



SYDNEY

**u3a**

*Learn Laugh Live*

## Harbourside North

March 2023

Welcome to the U3A Harbourside North Bulletin and the second for 2023.



We look forward to your suggestions for topics and contributions for inclusion in this year's editions. [paulacastileu3a@gmail.com](mailto:paulacastileu3a@gmail.com)

### The Editors

*Ursula Schappi and Paula Castile*

## *Which Way To Go?*

As my sister, Jocelyn, and I have got older, we often discuss, both humorously and seriously, how we want our bodies to be disposed of after we die. Joc is 67 and I'm 72. Joc wants to be composted (not yet legal in Australia). I want to be cremated. My eldest son is a ceramic artist, and I asked him to make an urn for my ashes. I said each of my three sons should take turns at keeping my ashes/urn for a year and hand me over to the next after each year so I can haunt them forever.

Funerals are an important part of the grieving process. During Covid I lost a couple of good friends without the ability to attend their funerals. Although there were some memorial services, I continue to mourn their loss. Recently, a close friend announced she doesn't want a funeral or any service. I argued this didn't allow for her friends and possibly her family to celebrate her life or mourn her passing. Funerals are an opportunity to remember and honour our friend or relative, mourning them and celebrating their life and achievements.



While I don't like using cliches, funerals do give family and friends 'closure'. It does not mean we stop grieving or that we forget them, but it is an important rite of passage.

When our mother was terminally ill, a friend of Jocelyn's suggested that we should organise the funeral before she passed away. The logic was that we could be more rational and less emotional. It was good advice and we did what she wanted. She left us 20 years ago at 91 years of age.

When overwhelmed by grief, it is important that we have the knowledge and/or professional or even spiritual advice about organising an appropriate and dignified way to farewell our loved ones.



Formerly, old familiar rituals that assisted us over the immediate pain of the loss of a loved one. We used to know what to do, that is we would change into black clothes to

demonstrate our grieving, send flowers to the funeral parlour, send cards to express our sympathy, attend prayer sessions at specified times, or go to overnight wakes to console family members and friends. Somehow, these rituals no longer seem to address our needs in modern urban life. We now have a greater diversity in cultures, expectations and choices about how we go or how we send off those we have loved.

The 2021 census data shows a decline in traditional religious affiliation. A significant proportion of the population indicated they had “no religion” (38.9%), with slightly more who consider themselves Christians (43.9%), and 8.3% identifying with other world religions including Islam, Jewish, Hindu or Buddhist (Ref 1).



There is an enormous amount of information about the history of funeral and burial rites across many cultures throughout history. Funeral or burial rituals have existed for centuries and long before Christianity. Much of our knowledge of history comes from examining the remains of the dead and how they were disposed of (See References).

According to [willed.com.au](http://willed.com.au), Australia has six types of funerals. (Ref 4).

**Traditional Funeral** - are the most common funeral in Australia.

**Direct Burial** - is one of the most cost-effective funerals. There is no viewing, visitation or funeral service.

**Cremation** - involves disposing of remains by exposing them to intense heat, turning them to ashes.

**Graveside** - funerals include a brief committal at the cemetery or crematorium.

**Memorial or Wake** - are more popular with younger generations. This is considered a [celebration of life](#).

**Green Funeral** - is a funeral with little to no impact on the environment.(Ref 2)

Most people choose the disposal of their bodies based on their religious beliefs, ethnic backgrounds, cultural expectations, family traditions or personal preferences. In Australia we have a plethora of religions, ethnic backgrounds and cultural differences and there have been significant changes in religious beliefs and practices with fewer people feeling the need to follow traditions.



Of course, the wealth and status of the deceased will dictate the pomp and extent of funeral ceremonial activities and often their graves. It is also more likely that ‘traditions’ will be followed. This is exemplified by ancient Egyptian funeral rites, highly decorated coffins, sarcophagus and the Pyramids as their mausoleums.

In recent times we have the example of Queen Elizabeth II’s funeral, which very much followed historical traditions. In Australia we have State Funeral for dignitaries and famous people who are regarded as contributing to nation such as former Prime Ministers, former governors, senior politicians and other public figures such as Shane Warne and Olivia Newton-John.



(Ref 3)

Most of us have much more simple send offs.

In Australia cemeteries are becoming full and the State is finding it increasingly difficult to



find land for burials. In much of Europe, graves are provided for a limited periods or an annual fee to be paid by the family to maintain the grave.

In this era of climate change, global warming and diminishing available grave sites. More people are looking for 'greener' funeral options.



The Australian Museum and Ku-ring-gai Council have websites (Ref 4,5) on funeral options and green alternatives. It offers various environmentally friendly options for funerals. These include:

**Natural burials** allow the body to return to nature in a way that does not inhibit decomposition. Sydney's first [natural burial park at Kemps Creek](#) opened in 2010.

**Cremations and burials** - There are more than 50,000 deaths a year in NSW with two-thirds opting for cremations and one-third for burials. Around 230 operators provide interment services in NSW.

**Water cremation - aquamation** - The world's first aquamation funeral took place in Australia. Aquamation accelerates the process that occurs in nature.

**Advantages:** It uses 10% of energy needed for cremation and there are no emissions. [More information on aquamation](#)



Ref 3

**Coffins, shrouds and urns** - Coffins and caskets slow the process of decomposition. You can opt for biodegradable environmentally friendly coffins or shrouds.

**Burials at sea** - In Australia burials at sea are regulated under the [Environment Protection \(Sea Dumping\) Act 1981](#). [More details on burials at sea](#)

**Donating to science** - You could donate your body to medical science, including your organs. Most universities teaching medical courses have body donation programs.

Australia's first human body farm opened in lower Blue Mountains.

Whichever option you choose, funeral rituals are important. It allows family and friends to come together to grieve, commemorate and celebrate the loved one's life and death. It is a rite of passage like Christenings or naming ceremonies, significant anniversaries, graduations, retirement, birthdays and marriages. Modern trends have affected many rites of passage, however, it does not mean we cease to celebrate them. *A rite of passage is a ritual, event, or experience that marks or constitutes a major milestone or change in a person's life. Rites of passage celebrate the social movement of individuals into and out of groups or into or out of statuses of critical importance to the individual and to the community* (Ref 6).

My friends can attest that I often say, *Getting old sucks*. It certainly has its challenges. A common response is, *it is better than the alternative*. I believe the alternative is the next big adventure.

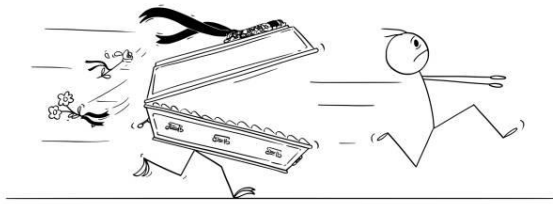
## References:

1. <https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/religious-affiliation-australia>
2. <https://www.willed.com.au/guides/types-of-funerals-australia/>
3. <https://harpersbazaar.com.au/queen-elizabeth-ii-state-funeral-pictures/>
4. [Death: the last taboo - The Australian Museum](#)
5. [Green funerals Ku-ring-gai \(nsw.gov.au\)](#)
6. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/rite-of-passage>

Other web sites of interest

- <https://hlmarksmemorials.co.uk/12-interesting-facts-about-the-history-of-funerals/>
- ['Grabesruhe': What are Switzerland's strict rules around burials?](#)
- <https://www.memorialplanning.com/resources/religious-funerals-guide/islamic-funeral-guide>

- <https://www.funeralpartners.co.uk/help-advice/arranging-a-funeral/types-of-funerals/jewish-funeral-customs/>



the group is to organise campaigns and a drive to recruit new members. The team is designing strategies and materials for this task.

What we need is an enthusiastic person who is willing to be our link to this team and coordinate its activities in our region. If you have any prior experience in publicity this would be an advantage but is not essential. You will be guided by the team in head office. Please call me at once, if you can help.

*Michael Suckling*

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## President's Message

**March 2023**

Dear members

All our venues are in full swing with regular face-to-face sessions. This is wonderful news after the turbulent years we have experienced.

### Annual General Meeting

Our AGM was held on 3rd March, followed by an enjoyable afternoon tea. The entire Committee was returned unopposed. This is **NOT** a good thing – we need replenishment with new blood. In the past year we have closed our Lane Cove venue because nobody was willing to run it. This is going to happen more frequently unless we get new people to assist in organising our existing venues. You do not have to offer to totally run a venue but could assist or share the job with someone else. **This is not an idle threat but the reality we are staring in the face.** Please give me a call if you can help in any way.

### Mystery Honorary Life Member

A reminder that the Sydney u3a AGM will be held on Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> March at 10 30 am in the Mechanics' School of Art at 28 Pitt Street. Honorary Life Membership will be awarded to one of our very own and I hope that many of you will attend to provide support. The guest speaker at the event will be Robert Tickner.

### A Plea for Help

It is sad that our membership is down by about 20% following COVID, despite an encouraging number of new members who joined in January and February. Head Office has an active Public Relations team. This is headed by the VP PR assisted by representatives from the regions. I am ashamed to say that Harbourside North has no-one working with this team. The main role of

