

Still Life



The Still Life in this edition has been provided by Ann Hollowell, who as keen-eyed readers may recall appeared in the last edition with her unique charity concept, Children Are Butterflies. Ann is the 2009 winner of the Editor's prize for contribution and receives a free BIFD subscription for next year.

How did you arrive at what you are doing today?

B Hollowell and Son Funeral Directors were set up in 1972 by my father and grandfather. I grew up within the funeral industry but vowed never to work within the company. I completed a hairdressing and beauty therapy course when I was 17 but due to ill health and surgery I did not pursue my career. During convalescence I began to answer the business telephone and slowly became aware that I was taking a more active role within the company. Before long I was arranging funerals and I qualified as a Funeral Director in February 1995 to my fathers and grandfathers delight.

What was the best advice you have ever heard?

In my 36 years of life I have been given lots of advice. I try and stick to the following:

- 1) Be yourself
- 2) Follow your dreams
- 3) Always tell the truth
- 4) Remember your glass is always half full, not half empty

What is your typical day? – Describe your job.

Once I have packed my kids off to school, fed the dogs and the fish and travelled into work, I am ready for a rest! Not only am I a Funeral Director but I am also a partner within the company. My day starts by checking my post and emails and dealing with anything that needs urgent attention whether it is connected to funeral work

or staffing. When I am not arranging and conducting funerals, I design and produce service sheets for all our funeral services as well as work on my forum and with families who are members of 'Children Are Butterflies' I then go home, sometimes on call and become a mum and housewife again.

Have you thought about your own funeral beyond pre-payment?

No not really. I want to be cremated with my remains being buried so my children/grandchildren can visit if they wish.

Have you made any special provisions with respect to your funeral?

At this point in time NO, I am sure my family would sort things out and know roughly what I would want but I may feel different in the future and set plans out for my family to make it easier for them when the time comes.

Do you consider that music important to a funeral service?

Today, music plays a very important part in a funeral service. Many families now request either special pieces of music to be played on the organ or they request music from a CD or tape. I especially use requested pieces of music on baby/children's funerals. It gives the families the opportunity to say how they feel using the words of a song.

Are funerals today value for money?

I can completely understand and appreciate why the general public with the help of the media feel that funeral services are over priced! We are seen on the day walking in front of a hearse and people feel that, that is all a funeral service consists of. If people could see the hours of work that is put into each funeral service it would then give a clearer indication to why funerals seem so expensive. It is plainly obvious if the cost of living rises so does everything else including the cost of a funeral services and all the disbursements that go with it.

What would you change about funeral services today given the opportunity?

What is there really to change? Everything has relaxed so much over the years. Women have become funeral directors, there are more cremation services, there are services of thanksgiving that now take place after the cremation/burial service etc etc
If anything, top hats and canes should be banned. I hate them, they are old fashioned and I would never wear a bowler hat, I'd just look daft!

Have you ever refused a clients wishes?

Yes, on more than one occasion. I always follow rules and guidelines; they are there for a reason. I will help any family I can to carry out their final wishes but it has to be above board and legal.

Have you considered who will

take over your business when you retire?

Hopefully one or more of the kids, (mine or the nieces and nephews). On saying that it has never been discussed as they are young and I don't plan on retiring for another 23 years or so. I'll think about that one nearer the time!

Do you have a will?

Yes I do, that was sorted as soon as I had my children and is updated when necessary.

What is the most significant benefit of your job? And the least attractive aspect?

Helping people during what will probably be the worst time of their life. Listening, understanding and following their wishes for their loved one. Feeling that you have helped to 'make a difference'

Least attractive is helping our embalmer in the mortuary. I am not squeamish at all, but I much prefer to work closely with my families.

Which was the most significant funeral in your memory?

I conducted a little girl's funeral just before Christmas last year. It was late in the afternoon and it was getting dusk. It was wet and cold which made the day even worse for her family. Whilst in Church it was noticed by the family and a large number of the congregation that a butterfly was circling her coffin. It was very strange due the time of the year but it flew above her for quite awhile. It struck a chord with me as I run my trust fund called 'Children Are Butterflies' and I was always told by my late Grandma that when you die you become a butterfly. I tell that story to all my children's families so the butterfly being in church brought great comfort to them and it is something I will never forget.

Does the media have any influence in people's decision making, with respect to choice?

I am not a great fan of the media generally but over the years there have been articles and documentaries about funerals. If anything they have portrayed in the past that a cremation service is a lot cheaper than a burial service when in fact there is not that much difference.
So, there have been times when a family would like a burial service but refer to an article they have read and say, they will have to have a cremation as it is cheaper, so I suppose the answer to that would be YES!

Which piece of equipment could you not do without?

My mobile phone. If I don't have it I'm lost. For work purposes I can always be contacted even when conducting funerals as it is on silent mode and of course it is of utmost importance for my daughters so they can contact me if there was a problem.

I do often ask though, "How did we all cope before the mobile phone?"

Which question would you have liked to be asked, and why? How would you have answered it?

Here goes..... Is it the responsibility of the funeral director to sort out the problems of forms 4 and 5 for cremation?

The answer to this question in my opinion is NO. Should funeral directors be spending time reading through forms 4 and 5 to check whether they are filled in correctly? No. If the medical referee for the Crematorium finds an error should he/she not contact the doctor concerned and deal with the problem direct? Yes. Once the forms are in the care of the Crematorium, is it not their job to organise their forms? Yes. Funeral Directors are not supposed to look at forms 4 and 5 they are supposed to be in a sealed envelope. Instead the problems with forms 4 and 5 seem now to be the problem for the funeral director to sort out. It is both the responsibility of the doctors and crematorium staff to deal with the paperwork that is what they are paid for.

