free on **0800 033 77 37** or visit **purecremation.co.uk**