

**Willing Up
and
Keeling Over**



A Lesbian Handbook on Death Rights and Rituals

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Willing Up and Keeling Over:

A Lesbian Handbook on Death Rights and Rituals

Long
Breast
Press



Sculpture by Lorraine le Plastrier

“She Who Sails Into the Wind” by Lorraine le Plastrier

“As someone who has sailed, I know it is impossible to sail into the wind, but this gal is going to anyway. In her boat that bobs and is un-streamlined, she knows she is not going to sink! She doesn't even need a sail. She asks no-one's permission, carries a spare rope under her seat — 'just in case.' “Sailing Into The Wind” feels like a mirror of my life. This was my first sculpture completed after a serious accident. It took me five years to learn to walk again and then up popped this sculpture and the title. I hope you enjoy her spirit.”

Medium: Peppercorn, Walnut and Jacaranda Wood.

All recycled. Brass.

Size: Height 330mm x Width 170mm x Depth 175mm

Exhibited: Anno Domini Gallery Perth WA

Craftwest Gallery Perth WA

Meatmarket Craft Centre Melbourne Vic

Castlemaine Market Gallery Castlemaine Vic

Publications: “

500 Wood Bowls — Bold and Original Designs Blending Tradition and Innovation,” LARK BOOKS 2004

WHealth Women's Health News Journal, Bendigo Vic

Willing Up and Keeling Over, Long Breast Press

©Photographs of sculpture — Lorraine le Plastrier

Dedication

To Ourselves:
our Lesbian ancestors and
all Lesbians in our magnificent variety
now and always

Remember wherever you are buried
or your ashes scattered in Australia,
you remain on Aboriginal and Torres
Strait Islander land, and we thank
the Indigenous people of this country
for this privilege.

The Long Breast Press Collective
acknowledges the Wurundjeri people
of the Woiwurrung language group
and the Jaara Jaara people of the
Dja Dja Wurrung language group
of the Kulin Nation as the traditional
owners of the lands we live on.

Table of Contents

'Lucky Duck', <i>Poem</i> — Anah Holland-Moore	7
Germination — Anah Holland-Moore	8
Chapter 1: Outside the box	9
Lesbians first — Jean Taylor	9
With Respect — Jean Taylor	11
Lisa, <i>Poem</i> — Ardy Tibby	13
Yours personally, <i>Story</i> — Jean Taylor	14
Chapter 2: When I'm good and ready	17
Right On — Jean Taylor.....	17
Where there's a will there's a cuppa — Cathy Wheel	18
Time, <i>Poem</i> — Cathy Wheel	26
Dying Intestate: A Cautionary Tale, <i>Story</i> — Barbary Clarke	27
Furry and feathered friends — Claudia Huber	30
Please cushion me, <i>Poem</i> — Lorraine le Plastrier	32
Chapter 3: Signed, sealed, delivered.....	33
Better safe than sorry — Claudia Huber	33
Caring for you — Jean Taylor	40
Lesbian co-mothers: Up the creek without a paddle? — Barbary Clarke	41
Lost, <i>Poem</i> — Cathy Wheel	45
Chapter 4: Lesbians down under	46
Handle with care — Lorraine le Plastrier.....	46
You and me in the Lesolea — Lorraine le Plastrier	52
The day the news came, <i>Poem</i> — Lorraine le Plastrier	56
Chapter 5: The Caring way out	58
Safe Exit — Jean Taylor	58
As mentioned in despatches from the peace zone, <i>Poem</i> — Jean Taylor ...	63
Chapter 6: Attending	65
Drop dead gorgeous — Anah Holland-Moore	65
A rose is a rose is a rose, <i>Poem</i> — Claudia Huber	72
Too hard to cope — Claudia Huber	73
People who stay, <i>Song</i> — Rosalinda Rayne	77
The funeral parlour: To embalm or not to embalm — Barbary Clarke	79

Chapter 7: Way to go	81
Rites of passage — Jean Taylor	81
Pauper's funeral — Anah Holland-Moore 1	88
Don't tell me I have changed, <i>Song</i> — Rosalinda Rayne	90
Chapter 8: Rite of way	91
She's not heavy — Jean Taylor	91
Fit for a Queen: <i>story</i> Anah Holland-Moore	95
Rosalinda's story — Rosalinda Rayne	96
Chapter 9 The Lesbian underground	98
How to plant a Lesbian — Anah Holland-Moore	98
For my grave stone — Anah Holland-Moore	101
Heartbeat, <i>Poem</i> — Cathy Wheel	102
Chapter 10: Dykes up in Smoke	103
Lesbian incense — Rosalinda Rayne	103
In rosy morning light, <i>Song</i> — Rosalinda Rayne	106
Chapter 11: Lesbians lofting into the wind	107
Dykes in space — Rosalinda Rayne	107
Ashes to Dust — Jean Taylor	109
Chapter 12: All at sea	111
Walking oceans — Barbary Clarke	111
Loose endings, <i>Poem</i> — Barbary Clarke	122
Zen, Tai Chi and the Art of Writing — Jean Taylor	126
Chapter 13: Expect no less	129
Lesbian Culture, Cultural Respect — Lorraine le Plastrier	129
Our sense of place — Cathy Wheel	131
Dear friends — Jean Taylor	132
New Growth, <i>Poem</i> — Barbary Clarke	134
Reading list	135
Websites	137
Biographies	140
Afterword	141

ILLUSTRATIONS AND PHOTOGRAPHS

“Willing Up and Keeling Over: A Lesbian Handbook on Death Rights and Rituals”

Long Breast Press Logo — Cover Photograph- Title Page Chapter Heading Photographs — Afterword, are all photographs of the Sculpture: “She Who Sails Into the Wind” by Lorraine le Plastrier, © Photographs of Sculpture — Lorraine le Plastrier

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- Chapter 4 “Lorraine’s Coffin Design”, © Lorraine le Plastrier. “Coffin and Casket Plans”, © Drawing by Sarah Yeomans.
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- Chapter 8 “Anah’s Cloak” photograph © Meg Irwin
- Chapter 12 “Crevasse opens under our feet” ”Ball bearings bombarding woman in the washing machine” “Trying to leap backwards over the crevasse”
 - ”Rocks falling on us at the bottom of the crevasse”
 - ”Mountain climbing up out of the crevasse with the help of our sisters”

Back Cover Photo: “Collective Lunching at Fryerstown Cemetery”, © Photograph by Meg Irwin

Lucky duck



*I am very lucky
lucky I came to know
the joy and delights
of my life
before I recognized
death lurking
in the corner
when my eyes
close forever
I will miss
my kids' smiles
my sisters' faces
my friends' laughter
my lover's embrace
I will feel safe
my lesbian community
will attend me
as I sail skyward to
the land of the dead
Celtic Warrior
Queen
I am
Very lucky*

Anah Holland-Moore
Oct 2006

Germination

The idea for this book grew over time from my own experiences and from witnessing other Lesbians being disempowered when they become terminally ill, or when their partner dies. We have many heartbreaking stories in our community of mistreatment, denial of rights and lost opportunities when the time comes to finally farewell our loved ones. We also have wonderful tales of meaningful farewells where everyone involved was very fulfilled. An intense and informative conversation with Lesbian activists, who were re-writing a mainstream book on death and burial in order to create relevance for Lesbians, provided the catalyst I needed to bring this idea to my community in Victoria.

In April 2005, at an annual national gathering for Lesbians over 40, I held a talking circle to introduce the subject of Lesbian burials. Lesbians who attend these gatherings are, in the most, political activists concerned with addressing Lesbians' needs as we grow older. The talking circle was a great success; many Lesbians who attended concurred with my thoughts. Enthusiasm for this project led to the formation of Long Breast Press to self-publish our own Lesbian book on death and burial.

The amazing and varied skills, personal experiences and the ability to put in the hard work that the Lesbians involved brought to the project ensured a dynamic pre-production stage and created this beautiful book. The information and resources herein are Victorian-specific and are presented in a self-help and referral format. This book is offered in the hope that it will contribute to us as Lesbians having full control over our choices while living, and peace and completion on death.

I am proud of our achievement and grateful for the experience.

—*Anah Holland-Moore September 2006*

Outside the Box

CHAPTER 1

Thinking about death and dying with dignity; making decisions; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lesbians; Lisa, Poem; personal experiences



Lesbians First

It's never too early to think about death and dying. Even though most of us don't really think about it in any real and practical sense until either we or someone close to us is diagnosed with a terminal disease, or someone we love dies suddenly, or one of us enters old age. And fair enough too. This society has not encouraged any discussion about death or familiarity with dying, so most of us have grown up with a fear of even mentioning such words. It's not an easy thing to come to terms with the fact that not only are we all going to die, but our loved ones, sooner or later, are going to die as well.

One of the aims of this book is to try and demystify death and to make it more of a familiar every day part of our lives. If we learn to walk with the fact of our own death, we are then more able to accept the eventual deaths of the people we know. Which in turn makes us better prepared to support the dying and honour the deaths of our loved ones and others in our community. And enables all of us to die in the way that suits our lifestyle and our personal preferences. This can take some time. But the more we think about it, read some reference books, talk it over with friends and involve ourselves in caring for others who are dying then the more capable and knowledgeable we become. And the more able we are then to care for ourselves, our families and friends in times of need.

Dying with dignity

That is, dying in the way we want to. Not always entirely possible. But even within the constraints of a terminal illness or a situation not of our own choosing we can make the kinds of decisions that can make all the difference to our own peace of mind and those of our loved ones. We can make sure our affairs are in order and write our wills, if we haven't already done so.

You can work out what kind of funeral you might like to have, whether to be cremated or buried; what kind of a ceremony you might like to ar-

range, from a simple service with friends speaking to one facilitated by a Lesbian civil celebrant or with a minister in a church; whether to choose an elaborate coffin or one made of untreated pine. These decisions can be made at any time, of course, and can either be written into the will or written down and given to the executor who would then make sure your wishes are carried out after you die.

There are a few legal requirements regarding the disposal of the body after someone dies but there is no law that says you have to go through a funeral parlour. You can make all the arrangements yourself, from organising the death certificate with a qualified medical practitioner, through to the burial or cremation and everything in between. This gives you a great deal of autonomy in the way everything is organised and a feeling of accomplishment at the end of it.

Some people choose to have everything organised by a funeral parlour which certainly takes away some of the necessity to remember all the details. Most funeral parlours have prepaid funeral plans with the advantage of paying the funeral off well beforehand at a price that is convenient and without the pressure of being rushed into anything when the time comes. A prepaid funeral gives the executor a ready-made plan to go on and gives everyone left behind some peace of mind knowing they are carrying out the wishes of the one who died.

Even within the constraints of a funeral organised by a funeral parlour, there is still the chance to organise many of the details to suit those who are left behind. What kind of music, where the service is going to be held, who is going to speak and how the coffin is to be decorated. These and other decisions can be made and organised by friends and relations to reflect the lifestyle of the Lesbian who has died.

Once we know we are dying or know that we will die sooner rather than later we can then make decisions about how and where we might like to die. Sometimes we don't have any choice in the matter and will spend our last days or weeks in hospital. Or perhaps we might prefer to go to a hospice. Or perhaps we're already in a Nursing Home. Or would rather die at home being cared for by friends and family. Again, even within the constraints of our own particular circumstances, there are decisions you can make which will make life a lot easier for all concerned. You perhaps need to be made aware that you often have choices. You may need assistance in working out what you might prefer. You might also want to find out where to go for assistance and support.

In a similar way, when a loved one is going to die, plans can be made about how she'd like to be cared for. These can change according to cir-

cumstances so she might be cared for in a hospice or a Nursing Home and if it's able to be arranged she might want to choose to spend the last couple of days of her life at home surrounded by friends and family. And after she dies, her funeral can be carried out according to her express wishes.

The following chapters will give you much of the information you need to know to start planning and making decisions about these crucially important aspects of our lives. We are all going to die eventually. It's better to be prepared, to be informed, to be ready to begin plotting. It will make all the difference.

— *Jean Taylor*

With Respect

This article was written in communication with Lou Bennett, Yorta Yorta Dja Dja Wurrung woman, with all due respect to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and in loving memory of Lisa Bellea, Minjungbul woman, activist, poet, photographer and community radio broadcaster (2.5.1961 — 6.7.2006).

All of the information in this book is relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lesbians in the same way it is to any Lesbian who is considering writing a will or burying a loved one. Matters to do with death are not only governed by law, but the human perspective of grief and mourning is universal and affects us all in similar ways. However, there may be one or two things Indigenous Lesbians need to keep in mind and some cultural practices they might want to take into consideration when someone close to them dies.

Indigenous womyn who are already in touch with and part of their own communities will know who to contact to ensure that protocol is followed and any particular cultural practices taken into account when someone dies. The importance of Culture is very often emphasised over and above any other considerations and every community has its own particular way of being respectful to the dead, so it's important to be aware of these and know what to do when the time comes.

Aboriginal and Islander Lesbians who are not in contact with any particular community and who want to find out if there's anything they need to be aware of could contact any one of several major organisations here in Victoria including the Aborigines Advancement League, the Aboriginal Health Service and the Aboriginal Community Elders Service (ACES) who would be able to either advise them or put them in contact with someone who would be able to tell them what they need to know.

As with any close-knit community, Aboriginal and Islander Lesbians find it very helpful to grieve with others in the community, to share the loss and sorrow with a group of Sisters they can talk with about what has just happened. Talking about the Lesbian who has just died and paying tribute to her life are very important for the grieving process. Knowing you can give and get support and give and get cuddles from your Sisters is an essential part of belonging to a group at a time of sadness because it's often hard to grieve by yourself. Later on, being able to contribute to the funeral service, with singing or story telling, helping with the food and the other jobs that need doing (such as making sure that the household continues to function with bills being paid and meals prepared on a regular basis), is also beneficial. This might sometimes involve going away for several days to accompany the body back to the land or the country she's culturally connected to, even if she wasn't born there, to be buried where she belongs in a cultural sense with her family and ancestors.

Keep in mind, there's a saying in the community, just as womyn bring people onto this earth so womyn also have a place in sending them out.

For non-Aboriginal Lesbians who want to support their Aboriginal and Islander friends when someone in their community dies, it's a matter of respect, of listening to and taking notice of what might be required, not making assumptions, and being prepared to offer support in the way your friend feels is culturally and personally appropriate. Take food when you go round to the house to pay your respects, be prepared to sit and listen, hold your friend and cry with her if she wants that, go to the funeral, find out about protocol, ask whether the names of the deceased are to be mentioned or not and offer to help out. But keep in mind that she might not always want to have non-Aboriginal involvement and respect that decision.

If non-Indigenous Lesbians truly want to be supportive of Indigenous Lesbians, then respectfully do whatever is required in the most supportive way possible.

Jean Taylor in communication with Lou Bennett, Yorta Yorta Dja Dja Wurrung woman

Aborigines Advancement League, 2 Watt Street Thornbury, Vic; 03 9480 6377
Aboriginal Health Service, 186 Nicholson Street Fitzroy, Vic; 03 9419 3000

Aboriginal Community Elders Service (ACES) 5 Parkview Ave Brunswick East, Vic; 03 9383 4244
Victorian Aboriginal Funeral Services, 664 Smith Street Clifton Hill, Vic; 03 9482 2411

LISA

*Quickly, and often late, she'd arrive
In a flurry of curls
With much clanking of equipment and
rummaging about
in an ever enlarging carry bag
Would plunk down in a heap with a glass
of plonk
To be reclaimed later.
Laughing and running about
to photograph and tape
everyone and everything.
Then a lift home,
Gone with a smile and a wave.
Then
Gone.*

Ardy Tibby

June 2006

Yours Personally

One of the defining moments of my life was the death of my three-day old daughter in 1966. Four years later, when I was aged 26, my mother died of cancer. As there was no social context at the time to either talk about or otherwise deal with the death of my loved ones, I was unable to appreciate the significance of their deaths in terms of what needed to be done beforehand. Nor was I able to grieve in ways that would enable me to properly understand what had happened in order to integrate their deaths into my life's experiences in a more meaningful way.

It wasn't till 1988, when a member of the Lesbian community, Anne Stafford, an Aboriginal womyn, decided she wanted to be cared for at home while she was dying of cancer that I began to learn a great deal about death and dying and what it means to incorporate this most crucially significant of events into our lives in a way that is both beneficial and empowering. As Anne needed care 24 hours a day, I became one of her carers on a roster system. We did everything from getting her drinks, and sitting her on the commode, to giving her sponge baths and making sure her morphine hadn't run out. Compared to the military regime I'd experienced when I was a nurse, caring for Anne was a breeze. She knew exactly what she needed. We didn't need to anticipate or second-guess her care. We were there to make sure her every need was met in exactly the way she wanted.

It was challenging to be with a Lesbian who was making no bones about the fact that she had chosen to die rather than go through any more treatment. But it was also very liberating to be around someone who was unafraid to face the fact of her own death and who had already worked out how she was going to go about that. That is, surrounded by those members of the Lesbian community and her family who were willing to be there to do what was necessary with care and loving devotion to make her last weeks as easy and pleasant as possible.

Anne taught me a great deal about facing my own fears about death and dying. She was not afraid to talk about what needed to be done before she died, like writing a will and organising her funeral and ensuring she had given power-of-attorney to her partner. By example she showed me how to no longer be fearful about the process of dying even when it involved loss of bodily functions, extreme pain and becoming dependant on others. It was her courage that enabled her to know how to get the support that was needed during the vulnerable times. Indeed, she taught me so much and so well that I was the carer on overnight roster when she

died during the night and volunteered to read the eulogy at her funeral. It was the least I could do.

Afterwards I wrote about the experience in a book "If Anybody's Friend Be Dead" which I self-published in 1990:

"Thursday, 7 July 1988: I'm sure it was the silence that woke me, the absence of that resonant breathing that meant Anne was still alive. I lay there hardly daring to breathe myself as I strained to hear any sound coming from Anne. Nothing. I glanced at my watch. Seven o'clock. I couldn't lie there indefinitely. It was up to me to go and find out if Anne really had died."

After that time, I found that the lessons I had learnt from Anne enabled me to be there for other Lesbians as they were dying and to do what was necessary after they died. But it was only after my partner, Maureen O'Connor, was diagnosed with ovarian cancer in 1996 that I realised there were a great many more fears I needed to face if I was going to give her the kind of direct and immediate support she needed over the long haul. Maurs and I became founding members of the Lesbian Cancer Support Group here in Victoria, which aimed to offer support for members when they were having treatment. We were also able to put into practise many of the lessons Anne had taught me when members of the group were dying and in need of care and support during the final part of their lives.

These experiences were invaluable when Maurs was told towards the end of 1997 that the cancer had metastasised and she had only a limited time to live. If I thought that the pain of supporting a friend through the process of dying was difficult, it was as nothing compared to the agony I experienced knowing Maurs was going to die. It was not only an extremely painful and challenging few months leading up to her death, but the grief afterwards without her loving presence was excruciating. But as with many such experiences, I wanted to be there for myself, I needed to be there for Maurs, I had to go through each step of the way in order to learn and to know what was involved in this aspect of life and living and dying.

As I did with Anne, I wrote a book about Maurs' experiences, "The C-Word", which was published by Spinifex Press in 2000:

"I can't take my eyes off Maurs as she gives another couple of breaths (maybe she isn't dead, after all), suddenly closes her eyes and stops breathing. I'm stunned. Not only by the suddenness of this long-anticipated death, but by how peacefully Maurs has died and how she's allowed us all just to be there with her at the end."

Over these many years, of course, there have been many Lesbians who have died. And the way each has chosen to die has been different. Both Anne's and Maurs' courageous examples of what's possible have held me

in very good stead over the years whenever a Lesbian friend has been dying and in need of care. And in particular, when the circumstances surrounding their deaths have been challenging or it hasn't always been possible to be there when they die. To face our fears, to be involved, to be there with our friends when they're dying, to support each other, to participate in the funeral, to grieve as long and hard as necessary, to talk about what's happening, to experience it every step of the way is as important when we're dying as it is when we're alive and well.

Anne and Maurs taught me that it's all one and the same. We can no more opt out of our responsibilities about death than we can about our responses to life. And if we do, it's not only to our own and each other's detriment but we lose some of the most rewarding and essential experiences life has to offer.

Jean Taylor

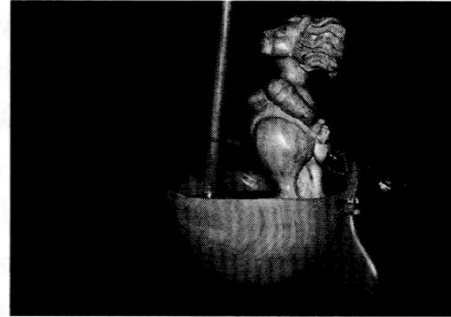
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- (L) Emily George: *If Anybody's Friend be Dead*, self-published, Dyke-books, Melbourne 1990
- (L) Jean Taylor: *The C-Word*, Spinifex Press, Melbourne, 2000

When I'm Good and Ready

CHAPTER 2

Lesbians and the law; wills; dying
intestate; our animals; Poem,
'Time'; Please cushion me, Poem



Right On

Rumour has it that Lesbians were never illegal under the law because Queen Victoria refused to believe, or no-one was game enough to explain to her, that two womyn could be sexual lovers. Be that as it may, Lesbians have always faced social discrimination, in that we could be sacked from our jobs, refused housing, ridiculed in public, denied access to information about our preferred lifestyle, and made to feel ashamed about our sexual preferences without protection under the law.

Although there are now laws that protect Lesbians from blatant discrimination, inasmuch as we can take legal action against discriminatory workplace practices, for example, and can have our Lesbian partners recognised for inheritance purposes, there are government departments such as Centrelink, and superannuation funds where Lesbian relationships are still not recognised. And while this is sometimes to our advantage, there is a groundswell of opinion in the Lesbian community that indicates that some Lesbians want the right to marry, adopt children and have full access to all the rights and responsibilities that married heterosexuals have in this state.

If and when the law is changed to include Lesbians as legitimate marriage partners, it still leaves those Lesbians who might not want to take advantage of that particular legislation to make sure that we know how and in what way we can protect ourselves, our partners and our children when it comes down to it. This might include making sure our Lesbian relationships are recognised by giving our Lesbian partner power of attorney in the event of a crisis and at the very least by writing a will.

The Victorian Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby has been actively lobbying the powers that be on our behalf for some years now. VGLRL has the latest up-to-date information about where Lesbians are at as far as our legal rights are concerned. If you have any queries or need to know where you stand on a specific issue, or want to become involved yourself, you can access their website for information and meeting details.

In the meantime, it is in our best interests to make sure our rights are protected under the law. All of us over 18 years of age need to write a will setting out all the details of where we want our property and chattels to go so there's no question at the time of death who is going to inherit and how this will be achieved. We need to know how to ensure our rights when it comes to inheriting our partner's property when she dies or accessing her superannuation. Too many of our Lesbian foremothers had their diaries, letters and other personal possessions destroyed through fear and prejudice, so you may want to ensure that your Lesbian memorabilia is preserved for posterity by mentioning where you want these to go in your will. And if there's no relative or friend who will ensure your precious documents are handed down in an appropriate manner, you might consider bequeathing them to your local Lesbian and gay archive. How to go about this and what you need to do to achieve as good an end result as possible will be answered in the following pages.

It's not that being and living as a Lesbian in this country is illegal. It's that as Lesbians we have for far too long either been ignored, our lives trivialised and ridiculed, or our way of being denigrated that we have internalised these attitudes which makes it difficult to stand up for our rights and demand what is rightly ours. That is, to die in the best possible way with our loved ones around us, to leave our worldly goods to whomever we choose without dispute, and to have a funeral that reflects the kind of Lesbian we are. We expect nothing less.

—*Jean Taylor*

References

- Victorian Women's Liberation and Lesbian Feminist Archives Inc, PO Box 168 Brunswick East, Vic 3057, phone: (03) 9387 6610
 Australian Lesbian and Gay Archives Inc, PO Box 124, Parkville, Vic 3052,
www.alga.org.au, algarchives@hotmail.com
 Victorian Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby: 0417 484 438; info@vglrl.org.au; www.vglrl.org.au

Where There's a Will, There's a Cuppa

If you are procrastinating about writing your Will (and many of us do), invite some friends around and use the best tool women have for planning and plotting — the kitchen table. Boil the kettle and over a cuppa help each other get started. If your needs and possessions are

uncomplicated, then a pre-printed Will form from the newsagent (usually under \$3) might be enough. If there are complications, or you are unsure, then use this time together to clarify what questions you need to ask, and where to get them answered.

The law is not a reliable source of support or justice for Lesbians. As Lesbians, the legal rights we enjoy range from few to none. In spite of this, there is a lot we can do to prepare and protect our loved ones, and to have our needs met in the best possible ways.

Why should I bother writing a will?

An effective Will gives your Executor the proof she needs to demonstrate to the Courts that it is your most current, valid Will; it is able to be used to obtain probate; and it can be used to dispose of your property as you requested.

If you die without a Will, it is called dying intestate. Government authorities (Administrators) will step in and distribute your precious property to your relatives, as they are directed by the law of the time (the *Administration and Probate Act of 1958 as amended*). Administrators will go through your journals, letters, photos, mementos, and poems, as well as other properties, investments and accounts. Chances are this distribution will not resemble the way you would want things handled. At the time of writing, Lesbian partners have primary inheritance rights, but this only applies if the partner is in a domestic live-in relationship for a minimum of two years prior to death.

If you die without a Will, and do not have a Power of Attorney in place, it is the biological family who will have the power to make decisions that may exclude your loved ones from access to the body, funerals, property, or all three.

The law recognises husbands. If you are separated and have intended to get a divorce but haven't got around to it, now is the time to do it. Otherwise your Lesbian partner may have to share her entitlement with an estranged husband.

If you have a Will, and there are changes in your life such as divorce, the birth of a child, or change of relationships or beneficiaries, a new Will should be made out.

Where do I start?

Begin by getting clear within yourself what you want to happen with all your property and possessions after you die. Write it all down. At this point, we recommend you write all your wishes down. Think about who

you do or don't want involved; what kind of funeral or service you want or don't want; what you prefer to happen to your body — burial or cremation. Make one list of all your possessions, and another list, all those you wish to acknowledge or leave something to, then begin to match them up.

If you still have trouble getting started, try writing down all the things you don't want to happen. Sometimes we are clearer about who we don't want in our wills, or involved in our affairs. You may want to have a closed/private funeral if there are people in your life that you don't want present.

Clarity now can often prevent dramas or crises later. Writing everything down can also make it so much easier on your Executor and other loved ones. (See Barbary's story on dying intestate.)

Where can I go for help?

There is a private business that sells legal kits, called "Legal Kits of Victoria", which can be reached on 9751 2666. Their website is www.legalkits.com.au. At the time of writing, their Probate Kit costs \$88, Will Kit \$33, and Power of Attorney Kit \$27.50.

There is also a list of Women's Legal Centres in Victoria, which should be able to assist you with your questions. You can also ring your local Community Legal Centre. Their database and staff resources will point you in the right direction. Most of the Victorian Community Legal Centres will provide advice and help you to complete your own Will. Not many of these centres will actually do your Will for you. (See contact details at the end of this chapter.)

There is a book called "Over the Rainbow", which is written specifically for Lesbians and Gays in Victoria, and includes information on Wills and funerals. You can access this book online at www.vglrl.org.au or www.over-therainbow.org. There are also some helpful websites, which are listed at the end of this chapter.

If you choose to write your own Will, the forms you buy from newsagents have instructions attached. By following these instructions, you will make it easier for your Executor to follow through with your wishes.

Be sure to include an 'attestation clause'. What is that?

This is a clause saying that the Will maker signed in the presence of two or more witnesses, and that they signed in the Will maker's presence. Without this special attestation clause, it will make the task of the Executor difficult and time-consuming. An example of this clause is, "SIGNED

by the Will maker in our presence and by us in the presence of her and of each other". The Will is then signed by the Will maker and both witnesses, with their full names and addresses, and clearly dated. Ideally, witnesses should not be named as beneficiaries in your Will.

Good Communication

We highly recommend that once you make your decisions, that you inform all the people involved. That means

- Check out with the person/s you named as Executor to make sure they are agreeable to do it, and that they know what is expected of them. If years have passed, confirm that they still want to do it. If you re-write your Will and change Executors, advise everyone concerned of the changes.
- Tell your Executor and perhaps another trusted person where your Will is located.
- Where possible, advise biological family of who you do and don't want involved. This is not always possible, but forewarning might reduce the struggles between biological families and the Lesbian community at the time of death.
- If you have specific requests for funerals and the disposal of your body, be sure to let significant people know. Put your wishes in writing and keep it with your Will and/or give significant people a copy.
- Keep changes of name and address up-to-date. If you should die suddenly, would your Executor/s know how to reach your beneficiaries and other loved ones? Perhaps you could keep a list of contacts with your Will.
- It is best to have 2 or 3 Executors named. This allows for changed circumstances where one may not be available. An odd number will guard against a stalemate.
- It is a good idea to mention in your Will whether you do or do not wish to donate your body tissue or organs to science. Be sure to inform your Executor and loved ones to prepare them.

Another good and helpful thing you can do is to carry a card in your bag that says, "In case of emergency, contact _____." This brings your chosen one into the picture immediately. The person you name does not necessarily need to be your Next of Kin.

Probate, AKA Grant of Representation

All applications for grants of Probate and Administration of deceased estates in Victoria are collectively referred to as Grants of Representation. At the time of writing, if the deceased's assets are less than \$25,000, there may be no need to go through probate. However, the Probate Office recommends that the first call you need to make is to the bank manager to confirm that they will release the money without probate.

If the estate is valued at \$25,000 - \$50,000, it must go through Small Estates Probate. Over \$50,000 and your Executor will need to file a Grant of Representation for full probate. There are a range of fees charged by the Probate Office for verifying, lodging, searching, preparing, etc. At the time of writing, it costs \$241.90 to apply for a Grant of Representation for an estate valued at more than \$1,000; for an estate valued less than \$1,000 the fee is \$94.60.

If the Executor/s you appoint in your Will cannot carry out the duties of Executor, the Court will appoint your Next of Kin as Executor. This could be a problem for you, since the court will recognise your biological family as Next of Kin.

Superannuation

At the time of writing, nominating your Lesbian partner as 'spouse' and beneficiary of your superannuation plan is not a 'binding' or valid nomination. The law in Victoria has a heterosexual definition of 'spouse', and same-sex partners are not a legal option. This discriminatory practice is currently being challenged. It is probably good practice to check with your specific superannuation fund to get a statement regarding valid beneficiary nominations.

Claims Against Your Will

A relative of the deceased can challenge the Will, but they must show that there should have been adequate provision made for them in the Will. Biological family don't automatically succeed in their claim just because they are related.

For all claims against a Will, you need to apply to the Victorian Supreme Court. These claims can be expensive and lengthy, and the legal expenses usually come out of the estate. All claims must be made within 6 months of death.

Ceremonies and Funeral Arrangements

Be aware that if you're going to include funeral details in your Will, you should tell someone, especially your Executor. The Will may not be read until AFTER the funeral. Be aware also that noting your requests about funeral arrangements in your Will does not make them legally binding.

“The executor named in the Will has the right to make funeral arrangements. If there's no Will, then the Next of Kin has this right. If you have the right to arrange a funeral you can also decide where the person is buried. As the Next of Kin could be a blood relative and not a same-sex partner, this highlights the importance of making a Will naming your same-sex partner as Executor — particularly if you think there will be any conflict with your relatives.” (Over the Rainbow, p. 41)

Check List

- State your full name and address
- Ensure the Will is clearly dated
- State the full names and addresses of your Executors.
- Add the attestation clause
- Never pin or clip anything to a Will.
- Keep your Will in a safe place, and tell a trusted someone where it is.
- Do not make corrections on the finished Will by erasing, adding or deleting. If you make a mistake or a change is required, always make a new Will, which has no corrections, or complete a Codicil form and attach it to your Will (see Glossary for Codicil).
- The finished Will should not be written on a photocopied document. It should be an original blank form.
- If you want to nominate your partner as beneficiary of your superannuation, be sure to mention it in your Will. At the time of writing, your partner's right to a share of your superannuation is limited. Leaving it to them in your Will may be the only way they will benefit.

— *Cathy Wheel*

For Further Assistance and Resources

Women's Legal Service Victoria, 1800 133 302

Legal Aid — www.legalaid.vic.gov.au, 350 Queen St., Melbourne, 1800 677 402, (03) 9269 0234, has a contact list and offers assistance in locating legal help, and a list of publications you may find helpful.

Law institute of Victoria www.liv.asn.au/public . How to find a lawyer, plus information on costs.

Victoria Law Foundation, www.victorialaw.org.au 43 Hardware Lane, Melbourne 3000, (03) 9604 8100, contact@victorialaw.org.au. Statement on their website: "Victoria Law Foundation is an independent, public benefit organisation making law accessible."

Community Legal Centres in your area www.naclc.org.au. Lists all community legal centres in Victoria with contact details and a brief description of the services they offer. (Click on 'CLC Directory')

Probate Office, Supreme Court of Victoria, Level 2, 436 Lonsdale St, Melbourne 3000; (03) 9603 9296; Email: probate@supremecourt.vic.gov.au

Victorian Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby, www.vglrl.org.au
0417 484 438

State Trustees, www.statetrustees.com.au, 1300 138 672,
(03) 9667 6444, 168 Exhibition St, Melbourne 3000

"Over the Rainbow — A guide to the law for lesbian, gay and transgender communities in Victoria," Victorian Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby and Legal Aid. Available online at www.vglrl.org.au. Has info on wills, funerals, conflict with relatives and other helpful information.

4-in-1 Legal Kit — Create your own Legal Documents. This kit is sometimes available in newsagents, and costs approximately \$20. It contains a legal Will guide, an explanation of the Executor's responsibilities, an Enduring Power of Attorney Guide, and a Statutory Declaration form. It includes all the blank forms needed.

Legal Kits of Victoria — PO Box 60, Olinda, Vic 3788, (03) 9751 2666, Email: webcontact@legalkits.com.au , "...how to avoid lawyer fees and keep personal control by using our Do-it-Yourself legal kits.

Glossary

Beneficiary: Person who receives property from a Will

Bequests: Gifts or property named in a Will

Codicil: A separate document in which a correction or change is made to a Will

Estate: Our assets and liabilities at the time of death

Executor: The person appointed by the Will maker to administer her Will

Grant of Representation: A necessary Certificate which allows the Executor to process the Will

Intestate: Not having a valid Will at the time of death

Letters of Administration: The Courts issue these Letters when a person dies intestate, and they allow an 'administrator' to distribute the estate to the relatives of the deceased.

Probate: A certificate which 'proves' that an Executor holds a valid Will. Referred to as a Grant of Representation.

Testatrix/Testator: The Will maker (female/male)

Will: Document which details the desired distribution of your property after death

Witnesses: Two adults who testify that the Will was validly made and signed by the Willmaker

Time

*Death demands my attention
It clamours like a spoilt child
tugging at my sleeve.*

*I look at dying
and it is surrounded by
what is left of life.
Not much, yet everything.*

*It is not generic death I ponder.
It is yours.
I slip away into thoughts
of nature reclaiming her own.
Time will stop and take you with her.*

*Even that tugging at my sleeve
can't stop me noticing
the life surrounding you.
Time still moves like a rare
jewel through your days.
There is still time
demanding attention.*

Cathy Wheel
March 2000

Dying Intestate: A Cautionary Tale

Being named as Executor in a friend's Will, which remained neither signed nor witnessed at the time of her death, is not an experience I would recommend to anyone. I want to tell you a little about my experiences in such a situation, then let you draw your own conclusions.

Before Elke died, surrounded by a group of Lesbians who saw her through her last battle with cancer — and granted her her wish to die at home — I had not seen her Will, and was unaware of its contents. All I knew was that she had asked me what I wanted. Knowing that she had a large number of books — and that I was already struggling to contain my own books in bulging bookcases — I'd said, 'Not a whole lot of books'. Instead, I had opted for a small glass oil-burner, which had sentimental memories for me from the time when we had been lovers.

Initially, Elke had told someone she'd wanted to be buried by the Tamar River in Tasmania. But then she'd changed her mind, because she thought no one would go and visit her grave down there. So, it wasn't to be Tasmania, but that was all I had to go on. From my knowledge of Elke, I was very sure of two things: she loved the Australian bush more than almost anybody I knew; and she also loved the sea. And she wanted to be buried. I rang up my friend, Eril, and said, 'How'd you like to come on a tour of the scenic cemeteries of Melbourne?' Being a good mate, she agreed. After checking out a few, we decided on Macclesfield, because it was up in the mountains near Emerald, and was rather like a series of small garden plots. Quite homely. But I never got to discuss this choice with Elke herself. Before taking her up there, Elke went, coffin and all, down to 'her' beach at Elwood and we had part of her funeral there.



Coffin at Beach

The more Lesbian-specific part was up at Macclesfield. It was very do-it-yourself.

The fact that her parents, (from whom she had been estranged to a certain extent), lived in Germany made things both easier and harder. Since neither of them could travel, they did not come to Australia to take



Shovel at Gravesite

over the funeral arrangements. But, two months after we had buried Elke, they said that they wanted her body back in Germany. Because I was not, officially, her Executor, I would have been powerless to stop that, if they had insisted, although I knew that Elke would have been very unhappy

with it. The Australian lawyer, who we had managed to get the parents to appoint as the 'official' Executor, with me backing her up as gopher, suggested just to let it sit for a while. Luckily, with the passage of time, Elke's parents relented. But not before I'd been sent for a good spin in the emotional equivalent of an industrial-strength washing machine.

Elke left her estate to the girlfriend she had met over the internet, who was living in France, and who had come to stay, for a few weeks, and tour Australia with Elke shortly before her death. (But who chose not to remain here while Elke died). In the event that the girlfriend did not want it, Elke left the bulk of her estate to me. But I knew that her parents, with whom she had had a telephone reunion, of sorts, a day or two before she died, would be doing it tough. So I packaged up a few small things that I hoped would have some sentimental attachment for them and sent them off. Later, I heard (since I couldn't communicate directly with them) that the teddy bear I'd sent did mean a lot because it was the one Elke had been clutching, aged 5, when her family fled from Leipzig, in East Germany, to the West.

Then came the division of Elke's effects. Luckily, this was not as complex as it might have been, since she owned no real estate, but it was still hard. Victorian law states that, if one dies intestate - without leaving a Will - there is a hierarchy of inheritance. Since Elke and her girlfriend had not lived together for the minimum two years, and Elke didn't have any children or siblings, legally, everything should have gone to her parents (who she'd not named in her unsigned Will, nor left them a single thing). Again, the washing machine!

In the end, her parents took all her saved money (including the superannuation that was due her) except for a small amount in her bank account, which went to her girlfriend. The girlfriend decided to leave half of that to the group of Lesbians who'd looked after Elke.

I can't tell you how horrible it was, packaging up stuff to go to some people who Elke had not wanted it to go to. Then, after that, I can't tell you how much more of an emotional strain it was when the girlfriend and the parents, after all my work packing it up, decided that they were not prepared to pay the freight to get it to Europe. (To me that, along with the fast and determined appropriation of her money, seemed really disrespectful to Elke). So I was left to decide what to do with it, with no clear idea of what Elke would have wanted in those circumstances. Part of her extensive music collection was lent to someone who subsequently committed suicide, so that it was never seen again. That caused me some mental anguish all on its own.

A while after Elke's burial, I organized for a wooden frame to be placed around her gravesite. Rosemary and lavender were planted there, so that anyone who visited her could take a sprig for themselves. I thought Elke would've liked that. But, some time after that, I went up to Macclesfield and was horrified to see that the 'garden' had been torn down and replaced with a huge slab of black polished granite. Worse: there was a cross and some roses gilded into the granite and, emblazoned at her feet, in Latin, the words 'To the everlasting glory of the (family name)'. I cannot even bring myself to repeat that name. How Elke would have HATED that! She'd bought a statue of Buddha that she'd said she wanted as her headstone. I hadn't yet placed it there, because I hadn't been able to figure out a way of affixing it so that vandals were not able to remove it. My first thoughts were of a judicious stick of dynamite. My second thoughts were to employ a stonemason to transfigure the cross into a Lesbian symbol and to scratch off the grandiloquent saying at the bottom. So far, the best idea (whilst remaining within the law) that I've come up with is to plant some ivy, or something else that's really 'clingy', and let it take over the whole grave. Unless anybody's got any better suggestion?

I think of Elke sometimes, but I just cannot bring myself to visit her grave. In the intervening years, I have sometimes felt doubt and guilt about what happened to Elke's effects. Did I do the right thing? What would she have wanted? All I can say is that I did the best I could at the time, when I was very vulnerable, having just accompanied my best friend to her death — and not getting much support for myself. And that I wish she'd signed her Will so that everything would have been more clear-cut and not as utterly emotionally exhausting...

— *Barbary Clarke*

PS I have implied, above - but I now want to make it crystal clear — that the after-effects of a death can be much like shoving a stick in a wasp's nest: quite often, people's pain at the death can easily be transformed into anger. And watch out if you're the one against whom that anger is directed! You may quite easily be made into a scapegoat for all the unfinished business that everyone has with that deceased Lesbian. This is hard enough if you have an 'official' role in winding up that Lesbian's estate. But the position can be greatly exacerbated if there is no Will, or it has not been signed. Please take heed. PPS I got most of the books anyway.

— *Barbary*

Furry and feathered friends

Animals often play a big part in Lesbian lives. Those of us who share our daily living with pets might want to make sure that they are well looked after should anything happen to us. In case of a terminal illness we tend to be more aware of making arrangements for our pets. But what about an accident or a sudden illness, which prevents us from taking care of them? It is best to talk to friends, (ex-) lovers or family before anything has happened and check who might be prepared to look after your furry and feathered friends when you are unable to do so. This will give you some peace of mind and make it easier for the animal, which likely will be distressed and in grief.

You might want to make some provisions for your pets in your will — either for their care or for any financial contribution to them being looked after.

If you cannot find anyone who is willing to take on your pets, the RSPCA has a program called 'Bequest Animal Program'. They rehouse pets of people who have died and want their animals to be well cared for afterwards. You need to register your pet for this program with the RSPCA and leave them an amount for vet-care. After your death the RSPCA becomes the official owner of your animal. Based on information you give them when registering they guarantee that your furry friend will be matched with a suitable permanent foster carer, who will make sure your pet lives happily ever after. Make a note in your will that you made this arrangement for your pet/s.

Sometimes very old animals do not adjust very well to sudden changes and you might be worried that it will be too distressed to keep on living happily. Some Lesbians might want to choose to have the animal euthanased when this is the case.

Legally you are not allowed to be buried with your animal. But you can make arrangements that your pet's ashes are scattered on your grave. Another option is to have your pet's ashes scattered at the same time and place as your own. You might want to have both your ashes scattered in your/its favourite spot — like a park, a beach or your own backyard. There are pet cremation and burial services available, some of which are based on ethical principles — like treating the dead animal respectfully and offering affordable rates.

Whatever you choose, give your pets some thought and consideration to make sure they will be all right when you can't look after them any more.

There are of course not only your pets. Many Lesbians deeply care about animals and wildlife in general. For some Lesbians bequeathing money to animal and wildlife groups is important. There are a vast number of groups dedicated to looking after dogs, cats and wildlife. Many of those are run by volunteers and often struggle to find the funds needed to care for abandoned, injured, mistreated or tortured creatures. If this is something close to your heart, you might want to make some provisions in your will for animal and wildlife groups you support. It will be much appreciated and make the life of some living creatures a bit easier.

—*Claudia Huber*

Contact address:

RSPCA, Bequest Animal Program, 3 Burwood Highway, Burwood
East 3151

Tel: 03 9224 2222, www.rspcavic.org Australian Pet Cremation &
Burial Service, Tel: 1300 302 575
www.australianpetcremation.com.au

Bamganie Environmental Services, Pet Cremation Service, Tel: 03
52817239 <http://users.windows.chariot.net.au/pets>

PLEASE CUSHION ME

*I have had the sun in my hands
its life giving powers
gentle with me
leaving me in its reflected
glow.*

*Where now do I place
this love in my breast?*

*Love given
cross references itself
to become an extraction*

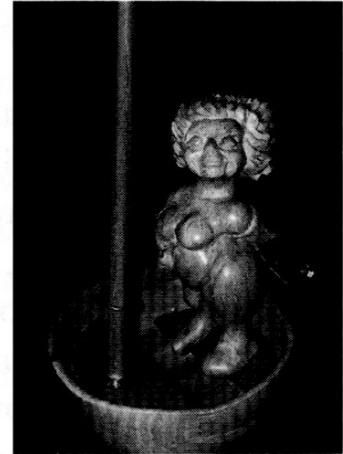
*Were my essence to fly
taking my physical shape
with it
I would let these gently
rustling leaves
caress my face
Gliding amongst them
wrapping myself about
with feather cloud
Please cushion me.
This sorrow of mine
lamenting its sounds
Cello madrigal is my
heart.*

Lorraine le Plastrier

Signed, sealed, delivered

CHAPTER 3.

Enduring power of attorney; medical treatment; guardianship; hospital visiting rights next of kin; carers pension; co-mothers



Better safe than sorry

Power of Attorney

When you are dealing with a serious illness or the aftermath of an accident there will be times when it is too hard or even impossible to look after your own affairs. This can include taking care of your bills, managing your bank account, or making legal or medical decisions.

To avoid confusion and messy situations you can make a Power of Attorney, which will give a person of your choice the authority to act on your behalf. This is a legally binding document, which allows you to maintain control over your own affairs.

Lesbians often choose their current lover, a trusted ex-lover, or a close friend to act on their behalf. It is important that the person you choose is aware of what your wishes are and will act accordingly.

There are three different Powers of Attorney: the General Power of Attorney, the Enduring Financial Power of Attorney and the Enduring Medical Power of Attorney.

General power of attorney

General Power of Attorney is for limited circumstances only, like a hospital stay, a holiday or a health retreat — anything that involves your absence for a limited time.

It can only be enacted when you are still able to make your own decisions. You authorise a person you trust to act for you for a specific time and circumstance. This can be something like paying your bills or looking after your property. The person you appoint must be over 18 years old, cannot be your health provider and must not be bankrupt.

General Power of Attorney becomes invalid as soon as the specific situation ends or when you lose the capacity to make your own deci-

sions. It can be revoked any time and only applies for transaction and situations you clearly specify. It needs to be in writing and both you and your attorney should have a copy with both signatures. No witnesses are required.

The more important document is the Enduring Power of Attorney, which must be in written form with two witnesses present, one of whom has to be authorised to witness a statutory declaration (see Medical Power of Attorney).

Enduring Power of Attorney does include everything that General Power of Attorney includes but also covers the case when you are unable to make your own decisions, be they physical or mental reasons. You can specify conditions and limitations how and when to use this document. Changes can be made any time as long as you have the required witnesses.

There is the Financial Enduring Power of Attorney and the Medical Enduring Power of Attorney.

Financial Enduring Power of Attorney

This document covers all your financial affairs, business transactions, property and assets. Financial Enduring Power of Attorney gives you the right to authorise a person you trust to organise all your financial and legal affairs, when you are not able to see to them yourself. You can specify exactly what the person you choose as your financial and legal attorney can do and how far her right to make decisions for you reaches. Unlike the General Power of Attorney, Enduring Power of Attorney is not limited to a specific situation (like going on holidays), but is valid over the whole period of time, when you are unable to make your own decisions (like being in a coma, being mentally incompetent or being in the final stages of a terminal illness). Your attorney needs to keep accurate records of all actions made under the Enduring Power of Attorney.

If you have many assets which need to be dealt with you might want to consult a lawyer about the final draft of the document to avoid any doubt or confusion for everyone concerned.

To make an enduring power of attorney you need to be fully competent and need two witnesses, one of whom is authorised to take a statutory declaration (see details under 'medical power of attorney').

To cover any medical decision it is important to have the Medical Enduring Power of Attorney.

Medical Enduring Power of Attorney and other important forms

Medical enduring power of attorney is a legal document, which helps to protect you when you are unable to make your own medical decisions. By appointing a medical attorney (also called agent) — a friend, (ex-)lover or a family member — you will have some safeguard to get the medical treatments you want when you are too unwell to ask or fight for them. This can include treatments in the final stages of a terminal illness, treatments after a severe accident or trauma as well as treatment and care in case of dementia or Alzheimer's.

You can appoint any person you trust to act according to your wishes and beliefs and who consents to act as your agent when needed. To be sure your medical attorney has a good understanding of your wishes you will need to discuss with her a variety of issues. Issues like:

- ≈ Which medical treatment you would consent to or which you would refuse (eg resuscitation, organ transplants, blood transfusion, artificial respiration, aggressive drugs, artificial nutrition and others)? For some cultural, religious or ethnic groups organ/tissue transplants or blood transfusions are unacceptable. If you belong to one of those groups you might need to write this into your legal papers.
- ≈ Do you want to die in a hospital/nursing home or do you want to die at home?
- ≈ The question of life prolonging treatment versus simply palliative treatment.
- ≈ What do you want to happen in case of dementia or Alzheimer's?

Make sure that whoever you choose as medical enduring power of attorney fully understands how you want to be treated and cared for in case you cannot make your own decisions.

To fill out and sign the form, you (or your legal guardian) need to be fully competent, which means you need to understand what you are doing. And you need two witnesses, none of which can be the person you appoint as your medical attorney.

One of the witnesses has to be someone who is authorized to witness a statutory declaration. This can be a justice of peace, a chemist, a post-office manager, a doctor, a solicitor, a minister of religion, a teacher or principal, a counsellor or a member of the police.

You only need one agent, but if you are worried about her availability you can appoint a second one who will act for you in case your first choice is unavailable.

You can change your medical enduring power of attorney anytime as long as you fill out a new form and have the required witnesses.

You can get forms for all three Powers of Attorney from a news agency. If you want explanatory fact sheets with them it is better to contact the Office of Public Advocate. Their information will make it easier to fill out the forms correctly.

Refusal of Treatment Certificate

Another important legal document is the 'Refusal of Treatment Certificate'. The form is available from the Office of Public Advocate or Medical Directors or Chief Examiners of hospitals or nursing homes. With the help of this certificate you or your medical attorney can refuse treatments you don't wish to be subjected to. You have the right to refuse any medical treatments, which is aimed at prolonging your life. This includes operations, the administration of aggressive drugs, any form of interventions to keep you artificially alive or any other medical procedure. However you cannot refuse palliative care, which includes making you comfortable, reasonable pain relief, food and water as long you are able to eat and drink on your own.

Again you need to be competent and fully aware of what you are doing when you sign this document. Signing needs to happen in the presence of a doctor and one other witness, who can be your medical attorney. The doctor or hospital manager has to send a copy of this document to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal within 7 days.

Advanced Directives

The group 'Dying With Dignity' (formerly 'Voluntary Euthanasia Society of Victoria Inc.') also put together further forms, which address specific situations. These are not legal forms as such, but help to clear any existing doubts about your wishes. They can be attached to your 'Refusal of Medical Treatment Certificate'. There are three different forms:

- ≈ The Advanced Directive, which names specific treatments for specific situations,
- ≈ The Advanced Directive re Treatment in a Nursing Home, which gives directions about treatments and care you wish in an aged care facility,
- ≈ And the Advanced Directive for Alzheimer's and dementia.

These forms are available from Dying With Dignity.

'Sound of Mind'

When you have filled out these forms but you still fear that anyone might challenge your choices - be it a biological family member or a disgruntled ex-girlfriend — you might want to get a letter signed by your doctor, which confirms that at the time of signing any of these documents you were of sound mind. This does not need to be anything fanciful just a simple letter to guarantee that nobody can claim you had lost your marbles when you made your decisions.

Copies of documents

It is advisable to give a copy of all your forms concerning your medical wishes to your medical attorney, your doctors, your family and your friends if you would like to involve them in your last journey. Doing this makes it more likely that any arguments about what you would want if you cannot make your own medical decisions any more are kept to a minimum. Remember that not all families are happy to accept the wishes of a dying lesbian.

Card carrying dykes

It is wise to carry a piece of paper or a card with you that shows whom to contact in case of an emergency. Should there be an accident or a sudden death, police or paramedics have to try to identify you and check whom to inform. If you don't have anything on you that shows you want your Lesbian lover or Lesbian friend informed first, they automatically inform your family. This might not be what you want.

Once your biological family has been given priority it is much more difficult for your lover/friend to have a say. This is not a problem if your family is accepting of your Lesbian lifestyle and your Lesbian lover. If your family is hostile towards your lover or friend they might not pass on the information about what happened. It can be devastating for your lover or friends to be excluded from any decisions that need to be made, or even from contact with you.

You only need to write on the card, whom to contact with name, address and telephone number. If you want you can add the term 'next of kin', but it is not essential as long as it is clear whom you want informed first in case of an emergency.

You also might want to add to the card if you want to be an organ or tissue donor or not.

Papers, papers and more papers!

It seems there are a lot of papers to fill out and organise and yes it can be tedious and exhausting to think all this through. But they are important to ensure to get what you want - particularly at a time you most likely will be feeling very unwell and vulnerable. Dealing with these documents a long time before they are needed makes it much easier for you and your loved ones to cope with the hassles of medical and legal institutions at a time when there is a high level of stress, anxiety and grief already.

Many Lesbians who have experiences with dealing with terminal illness or aftermaths of accidents find it easier to cope when they feel they have somehow prepared themselves for what can happen. Taking control as much as possible over our living and dying can give us a sense of empowerment and make us feel less like a victim to circumstances. And unfortunately it has happened too many times that wishes of dying Lesbians have been discarded by homophobic families or medical institutions. Lesbian lovers and friends have been denied influence on important decisions or even contact altogether too often not to take precautions. No lesbian wants to be in a situation where her wishes are disregarded or silenced. Filling out these documents and forms is one way to prevent this from happening.

Next of Kin, Hospital Visiting Rights, Guardianship*Next of Kin and Visiting Rights*

Traditionally 'next of kin' was only used for the closest blood relative. For a long time same sex partners were excluded from rights applying to next of kin.

In Victoria same sex partners have some recognition as 'senior next of kin' under the 'Guardianship and Administration Act 1986' which gives domestic partners priority over blood relatives. The question if same sex partners are acknowledged as domestic partners can still be controversial. Most hospitals however recognize same sex partners. To avoid problems it is best to be open and out about your relationship. Hospitals do not want to be involved in disputes over next of kin or visiting rights. Their main concern is the wellbeing of the patient and to prevent any undue stress on her.

If you fear that family members will be hostile and cause troubles make sure you take legal precautions. If you have any doubt that your rela-

relationship will be respected you can make a statutory declaration which confirms that you are in a domestic relationship with your lover. You can get forms for statutory declarations from news agencies and you need the signing witnessed by a justice of peace.

Should the hospital refuse you access you can apply to the Victorian Civil and Administration Tribunal or complain about discrimination on grounds of 'marital status' to the Equal Opportunity Commission.

'Next of Kin' is particularly important when it concerns a will — or rather the absence of one. You have to keep in mind that if you die without a will all your belongings, assets and property will automatically go to your biological family (see details under chapter 2). If you don't want your lover to be left out in the cold make at least a statutory declaration that she is your 'domestic partner' or of course even better, make a will.

Guardianship

A guardian usually is a (court appointed) person who will make decisions for someone who is unfit or not of age to make her own decisions (eg guardianship for children or people with a mental illness).

There is however the 'Enduring Power of Guardianship' which allows you to appoint a guardian to make lifestyle decisions for you - like where you want to live, what healthcare you would like or who would be allowed to visit. Again you need to sign a form ('Enduring Power of Guardianship) with a witness present available from the Office of Public Advocate. You can specify what exactly you authorize the guardian for. The guardian needs to sign, that she accepts to act for you when you cannot make your own decisions any longer.

Enduring Guardianship does not include the right to make financial or legal decisions and gives only a limited right over medical decisions. Your guardian cannot refuse medical treatment and is not allowed to consent to terminating a pregnancy or to remove tissue or organs for transplants.

Enduring Power of Attorney covers a wider range of issues and will guarantee on a broader level that you get what you want.

Lesbians often choose their long-time lovers as financial and medical attorneys. Not all lesbians are in long-term relationships however and choose close friends as their legal representatives for situations when they cannot make their own decisions.

If you only got together recently with a new lover and you don't know how the relationship will develop, you might want to rely on a friend rather than on your new lover. If you live together and/or want your lover to have some influence on decisions you can ask her if she wants to be

your guardian should anything happen, but have a close friend as your attorney. You need to make sure though that they get along and that they will not have contradictory opinions about what your wishes are.

The more you have thought about your wishes and the clearer you communicate them to lovers, friends and family, the less likely it is that there will be nasty disputes among the ones who are involved. It will give you and your loved ones some peace of mind and will make it easier to care for you with the respect and love you deserve.

—*Claudia Huber*

References and Contact Addresses:

Office of the Public Advocate, 5th floor, 436 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne 3000 (03) 9603 9500

Equal Opportunity Commission: Level 3, 380 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne 3000 (03) 9281 7100, www.eoc.vic.gov.au, Email: complaints@eoc.vic.gov.au

VCAT (Australian Civil and Administration Tribunal): Ground floor, 55 King Street, POBox 5408 CC, Melbourne 3000, (03) 9628 9900, www.vcat.vic.gov.au

Dying With Dignity: 3/9b Salsbury Avenue, Blackburn, Vic 3130 (03) 9877 7677, www.dwdv.org.au

Law Institute of Victoria:
www.liv.asn.au/public/legalinfo/wills/wills-powers.html

Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby: www.glr.org.au

Over The Rainbow Victoria: www.over-therainbow.org

Caring for You

It wasn't till I had to front up to Centrelink for yet another interview and I told them that my partner at that time was dying of ovarian cancer and needed me at home with her rather than out looking for jobs, that I came to terms with going on the Carer's Pension. Up till then I'd resisted being seen as a carer because I still saw myself as Maurs' partner. Besides, it wasn't much more than I was already receiving on the dole. But the fact that I didn't have to be actively looking for work to get the benefit and could be available for Maurs whenever she needed me was a huge advantage.

Anyone who is caring for someone who is infirm or unwell, whether you're a partner or a daughter or a sister or a mother or a friend, is eligible to apply for either a Carer's Pension or a Carer's Allowance. The Pension is income and asset tested and you can continue to work a limited amount of hours. The Allowance is a lot less money and is not means tested.

You have to fulfil certain criteria in the number of hours you are available, the kind of care you're actually doing and a doctor has to fill out a form to confirm the impairment of the patient. The forms can be a bit daunting but it's not an impossible task and you can request the assistance of a social worker if you find it's a bit much. It's actually cheaper for the government to pay this relatively small amount of money to enable you to care for someone in their own home than it is for them to pay to have your loved one in residential care. In my case, this arrangement was certainly a lot easier and far more acceptable as far as both Maurs and myself were concerned. By going on the Carer's Pension I was freed up to do this kind of essential caring work I needed to do, like driving Maurs to see the doctor or staying with her while she was in hospital, rather than having to worry about fulfilling my obligations on the dole by looking for work. If you find yourself in a similar position, (and you don't have to be on the dole to be eligible,) give Centrelink a ring and find out what you need to do to apply.

—*Jean Taylor*

Reference: Centrelink www.centrelink.gov.au

Co-Mothers: Up the Creek Without a Paddle?

The rights of a non-biological co-mother, upon the death of the biological mother, are complicated by the fact that same-sex parent and child law is partly governed by Federal, and partly by State, law. At the time of writing, same-sex couples cannot adopt children as a couple (although all adoption is currently under review by the Victorian Law Reform Commission).

The following is a précis of information from the Victorian Gay & Lesbian Rights Lobby, Over the Rainbow, and Law Institute of Victoria websites. We recommend that interested Lesbians should consult these sources (see references at end).

Family law is governed by Federal law, which does not consider non-

biological co-mothers in same-sex relationships to be ‘parents’. However, it is possible for the Family Court to make a ‘Parenting Order’, under the *Family Law Act*, which gives the non-biological parent legal recognition of their shared parental responsibilities with the biological parent. Anyone who is ‘concerned with the care, welfare, and development of the child’ (quoted in *Over the Rainbow*) can apply for a Parenting Order. The Family Court has granted many Parenting Orders, without dispute, to non-biological mothers. It is largely dependent on the attitude of the judge whether the sexual orientation of the parent is considered to affect the best interests of the child. Another factor which will be taken into consideration is whether the biological and non-biological co-mother are in a committed and stable relationship. (NOTE: Parenting Orders can be changed, for instance, if the Lesbian couple breaks up). The main disadvantage of getting a Parenting Order is that it is likely to be an expensive process. A lawyer’s services will be needed in preparing the correct documentation; the couple will have to pay a Court filing fee; and a counsellor’s report on the family may be required to assist in the Court’s decision-making.

To complicate this situation: since 2001, in Victoria, the live-in domestic partner of the biological parent is considered to be a parent, according to the *Children and Young Persons Act*. A non-biological parent can be listed as ‘The Informant’ on a child’s birth certificate if this is requested by the biological mother of the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages. The non-biological co-mother has limited rights regarding the schooling and medical care of the child, unless she is named in a parenting order in family law.

So far, the best actions that can be taken to protect the rights of a non-biological co-mother — *prior to the death of the biological mother* — are for:

- 1) The biological mother and the non-biological co-mother to enter into a parenting agreement. This should include such issues as: the intention to share parenting; how the child will be cared for financially; where and with whom the child lives; and the sperm donor’s (lack of) involvement.
- 2) Both of them to have the parenting agreement registered as a Parenting Order by the Family Court. (This is only relevant until the child turns 18. And it would have more weight if it were supported by an affidavit from a ‘known’ sperm donor. If the sperm donor is known, he must be given a copy of the application for the Parenting Order).

- 3) The non-biological co-mother should make a Will, acknowledging the child as a beneficiary (because children are not, for the purposes of inheritance, automatically regarded as kin to the co-mother).
- 4) The biological mother should name the non-biological co-mother as 'testamentary guardian' of her child/ren in her Will (although this is not legally binding) i.e. she names her partner as the guardian of her child/ren in the event of her death. If there is a dispute with other members of the biological mother's family, the Family Court can be asked to make a parenting order. In such a case, the Family Court would consider the child/ren's best interests, taking into account:
 - i) 'the previous relationships between the child and the relevant adults, including what kind of role they've had in the child's life' (*Over the Rainbow*).
 - ii) what the biological parent wanted
 - iii) what the child wants, if they are old enough (*Over the Rainbow*).
- 5) The biological mother to consider the financial interests of the co-mother, who is going to be looking after her (the biological mother's) child, by naming her as the superannuation beneficiary in her Will. Currently, not all superannuation trustees will accept a same-sex partner as a beneficiary, but some funds do. Some others exercise the right to make a case-by-case decision, at the trustees' discretion. At the time of writing, naming someone as superannuation beneficiary is not legally binding, but there is probably more chance of this happening if they have been named in a Will.

From all of the above, it will be apparent that it is hard enough to protect the rights of co-mothers if all of the above legal steps have been taken in advance. If they haven't, and if, for example, the biological and the co-mother don't live together, it will be much harder.

—Barbary Clarke

For further assistance and information

Women's Legal Service, (telephone advice and referral) Tel 9642 0877
1800 133 302 (country callers)

Victoria Legal Aid Family Law Service and Child Support Legal Service
Tel 9269 0234 or 1800 677 402 (country callers)

Child Support Agency 13 12 72

Centrelink Family Assistance Office 13 61 50

Family Court/Federal Magistrates Court 1300 352 000

Victorian Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby www.vglrl.org.au

Rainbow Families Council via <http://www.rainbowfamilies.org.au>

Lost

*Nothing happened
the way I wanted it to.
First of all, it shouldn't
have been terminal.
It shouldn't have been you.*

*Everything happened
outside my grasp.
Your husband forced you
to choose not me.
Abandonment before death
was my challenge.
I lost you before
I ever lost you.
How I ached with the pain of it.*

*When you died ten months later
I didn't feel the same pain.
It was a softer sadness
delayed and helpless.*

*It would have been different
if you weren't straight
and he wasn't cruel.*

Cathy Wheel

Lesbians down under

CHAPTER 4.

Coffins; Caskets; Receptacles;
Shrouds; Containers for Ashes; Oeuvre
Eulogy; Coffin Covers; Legalities;
Standard Grave Size, Leso-Green
ecology issues; Plans; Coffin Sources;
The day the news came, Poem



Handle with care

Learning about coffins and preparing for your own death arrangements with some independence and individuality and economy is covered in this section.

Is there a Lesbian culture around death and dying?

I organised a talking circle at one of our gatherings on the topic of Lesoleums and how we would like our funerals to be organised. There were many ideas put forward, some women were hesitant and some had not yet given any thought to their planning. A Lesoleum can be a shared crypt or it can be an individualised Lesbian space. There is a section included here on the topic of Lesoleums. I like the idea of us hanging about together, even in death.

At the talking circle women listened or told stories about how some of us imagined we might pop-off. Some stories were grand ideas, going out to sea in a flaming boat, some were draped over a mare's back, someone else was imagining their own great funeral pyre, others wanted to make it as easy as possible for their loved ones and friends.

My own encounter with planning my funeral began in my late 40's. Primarily, I entered into the fun of it, but underneath, I wanted to give my friends and loved ones some options for their grieving processes and to include some release through humour. Being an inevitable Lesbian, I too wanted to have some say in yet another circumstance where we were denied a voice!

As an artist, my thoughts drifted toward making a paper-mache coffin in the shape of a mummy case, head and shoulders and upturned feet to allow for the wearing of the 'sensible shoes' into the otherworld. I liked the idea of colour and Lesbian posters and magazine covers pasted on

the outside and definitely photos of friends and loved ones pasted on the inside, so they can come along with me. Maybe some messages from friends and loved ones for me, just in case there is another place!

In the Victorian times it was common to put a bell in the coffin in case a person was accidentally buried alive. If the bell rang someone was supposed to get them out. I thought I might put a bell in mine too, but more for the idea of ringing it to give warning ahead to say 'Lesbian coming!'

I wanted my coffin to be open at home until the last moment to provide an intimate space and to help lessen fear around a dead body. Mine! This time is important; it allows time to gather our resources emotionally.

Choosing my 'going away' clothes and or making my shroud appealed to me and I liked the idea of fresh herbs tucked in amongst the fabric. The lining of your coffin or receptacle can be very personal.

When it came time to be off to the cemetery I imagined a flat tray truck with bunting around the edges, flapping in the wind. I picture the coffin at the back of the truck and my friends standing or sitting on the truck at the front, singing and playing musical instruments, clapping sticks and drums. I laughed at the idea of a bit of a truck lurch now and then and added suitable cries and exclamations. I hoped for a steep hill where the coffin might have a little slide backwards and teeter a wee bit on the edge of the truck, for excitement and noise and shouting as I was saved from an early plummet.

At the graveside, I liked the timing to be at the coming of dusk, when the birds would call, so I must be thinking of a country cemetery. Dusk is also just a little bit spooky. Friends would light candles and sing to me. Maybe a lone mandolin player at the graveside could play a lament. When my lovely receptacle was lowered, women might sound the old Celtic keen, when women keened a sound of five descending notes on a pentatonic scale. Everyone could shovel a bit of dirt in. And then... I would love the living to have a wake and eat and feast and tell stories about me and themselves and comfort each other.

Doing it for yourself: What are your choices?

Coffins are a tapered body shape and can be made in construction plywood, chip board, mdf or craft wood, solid wood, or cardboard. Cardboard coffins are difficult for an individual to obtain and you will need to check with your cemetery to see if it is all right to use them.

Caskets are rectangular shapes and could be made in all of the above.

Receptacles are something different from a coffin or casket. There is more scope for Lesbian individuality with a receptacle.

Shrouds are an option for burial straight into the ground. This option

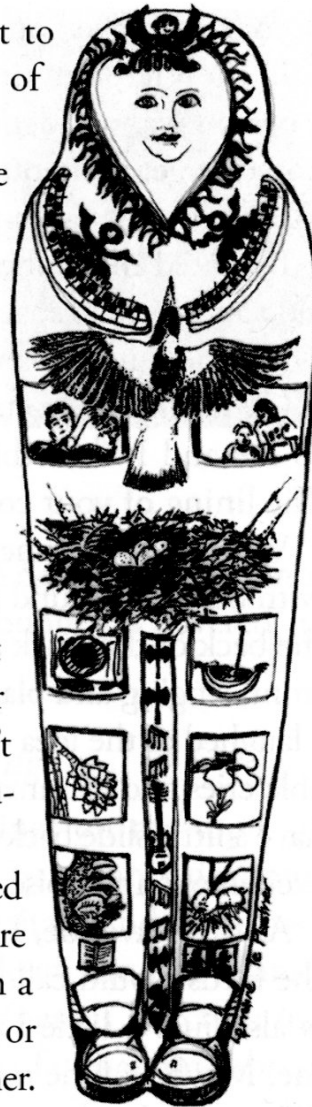
has developed because of different cultural groups in Australia. I believe Lesbians are a cultural group, not a minority.

According to regulations there is no requirement to prove cultural or religious grounds for this style of burial.

Container for Ashes — You can design or choose a favourite container to store yourself on the mantelpiece or in the garden or at the Lesoleum. Ashes when collected from a crematorium are in a container approximately the size of a shoebox.

Oeuvre Eulogy — I like to imagine this individual Receptacle design as an egg-shaped container. Oeuvre is the total output of a writer, artist, and Lesbian. Eulogy is praising someone recently died. So, a eulogical parting from this planet by a fine Lesbian contained within the sum of herself! Don't you love the idea of going off in an egg shape. Your egg shape may have to have a flat bottom. I don't know if it is possible but it might be if you fulfil regulation requirements listed below.

Coffin Covers — A special fabric could also be used to cover our coffins/receptacles, similar to how flags are used. I really like the idea of a Lesbian going off with a Leso banner draped on the coffin or in the van or ute or truck!. It is something we could pass along to each other.



Lorraine's
Coffin
Design

Legalities

You are entitled to use the facilities of any crematoria or cemetery when you pay the relevant fees. The following information relates to the recent legislation and is quoted from "Cemeteries and Crematoria Regulations 2005 Victoria.

"Part 4 Interment (pp 13 & 14)

- "13. Requirements for enclosure of bodily remains and body parts "A person must not bring bodily remains or body parts to be interred into a public cemetery, or convey those remains or body parts within a public cemetery, unless the remains or body parts are enclosed in a coffin, container or receptacle —
- (a) that is clean and hygienic; and
 - (b) that is constructed of wood, metal or other substantial material; and

- (c) from which neither offensive or noxious emissions nor matter from those remains or body parts will escape.”

Whatever form or shape of coffin or receptacle you decide to make or purchase, it must be within this interpretation.

Standard grave size

If you are thinking of digging your own grave these are the dimensions: Standard rectangular shape: length 2100mm X width 650mm. The grave may be enlarged or reduced, depending on the size required.

If you are thinking of sharing your gravesite with friends or loved ones you can have a single interment, a double interment or a triple interment or several side by side plots. Discuss your ideas and details with the individual cemetery you are interested in. Find one that suits your needs.

Whatever your receptacle design is, it should fit into the grave size.

Coffins and Receptacles for Cremation

Coffins or Receptacles intended for cremation should not be made of plastic or metal and must conform to EPA requirements. This means no treated pine, no linings made of p.v.c., products containing chlorines or fluorides. Polystyrenes should be restricted. Pacemakers and rubber shoes should be removed.

IMPORTANT

All details of construction and materials of coffins or receptacles should be discussed with the cemetery or crematorium

The underground boat circles and crosses the River Styxx: Practical suggestions for coffins and receptacles.

The dimensions of a standard coffin or casket are approximately: Length 2000mm x Width 610mm x Height 350.

Non-standard size: no larger than necessary. For a non-standard size the cemetery or crematorium should be notified, to allow for any difficulties to be sorted.

The coffin or receptacle may be as plain or decorative as you would like it. There **MUST** be a metal plate attached to the lid with the name, and date of death of the deceased engraved on it. These metal plates could be your own design and special shape. They are taken off at cremation.

For cremation, the coffin or receptacle should have a flat bottom without projections or bracing timber on the exterior. Joints and the lid can

be sealed with silicone to cover the regulations concerning no offensive liquids or odours. Ferrous screws may be better for cremation.

Four handles are helpful when fitted to aid lowering into grave or carrying or being placed on the 'Lesbian Conveyor'. The idea of a 'Lesbian Conveyor' could be explored as a shared community Conveyor to make it easier on those organising the moving of coffins or receptacles from homes to cemeteries or crematoriums. It could make lifting and carrying easier.

Shroud Burial

You may choose to design your own shroud. For a shroud, the fabric could be natural cheesecloth or calico: it could be hand-dyed, hand woven, it could be multi-coloured screen printed silk. It is a personal choice. The shrouded, clothed or naked body must be taken to the graveside in a sealed receptacle or coffin. The lid must be sealed.

At the graveside the coffin is opened. The opening of the lid must not allow any noxious gases to escape. To prevent build up of gases in the coffin, the lid can be sealed as close as possible to the time of burial. Muslims use a coffin with a hinged lid with clips for easy closing and opening. This idea makes it convenient on-site. The handling of the body must not be visible to the public. For a large funeral, friends and loved ones could form a visibility barrier or sheets of fabric or special screens could be held up for privacy. In a quiet country cemetery perhaps nothing would be needed as there would be less likelihood of strangers being nearby.

Transferring the Shrouded Lesbian to the Grave

Depending on the weight of the deceased, two or three people get down into the grave and stand there ready to receive the body. Others lift the body from the coffin and pass her to the people in the grave. They then gently place the body down into the earth at their feet. The cultural group which uses this method of burial has experimented with different ways of transferal. Lowering the body on a sheet of fabric and on a hard board - neither of these has been found to be as respectful as the personal handling method.

Most Funeral Directors would not have had the experience of a Shroud burial and because they are a private business they could refuse. A cemetery cannot refuse a shroud burial.

Shrouds Reference

Dorothy Adair. Castlemaine. c/o Long Breast Press P.O. Box 168, Brunswick East 3057

Leso Green Issues! Plant First Have Your Coffin Later

If you have concerns about treading lightly on the planet you may wish to consider how to make the least ecological impact when you are planning your funeral. You may like to think about tree planting now. Choose a place that needs replenishing to help make your funeral carbon neutral. Invite friends to join you.

Coffins made of cardboard are thought to be a good Leso-green option. We have had a lot of difficulty finding sources for cardboard coffins.

OnEarth in South Australia will sell direct to the public or coffins can be ordered through a funeral director (see contacts at the end of the chapter). Delivery can be arranged. If you like this style of coffin, you may need to buy it as a pre-planning idea. OnEarth recommends allowing for a delivery time of 5 days. They have a preferred carrier: Hi-Trans Express.

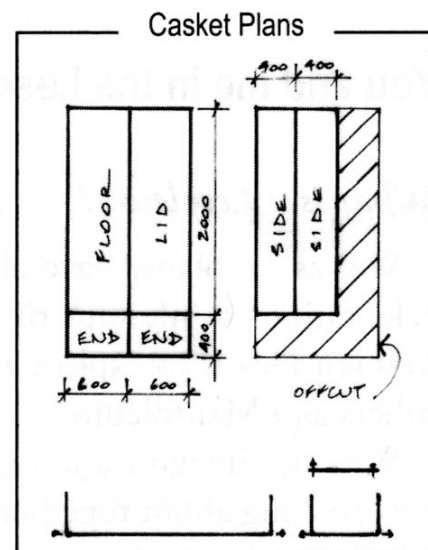
Another South Australian company, Sensible Funerals, is promoting a good idea that involves using a cardboard coffin placed inside a wooden coffin. The wooden coffin is used in the ceremonies and the cardboard coffin is taken out at the crematorium. Information can be viewed on their website (see list of websites at the end of the book.)

The company LifeArt makes fibreboard coffins. These coffins are supplied direct to some funeral directors. (See contacts at end of chapter.)

Chipboard is said to have a similar impact to sustainability as cardboard, so might also be an option.

Now Imagine

Imagine the fun of decorating your own coffin. Use water based paints, charcoal, acrylic paints. Think about colours, feathers, sculptures. Favourite bits and pieces pasted inside or out, collages, pictures of friends, music, political slogans, pictures of places you have loved. Decoupage can be very beautiful. You may like to paint your own eulogy on the outside, or notes to friends. If you love herstory you may wish to bury a time capsule with you telling something of our Lesbian culture in this current time. Bad ideas- no helium balloons in the coffin or receptacle. And definitely no penny bangers or crackers in the coffin if you are being cremated.



Plan for simple rectangular casket using 2 sheets of construction plywood, 2.4m x 1.2m x 17mm.

Sources: Coffins, Caskets, Receptacles

Coffins can be purchased ahead of time and used as a storage container in your household. They can also be purchased from funeral directors. Most funeral directors will provide a plain coffin on request.

If you don't feel like making your own coffin, you might like to buy a simple form and decorate it yourself or keep it plain. At the time of writing, the cost for the wooden coffin from Chevra Kadisha is approximately \$440. The cost of a cardboard coffin from South Australia at the time of writing is between \$350 and \$400. Allow for freight costs in your budget.

Plain Pine Coffin Source Chevra Kadisha. Jewish Burial Society.
115-119 Inkerman St St Kilda Victoria 3182; P.O. Box 105
St Kilda Victoria 3182 Phone: 03 9534 0208 Email:mck@
mck.org.au www.mck.org.au

Cardboard Coffins OnEarth Australia Unit 2, 62 Cottage Lane,
Hackham, Adelaide, SA Australia 5163 Phone: 08 8326
7676 Fax: 08 8327 2397 Email: sales@onearth.com.au www.
onearth.com.au

Sensible Coffins 151 South Rd, Ridleyton, SA Australia 5008
Phone: 08 8241 5655; www.sensiblefunerals.com.au
kruss118@adam.com.au

Enviroboard coffin suppliers www.lifeart.com.au; P.O. Box 486
Drummoyne NSW 2047 Ph: 02 9712 7446

You and me in the Lesolea

What is a Lesoleum?

We, as Lesbians, have always done such interesting things with our celebrations of life, our rituals and our survival. It seems to me a grand Lesbian idea is to explore that of a Lesoleum. Sometimes referred to by others as a Mausoleum.

Why not imagine and organise a memorial space/place with friends so we can hang about together at the end. Lesoleums can be used for coffins or ashes or both.

And as my imagination delights in fun, why not dot this country with Lesoleums and then young Lesos can go visiting on pilgrimages to the

old dykes who are sealed behind a slab of impervious material! Or they could go picnic at our sites or have Amazon games or hold candle ceremonies remembering dyke dearlings. One of them might even write a book about the 'Lesolea of Australia'. The plural for mausoleum is mausolea. Translated from the hetero to Lesospeak is the lovely sounding LE-SOLEA a place of protection.

Ideas for Lesoleas

They could be as simple as a memorial cairn of loose rocks or as complex as a grand construction above the ground. We could be together in small or large groups.

Be flexible enough in your planning to think outside the rectangle and allow for choices. Burial, ashes, no ashes, or a mixture of both. It could be fenced as in earlier traditions with a Labrys on each corner or some of our wonderful symbols entwined throughout. In our Lesbian way, we can think of special ideas. It could be a room entered, or a granite boulder, or a carved stone with special symbols for ourselves. A stone of memory with each of your names upon it would be herstorically interesting in years to come.

If you are planning to scatter ashes you can still claim a Lesolea. You can choose a natural place of beauty or one of special significance to you and your friends. A miniature garden, or a pond in a public or private garden, it could be a particular tree, or jetty or a cliff top. If you are considering something like this think about the idea of 'A Lesbian Celebration Book' a shared book that records your names and becomes something that is passed along amongst us.

Ownership of Lesoleums

Country cemeteries often have nicer surrounds, are not so crowded, still have sites available for sale not rent, and would be good sites for Lesoleas.

A Lesoleum would require a site in perpetuity. This requires documentation. Exclusive rights can be passed down so we need to document a clear audit trail. Storage of papers both legal and important can be planned for. Be Lesbianly wise.

It is our responsibility, as grave or Lesoleum owners, to maintain them at our expense. The Lesoleum should be kept in a state unlikely to cause danger to life or limb and in thorough repair and proper condition (especially for the dyke pilgrimages!)

Is Time a Factor When Burying in a Mausoleum or Crypt?

Once an interment has taken place in a mausoleum or crypt, the remains of the deceased are interred forever.

What is a Crypt?

At the Necropolis in Melbourne, crypts are constructed of durable, poured-in-place, reinforced concrete and connected to drainage and ventilation systems. At your expense crypts may be available at up to six different designated levels. These are the prayer, heart, eye, meditation, sanctuary and heavenly levels. The most popular levels are the heart and eye level. Crypts can be purchased as a single position, a true companion (where the interments are positioned head to toe and separated by a special partition), or a pair, where the coffins are interred side by side.

Once a funeral is completed, the coffin or casket is placed in the crypt. The crypt is sealed and a marble, granite or bronze memorial shutter is then placed over the seal. The crypt is always sealed on the same day as the interment.

Is Embalming Necessary for Interment Within Crypts?

Sometimes embalming may be involved, and in some states it is essential if the body is to be interred above ground (in a crypt or vault); this may mean extra costs. This depends entirely on where the mausoleum is erected. For example, NSW health authorities deem it compulsory. In some states however, whether or not to embalm the deceased remains the choice of the next of kin.

Larger Cemeteries

With the growing shortage of land available for cemetery use, a mausoleum or crypt allows for a maximum number of entombments in a minimum space.

Preston Cemetery in Victoria is planning the third stage to its mausoleum complex which will extend the number of crypt spaces to be in excess of 8,000, making it the largest in Australia.

—*Lorraine le Plastrier*

Contacts:

Metropolitan and Country Cemeteries are found in the yellow pages under Cemeteries. Some are also listed under Cremations but mostly the listings here are funeral directors.

Helpful Information:

www.choice.com.au

Check Index under Funeral, Choice Magazine

www.sidsandkids.org.au

Helpful information about children's funerals

www.forpeaceofmind.com.au

Peace of Mind, P.O. Box 1042 Chatswood NSW 2057

Information about funerals

www.health.vic.gov.au/cemeteries

Cemeteries and Crematoria Regulations Victoria 2005

www.dms.dpc.vic.gov.au

Regulations for Interment and Regulations for Mausoleums

DAY THE NEWS CAME

*The day the news came of the death
The old blue-eyed lady
deepened her furrows as she spoke the words.
The raucous tone of a young woman died in her chest
This young mother sat pale faced, but silent.*

*Subdued words of disbelief.
repeated, repeated, repeated*

*This was the season of harvest.
Fruits fresh with juice and prime.*

*The long silences of women wove, interlaced
with the still silences of the summer night.*

*And in her house the old woman weeps
restless pump, her heart lives and dies and lives.
She is deserted by the sensibilities,
her knowledge of the life pattern
crawls and halts fumbling in her mind.*

The second day of the news of the death

The young mother sat, still pale faced, and silent.

*The moon, two levels of cloud about it.
Patiently rises, its face as marble.
Upturned slow, my eyes to this roundness of moon.
Full, bright reflecting out of calm sea clouds.*

Still, I sat and bathed in this sensuous light

*trying to calm my perplexity.
Monumental mountains heavy in their presence
Unfriendly by their permanence watched me.*

*Then clouds came with stealth
the moon drawing them, a cloaken haze
across her frontal face.*

*Shrinking backwards.
Had the spirit left the body?*

*I laid my head close to the living things
cheek to earth.
My mannerisms, bravados, falling back in layers.
Shedding, leaving me torn into my core.
Inhaling deeply and exhaling long slow sighs*

*In this night of the motor car
my birthed flesh is bitten to destruction.*

This is the news of the death.

Lorraine le Plastrier

The Caring Way Out

CHAPTER 5

Dying at home; dying in hospital; hospices; nursing home; as mentioned in despatches from the peace zone, Poem



Safe Exit

The decision about where to die, which also involves how you are going to achieve this, is a crucial one. Sometimes it may seem as if we may not have much choice in the matter. But even within the constraints of a terminal illness or limited mental capacity or a physical disability we can still make decisions. And with the support of our friends we can work out the best possible place to be when we are dying for our own well-being and peace of mind.

Hospital

Maybe you are terminally ill and need constant professional nursing attention. In which case you might not have much choice but to be cared for in hospital where you have onsite access to medical treatment and need trained staff to administer the necessary drugs. In this situation, and in case you become incapacitated, it's important that you have the enduring power of attorney and medical, financial and legal guardianship papers drawn up and signed naming those who will make the decisions for you according to your wishes.

You will want your Lesbian partner to be able to visit at any time as well as friends in the Lesbian community. Many large city hospitals have a broadminded understanding of the needs of Lesbians these days and will ensure that you and your partner and friends are treated with respect. In fact, it helps to be out as a Lesbian in such a situation so the medical staff can respond and care for you in the most appropriate way possible.

However, in smaller country hospitals this might not necessarily be the case. When faced with discrimination it might help to know that you have rights and that it is against the law for Lesbians to be discriminated against. You can make a complaint to the Equal Opportunity Commission or approach an activist Lesbian group, such as the Matrix Guild

(for and by Lesbians Over 40) or the Victorian Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby or Positive Women (for womyn with HIV/AIDS) or a womyn's health group. For example, Women's Health In the South East (WHISE), Women's Health Victoria or the Women's Health Information Centre at the Royal Women's Hospital will be able to give you information and support or could perhaps advocate on your behalf.

Other difficulties you may encounter might be due to the emphasis in hospitals on getting well and therefore the staff might not be so prepared to deal with the processes of dying. Especially if they've never had much to do with people dying as some nurses haven't. On top of that, having to resist a conservative westernised medical approach to medical treatment can be pretty daunting and you sometimes need all your wits about you or at least friends who are prepared to go into bat on your behalf if you aren't being fully informed about your choices.

Even so, sometimes a hospital with all the latest equipment and fully trained staff is the best of all possible places to be when you need ongoing treatment or have to be cared for in a medical environment.

Hospices

The staff in hospices, on the other hand, are not only prepared for people to die, because caring for people who are dying is what they are trained to do, but they provide compassionate care and appropriate surroundings if you need or choose to die in an institution. Because a hospice is geared towards providing an environment that best facilitates the dying processes, many Lesbians find this to be an admirable solution. Especially when the thought of being an imposition on loved ones might be too much to handle or you would prefer some more impersonal care without having to worry about someone attending to the more intimate aspects of your bodily needs, or if your partner finds it too exhausting.

At a hospice your life will not be prolonged unnecessarily but you will be provided with a high standard of palliative care which also includes the administration of drugs to ensure no or reduced pain at all times. At a hospice a Lesbian can be assured of a comfortable and comforting environment where her needs will be met to facilitate her dying in the easiest possible way.

Nursing Homes

Nursing Homes are another option. Sometimes when we or our loved ones reach old age and we can no longer care for ourselves or each other,

moving into a Nursing Home is the most practical way to go. And while Nursing Homes haven't had very good press over the years, they do specialise in aged care. With a bit of shopping around and a great deal of perseverance, a good Nursing Home is sometimes a very comforting and appropriate place to be when we reach that extremely vulnerable physical and mental stage in our lives.

While most Nursing Homes are still very conservative, there has been some discussion around the need for double beds so that elderly Lesbian couples need not be split up, as has happened in the past, if both of you need to go into a Home at the same time. Keep in mind, too, that only about ten percent of the population end their days in Nursing Homes so most Lesbians are not going to end up there no matter how old we get.

And of course, the Old Dykes Home that many of us have been talking about for years, while still only a pipe dream is not entirely beyond the realms of possibility. Even the thought of so many elderly Lesbians in the one place conjures up all the fun and games we could get up to if it became a reality and what a very comforting choice of option it would be.

At Home

Then again, you might prefer to die at home with your partner, friends and family around you providing care 24 hours a day. There are no firm rules about how to do this and every situation is different according to the Lesbian being cared for while at the same time taking her partner's and children's needs into consideration. Also to be considered is how long it's likely take and how much care she is going to need before she dies.

Being cared for at home has the advantage of being a familiar environment so that the Lesbian being cared for can feel comfortable and in control of what happens to her at any time. It's perhaps important in this situation to draw up or arrange a roster system so that no one person carries the burden of caring on their own and the shifts can be shared around according to everyone's energy levels. Having food on hand for the carers, comfortable sleeping arrangements, making sure that the partner and/or children are relieved of stress as much as possible, with not too many people around at any one time, are all things to consider when there are many more people in and out of the house day and night than usual. Your doctor can make sure you have all the necessary drugs, such as pain relief, on hand for immediate relief as required. She can also arrange for a hospital bed if necessary or suggest where to go for commodes and walkers and other medical equipment to take the patient's altered physical needs into account.

Being cared for at home doesn't preclude visits and medical support from outside the home either. You can access outside support from your local hospice or the District Nursing Service or any other government funded services which are available through your local council, church or community centres. In fact, the more sympathetic and appropriate support Lesbians can get when we're dying the better.

All that being said, we don't always know when and how we, or our loved ones, are going to die. We might have some warning, when we're diagnosed with a terminal disease, for example, to get our affairs in order. But as many Lesbians die peacefully in their sleep or are killed in car accidents or collapse suddenly and die without any warning, it's in everyone's best interests to be prepared beforehand. Whatever happens and whichever way our deaths present themselves, being informed about different aspects of dying and being prepared in some manner for death goes a long way towards making all our lives that little bit easier.

—*Jean Taylor*

For further information and assistance

Matrix Guild: PO Box 99, Fairfield 3078,
www.matrixguildvic.org.au/index.html, 03 9347 2532,
jkent@vtown.com.au

Women's Health In the South East (WHISE), level 2, 54 Wells Street,
 Frankston, 03 9783 3211, whise@vicnet.au,
<http://home.vicnet.net.au/~whise/>

Women's Health Victoria, level 1, 123 Lonsdale St, Melbourne, Vic;
 9662 3755, www.whv.org.au, whv@whv.org.au

Women's Health Information Centre at the Royal Women's Hospital:
 132 Grattan Street, Carlton, Vic, 9344 2007,
www.rwh.org.au/wellwomens/index.cfm?doc_id=2278,
www.wellwomen.rwh.org.au

Positive Women, 03 9276 6918, info@positivewomen.org.au,
www.positivewomen.org.au

ALSO Foundation, www.also.org.au, also@also.org.au

Gay & Lesbian Switchboard, 03 9827 8544, 1800 184 527

Women's Information and Referral Exchange (WIRE):
 1300 134 130

Equal Opportunity Commission, level 3, 380 Lonsdale Street,
Melbourne, Vic 03 9281 7111, TTY: 9281 7110

Nursing Homes – Health and Ageing, Australian Government Dept
of, 1800 020 103

Hospices: Palliative Care Victoria — 03 9662 9644,
info@pallcarevic.asn.au, www.pallcarevic.asn.au

Royal District Nursing Service — 03 9354 5222, getinfo@rdns.com.
au; www.rdns.com.au

as mentioned in despatches from the peace zone

*my lover holds her breath when she comes
for those few ecstatic moments she stops breathing*

I say, to my friend, "There's nothing to be afraid of. All that happens at the end is that you stop breathing," recalling how it was when my late partner died in the middle of one never-to-be-forgotten but otherwise quite ordinary Thursday afternoon in September, "People do it all the time, they simply stop breathing. There's nothing to be afraid of when you die."

"How do you know?" my friend asks.

*my lover holds her breath when she comes
for a few mind-blowing moments she stops breathing*

As a young mother I would hover over the humidicrib where my baby was unconscious to make sure she was still breathing. Sometimes it was hard to tell because her little body would appear to be completely lifeless. I had to bend right down to observe the slight rise and fall of her chest as it worked unceasingly to pull air into her lungs. Fearful, I held my own breath until I was reassured that she was, indeed, still breathing, in and out, still breathing.

*my lover holds her breath when she comes
for a few toe-curling moments she stops breathing*

I wake in the early hours of the morning. From my bed on the floor not far from where my friend is unconscious in her recliner, I listen to her breath as it rasps in and out, in and out. It seems almost impossible that she is still breathing when the cancer has so ravaged her body and dulled her mind, that her chest is still rising and falling to pull air into her lungs, but so it is.

I hover over her unconscious form waiting for her to stop breathing, to let go, to simply stop breathing. But she's got a hold on life that refuses to give up, her pulse is strong under my fingers, her chest rises and falls, rises and falls.

*my lover holds her breath when she comes
for a few orgasmic moments she stops breathing*

I was not with her when she died, when she stopped breathing, my daughter who died. I was in bed in the ward of the Queen Vic with all the other mothers whose babies were dying, when the nurse came and told me that my daughter had died, that my baby had stopped breathing. I almost stopped breathing myself.

*my lover holds her breath when she comes
for a few trembling moments she stops breathing*

I was with her when she died, when she simply stopped breathing, my friend who died. My Lesbian friends and I, we are getting older. We know that death is our work now, that we have a duty to care for the dying and a responsibility to lay out the dead. That we need to simply be there when we're needed, to maintain the vigil, to support each other.

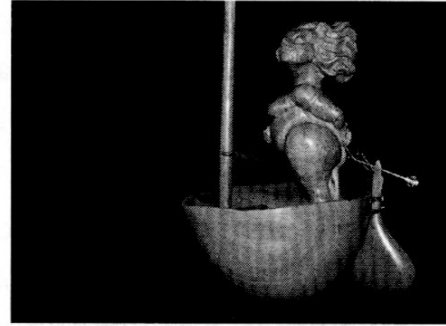
*my lover holds her breath when she comes
for a few life-affirming moments she stops breathing*

*Jean Taylor dedicated to the memory of Thelma Solomon
and her surviving partner Maureen Gie*

Attending

CHAPTER 6

Death certificate; autopsy;
 coroners; identifying the body;
 organ donations; farewell rituals;
 suicide; a rose is a rose, Poem;
 People who stay, Song



Drop Dead Gorgeous

Attending a loved one in her final journey is a deeply personal decision. To be present to all that needs to be done, to focus your attention on your beloved and to allow yourself and others to experience all that comes with the hard tasks, is difficult. However we often feel a connection and wholeness as we attend the dying. Be present, this moment will not come again. Allow the process.

In times of great shock the body releases hormones that alleviate shock and calm grief by closing down the memory. This is one reason to prepare, if you can, for death. Being fully present and completely attending, to yourself, to the bereaved Lesbian, to the friends, and to all the rituals taking place will, in the future, help build the herstory of the death and burial.

Death Certificate

To obtain a death certificate, a death has to occur. The only thing that can be done in advance is compiling a comprehensive list of personal information. This information is essential for obtaining a death certificate. You need to include full name of parents of the deceased Lesbian, her birthplace, her Next of Kin, her mother's maiden name. The more you can record the better.

A medical practitioner must confirm the death and send this notification to the Department of Births, Deaths and Marriages. After receiving the Doctor's notification of death, the Department will forward the necessary paperwork to whoever is nominated to register this death. This can be you or your funeral director.

It may take some time to receive the death notice from this Department. The body may be buried or cremated before the death notice is issued. It may be convenient to request multiple copies of the death notice

as it often takes a long time to receive one. There is a small fee involved in obtaining this certificate and no discount for multiple issues.

See Chapter 9 for certificates needed for burial. See Chapter 10 for certificates needed for cremation.

Coroner & Autopsy

Most deaths occur from known causes, therefore only a small percentage would require either an autopsy or a coroner's report.

An autopsy is sometimes called a 'post-mortem'. It is a detailed physical examination of a person's body after death by a pathologist (doctor). This is usually done at a local or regional hospital. An autopsy can help explain why and how the death occurred and usually takes no more than 48 hours.

A death must be reported to the coroner for investigation when:

- the person died unexpectedly
- the person died from an accident or injury
- the person died in an unnatural or violent way (including suicide and murder)
- the person died during or as a result of an anaesthetic
- the person was 'held in care' immediately before they died, in jail, institutions etc.
- a doctor has been unable to sign a death certificate giving the cause of death
- the identity of the person who has died is not known.

Objection to an Autopsy

The Next of Kin or executor of the will can object to an autopsy being carried out. The objection must be made in writing stating your reasons. The coroner will make a decision based on the validity of your objections. Similarly you may request an autopsy for your own peace of mind. Again the request needs to be made in writing to the coroner or pathologist at the hospital dealing with the body.

Identifying the Body

The person's body must be formally identified by someone who knew the person (usually a friend or relative). If you were present at the death or soon thereafter, you may be asked to identify the person at the place of death. If the person was not identified at the place of death, you may need to go to the Coronial Services Centre in Melbourne, or the local or regional hospital.

You should ring the Centre or local police to arrange a suitable time. Only one person is needed to do the identification, but it is a good idea to take someone with you for support, as identifying someone you know can be upsetting. The coroner's office has a counselling and referral service available to help people affected by a death being investigated by a coroner.

Organ and Tissue Donation

Organ donation is quite an emotional topic. Some Lesbians have experienced deep trauma from having to sign forms for organ harvest when their loved ones are beyond hope of survival. Other Lesbians object to both organ and tissue donation, while many Lesbians have consented to both types of donations and worry that their wishes won't be met after their death. There is a straightforward method to cover all your needs regarding organ and tissue donation.

Many Lesbians may not know that the Australian Donor Register records both objections and consent. You can register at any time during your life and have your decision noted on your driver's licence, Lesbian card and in your living will.

Tell your friends and loved ones of your decision regarding organ and tissue donation. The more information we share while living, the less worry and stress we leave for those remaining.

Donating Your Body to Science

Some Lesbians mention leaving their body to science. This can be done provided you meet certain criteria.

There is only one medical service receiving bodies in Victoria. The two requirements for donation are that the body must be able to be collected within a radius of sixty kilometres around Melbourne and the Lesbian who has died could not have been residing for longer than six months in Britain between 1st January 1980 to 31st June 1996, because of the danger of Mad Cow Disease. If these criteria can be met, one applies for donation forms from the Dept. of Anatomy, Medical Building, University of Melbourne, Victoria 3010. These forms confirm that after death you consent to the retention of your body for medical research and to the cremation of the remains on completion of research. The Next of Kin will be contacted when the ashes can be collected.

For the privilege of receiving the donation of the deceased body the University bears all costs involved including the cremation. For further information contact the Dept of Anatomy, University of Melbourne on 03 8344 5809, Mon, Wed and Fri only.

Claiming the Body

It is not a difficult task to claim the Lesbian's body for burial or cremation.

We as Lesbians do have stories of being denied access to our loved ones after death. This is happening less often as we legally prepare ourselves in advance to ensure our loved one's wishes are acknowledged when she dies. If your loved one nominated you as Next of Kin and executor of her will, you will have prime legal rights to claim her body.

If you are employing a Funeral Director she will organize everything. You and your friends may wish to collect the body. If your loved one dies in hospital, contact the medical administrator of the hospital, who will organize the necessary paperwork to release the body to you. If the coroner has become involved, again it is a straightforward task to claim her body if you have proof of your legal status.

Unfortunately some Lesbians die without a will or written death plan. In these cases the blood relatives are classed as Next of Kin and have rights over the body.

Any contention arising in claiming the body will be settled by a Magistrates Court. Contact your local Clerk of Courts for further information.

Laying Out the Body

The following information is very detailed and some Lesbians may find it distressing.

Laying out is the term used for preparing the deceased for burial or cremation. This differs from embalming, which only occurs for very specific reasons; see additional information at the end of this section.

Many Lesbians will want to be involved in this process as a loving last gift to their beloved. If you choose not to do this, everything will be taken care of by the funeral director. You can request the clothing and jewellery that you wish your loved one to be wearing. You can also stipulate no make-up and no removal of facial hair. Death changes the appearance of our loved one, so having them look as near to as they did in life is a great comfort.

If you and your friends choose to wash and dress your loved Lesbian's body, you will be able to do so at the hospital, funeral parlour or at home with or without professional help. If the Lesbian has died of the AIDS Virus or another infectious disease, refer to the note at the end of this section.

To begin the laying out, all clothing is removed from the body and a waterproof sheet is placed underneath it while washing. Gently wash all surfaces of the body with warm water. Rosemary oil is recommended to

the dead body; however, it is advisable to do this. As this is difficult, we suggest you to seek support. Ancient burial practices are bound in the wisdom of facilitated grieving and closure. Viewing the body is an important step in comprehending that your loved Lesbian is actually dead. Spend as much time as you or others need to say goodbye.

If your loved Lesbian dies in hospital and you are advised not to view the body, you can insist on this if it is what you need to do. Contact a friend or hospital counsellor to support you with this. You may wish to take the body home to say goodbye if your beloved didn't die at home. A funeral director can do this or you may do this with friends if your loved one has requested no involvement from anyone outside the Lesbian community. Notify the hospital of your intentions and arrive to collect the body with a regulation coffin. (See Chapter 4) The body's core temperature must remain at 6°C at all times, so cooling systems need to be developed. For an adult body, it will take twenty-six two litre plastic milk bottles filled with water and frozen then packed around and under the body and rotated with re-frozen bottles. This will achieve the required temperature. With this system in place, you may be able to have your loved one's body at home for up to three days.

Prayers and Vigils

These can take many forms, singing, music, chanting, drumming, wailing and keening, silence, story-telling, drinking, meditation, spiritual practices, whatever it takes to awaken grieving and to begin the transition from a physical to an ethereal or spiritual relationship with the deceased. This is the last time you will see her in her physical form. Memories are strengthened now; we are reminded of our interconnected journey with the deceased. Flowers, mementos, photos and food are shared. We are in an altered state of consciousness and most of the traditional practices are to encourage the flow of grief and lessen the state of shock. Honey or sugar added to hot drinks and sweets will also alleviate the effects of shock.

It is helpful to make saying goodbye an ongoing ritual. Meeting with friends and loved ones each week for some time after the death is very supportive, especially for those close to the deceased. The finality of death is more evident as time passes. Continual practices of saying goodbye and letting go, ease the intensity of the loss. Birthdays, anniversaries, special events also bring the need for awareness and attention to grieving. Have supportive friends and family on call should you need company at these times.

Grief counsellors may be helpful at any stage of letting go. Most health centres or doctors will have information on how to get in touch with these services.

—*Anah Holland-Moore*

The State Coroner's Office Victoria, www.coronerscourt.vic.gov.au

Victorian Organ Donation Service, www.lifegift.com.au

Departments of Births, Deaths and Marriages, www.dvc.vic.gov.au

Victorian Government Health Information, www.health.vic.gov.au

Victorian AIDS Council, www.vicaids.asn.au

A rose is a rose is a rose

In memory of a special rose

A rose is a rose

Or is it?

A colourful beauty in bloom

Or prickly with thorns in gloom

A rose is a rose

Or are you?

Sparkling eyes full of humour

Sharp wit that could cut to the bone

A rose is a rose

Or are you?

When what's left is petals to dry

Between pages of 'Lesbian Ethics'

A rose is a rose

You are gone now

A choice to make but your own

We carry your memory within us

A rose is a rose

After all.

Claudia Oct 2006

'Rose is a rose is a rose' was written by Gertrude Stein 1913 and is part of her poem 'Sacred Emily' 'Lesbian Ethics,' by Sarah Hoagland, Institute of Lesbian Studies, 1988

Too hard to cope

*In memory of those, who didn't make it.
And with thanks to those who fought on.*

In recent years several Lesbian health professionals, Lesbian academics and social workers started to initiate studies on Lesbian Health. Amongst other relevant topics, some of these studies look into the high rate of suicide amongst Lesbians of various ages.

It appears that living in a society, which still oppresses Lesbians and women on a wide scale, there is a high rate of suicide and depression amongst Lesbians. A society, where young Lesbians get ostracised and bullied by peers; where Lesbians still fight for acceptance by their biological family and non-Lesbian friends; where Lesbians still choose to stay in the closet at work out of fear of losing their job; where Lesbians still don't have the same legal rights as heterosexual women; where Lesbians still face hostility and ridicule in the street for holding hands or kissing in public; where Lesbians still don't have easy access to Lesbian-friendly health practitioners or counsellors.

On top of Lesbian specific discrimination, many of us are also survivors of incest-rape. Some of us came out of oppressive, sometimes violent heterosexual marriages. Others were refused custody of their children because of being a Lesbian.

Even though the view on Lesbianism has become more tolerant, the pressure of being a Lesbian in a hetero-patriarchal world with its ingrained lesbophobia is still a reality in many Lesbian lives.

For many years Lesbians were portrayed as sinister evil creatures, women who were out to corrupt innocent girls. This changed into picturing Lesbians as depressed, deeply isolated individuals full of self-hatred. Once the medical profession took interest in the 'phenomenon' of Lesbianism it was claimed to be a mental illness and something women could be cured of. Lillian Faderman gives a fantastic overview of how Lesbians were portrayed in literature from the seventeenth century to the present in her books 'Surpassing the Love of Men' and 'Chloe plus Olivia'.

Only with the beginning of Lesbian feminist writing a positive image of Lesbianism as a strong life affirming choice started to appear. For the first time Lesbians were depicted as happy stropic individuals with a will to live and the right to exist as full humans.

These days Lesbians might not be openly portrayed as evil, mentally deranged or sick any more. But in mainstream media, billboards, literature or speeches by politicians or religious representatives, it is still not seen as a strong lifestyle that has a right to exist openly. Positive images of Lesbians are still rare and heterosexuality is still presented as the norm.

It is no wonder that the pressure to conform with mainstream values and the often impossible attempt to fit in can have some devastating effects on the Lesbian self-image, Lesbian identity and mental health. For some of us coping with living in a heterosexist world becomes too hard and suicide is seen as the only way out.

Each Lesbian suicide is a huge loss and leaves lovers, friends and her Lesbian community in grief and shock.

Lesbians who are left with the aftermath of suicide often need a long time to come to terms with what happened. It is usually close friends and lovers who have to deal with what needs to be done.

Death by suicide by law requires an autopsy to determine the exact cause of death and is followed by a coronial inquest. This can be very upsetting for those left behind. If there is no will or final note the biological family automatically takes over and lovers and friends can be left with nothing.

Lesbians or the Lesbian lifestyle often get blamed as the cause of the suicide. Aggression and hostility from family members towards Lesbians are common, often to the point of Lesbian lovers and friends being excluded from any funeral or cremation arrangements. Even if the biological family is not openly hostile, having to deal with the lack of understanding of their daughter's Lesbian life can be very daunting.

Pain and grief also can be turned against each other and it can happen that a Lesbian is made the scapegoat by other Lesbians. In grief and anger we often express feelings and words that can be very hurtful to the Lesbian who was close to the one who committed suicide. Try to put yourself in her shoes and consider how you would like to be treated if you were in her place. Coping with the loss and shock is difficult enough. We don't need other Lesbians to be judgemental or disapproving at a time like this. Having to make arrangements for a funeral or cremation after the suicide of a lover or friend, taking care of her affairs (like bank accounts, bills, rent, informing others, etc), having to sort through her belongings and emptying her living space is a hard task to attend to.

Many Lesbians also struggle with self-blame and guilt when a lover or friend takes her own life. Questions like 'what could I have done to prevent this?' or 'why didn't I see what was coming?' and all the 'what ifs

...’ are an often found reaction. But if a Lesbian was deeply depressed and suicidal there is often nothing anyone could have done. All we can do is to reach out to a Lesbian in distress. If she is unable to recognize that others are trying to help and be supportive, we might not be able to prevent her suicide.

I can understand that coping with life can be too much of a burden for some Lesbians at times. But I wish that one day the power and passion that being a Lesbian evokes and the bond within our Lesbian community will be strong enough that no Lesbian will consider suicide as a solution any longer.

If you think of that as an option, talk to friends and lovers or even a Lesbian counsellor. It may be hard, but you may be surprised how reaching out can shift your perception of what is happening and how support from other Lesbians can give you back the will to live. Our Lesbian lives are too precious to lose any of us to suicide.

—*Claudia Huber*

References and contact addresses:

Studies, which include Lesbian suicide:

‘More than Lip service’, The Report of the Lesbian Health, Information Project, LHIP, Royal Women’s Hospital, Victoria, page 36 www.rwh.org.au/emplibrary/wellwomens/LHIP_FinalReport_Apendices.pdf

‘Suicide and Suicide Attempts in the Lesbian and Gay Community’, in Proceedings of the Health in Difference Conference, Millard, J., Sydney, 1996, Health in Difference, Sydney

Where to ask for help:

Gay and Lesbian Switchboard, Victoria; 6pm–10pm daily, Wed 2pm–10pm. Tel: 03 98278544 metropolitan, 1800184527 Country Victoria; www.vicnet.au/~glswitch/ They can give you numerous numbers of Lesbian counsellors, some of which specialise in suicide and some of which have means tested fees.

CASA, Centre Against Sexual Assault; Tel: 1800 806 292, country Victoria 03 93442210, 9am–5pm; 03 93491766 after hour crisis line; ww.casa.org.au; They deal with sexual violence. You can ask for a Lesbian counselor, but they have long waiting lists, which are even longer if you prefer a Lesbian to speak to.

Life Resolutions, Mary Magalotti, Principal Psychologist, Tel: 03 93804444; inquiries@liferesolutions.com.au, www.liferesolutions.com.au, 343 Brunswick Rd, Brunswick, Vic 3056.

Lesbian counselors available.

Belinda Jude, psychologist, Tel: 0407 305 325; She practises in Ringwood, Glen Iris, Dandenong and Sunshine and has means tested fees

Robyn Bull, psychotherapist, 0407 221 035; She practises in Bendigo and Brunswick.

Suicide Help Line, 1300 651 251; This is a general suicide help line not specific to Lesbians, but might be helpful in an immediate crisis.

People Who Stay

*I wanted to write a song
About people I've loved who've gone
So much I thought I had to say
About those who have passed away.*

*But today I find
What sticks in my mind
Is how those whom
They've left behind
Shoulder the burden of their own pain
Then reach out to the others who remain.*

*I want to say "thank you"
To those who choose to stay;
I want to say "thank you"
To those who choose to stay.*

*Their's is a tough choice:
No romantic speeches;
Risking all mem'ry
Of their youth may fade;
'Til all that's remembered
Is the wrinkles, damp chin
Grey Hair or addled brain*

*I want to say "thank you"
To those who choose to stay;
I want to say "thank you"
To those who choose to stay.*

*No Eulogies are written for the living
Yet their's are the hands and hearts
That help me with my pain..
For all of us here and for any who come later;
A chorus for those who courageously remain..
A chorus for those who courageously remain!
I want to sat "thank you"
To those who choose to stay;
I want to say "thank you"
To those who choose to stay.*

Rosalinda Rayne

March 199

The Funeral Parlour: *To Embalm or Not to Embalm*

In 1997 I had the experience of going to the mortuary and washing Elke, clothing her in her favourite jeans and a shirt she'd worn a lot, and placing her in her coffin, surrounded by one of her beach-patterned sheets. This was a really special experience, which I will remember and be glad about for the rest of my life. Not that I'd wish it on you, but if you have the opportunity to perform this service for a loved Lesbian, and if you feel up to it, I recommend that you do likewise.

Something surprised me during this process. It was at least two days after Elke had died, but I was able to move her limbs around to dress her. When I questioned the mortuary attendant, she said that she had been flexing Elke's limbs. The mortuary attendant I talked to today confirmed that rigor mortis only lasts for a while, maybe 1 or 2 days, then naturally goes away. Apparently it happens as a result of the lack of a particular chemical called ATP in our bodies. If you move the deceased Lesbian's limbs for her, she'll be flexible enough to go into a 'receptacle'.

We have a lot of bugs in our bodies, when we are living, which are naturally broken down by our body processes. But, after we die, when our body cannot break them down, there is a chemical change, in a matter of seconds, that changes them from organic chemicals to inorganic ones. And thus begins the process of decomposition. The state of our Lesbian bodies at the time of our death will depend on a large number of factors, such as cause of death, the types of medication that we were taking, the season, and the temperature in the home (if we have died at home).

Although heat causes decomposition, these days it is not recommended to pack dry ice around the dead person (especially as, if ventilation is poor, it can even lead to the demise of the mourner!), nor, indeed, ordinary ice, according to the mortuary attendant. (However, see Anah's section on the use of plastic bottles). But there is a method called 'temporary preservation' (again, how long this lasts depends on the state of the Lesbian body). It is recommended, in order to promote sanitation and preservation of the body and to avoid odour, distension and fluid loss from the body. And the good news is that it can be achieved through the injection of an organic material called Ardbalm, which seals the body's proteins. The bad news is that the injection needs to be administered into an artery, which needs to be raised via an incision of (max) 5cms. Obviously, the mortuary attendant said, the minimal treatment possible will be given, depending on the state of the body and the timing of the funeral. They won't do anything that is

not necessary, according to her. But, knowing us Lesbians, we'll want to take our time to say good-bye to our Lesbian sister.

Apparently customer service is well-developed in the funeral industry because the mortuary attendant said 'Yes' when I asked whether she would be willing to come to somebody's home and carry out the temporary preservation on the spot, rather than at a funeral parlour.

Until now, I have been assuming that every Lesbian will want to have as do-it-yourself a funeral as possible. But, if that's not the case, she can still be taken to the funeral parlour and be fully embalmed i.e. have her blood replaced with chemicals. But this may not be a particularly environmentally-friendly option.

Inappropriate presentation of a Lesbian's body – if there is to be an open coffin (or even if there isn't) – is quite devastating to surviving wimmin who care about her. It can be very upsetting if a dead Lesbian is presented, in death, in a way that she would never have chosen to be in life. Several of us have vivid memories of something that was done to our beloved Sisters that we found shocking at the time, and which has lingered in our memories. In a way, it seems like a sign of disrespect at the last. (Perhaps providing a really good photo of the Lesbian who has died would be useful). But I cannot stress how important it is to give very precise and detailed instructions to the mortuary attendant(s) as to what you require. The mortuary attendant I talked to said she would prefer this, for instance what, if any, make-up was to be applied. She said, in the absence of instructions, she would pay special attention as to how a deceased Lesbian presented i.e. she wouldn't tizzy up a stone butch who had a number one cut with make-up and a perm, but would most likely wash and set the hair and apply make-up to someone who presented as a lipstick Lesbian. But the problem is that, sometimes, the period immediately prior to death changes a Lesbian's appearance. So it would really be better, if you're not preparing her body yourself, to issue clear instructions on the deceased Lesbian's preferred way-of-being in life and, therefore, in death.

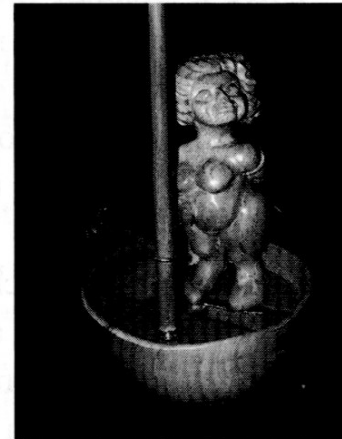
In summary, many issues govern how a dead Lesbian's body will be presented for her funeral, including her/her partner's environmental beliefs and what sort of funeral she is to have. We recommend that these issues – as far as possible – are talked out well before a Lesbian's death because considering these decisions, for the first time, at a time of great duress, can add needless stress to the living.

—*Barbary Clarke*

Way to Go

CHAPTER 7.

Doing it yourselves; funeral parlours; planning a funeral; viewing of the body, costs, notices, memorial card, order of service, eulogy, venue, coffins, clothes; pauper's funeral



Rites of Passage

The planning of a funeral usually happens when someone is either near death or has just died. But you can plan a funeral at any time and leave written instructions in an obvious place or better still give the instructions to your executor beforehand so your funeral to be arranged and carried out according to your exact wishes. You need to keep in mind that your wishes regarding the disposal of your body are not absolutely binding (see Cathy's section on Wills) in the way that the disposal of your estate is. And even though it would be unusual for an executor to disregard the wishes of someone they knew that well, it can and does happen. For example, if the instructions were not found in time or someone had strong objections to what had been suggested or some of the details had to be altered to fit the changed circumstances.

The main thing is, funerals are for the partner, friends and family left behind rather than for the Lesbian who has just died. It's a good idea to keep that in mind if you're planning your own funeral. On the other hand, a funeral that reflects who you are in the best possible way, even if a great-aunt may not approve of your lifestyle, is to be commended. If you are tempted to leave instructions that you do not want anyone to attend your funeral after you die, please keep in mind that those you leave behind are likely to find this extremely distressing. By the same token, if the wishes of your loved one absolutely preclude anyone attending the funeral, and you want to abide by her wishes, it might be a good idea for the mourners to organise a separate memorial service after the funeral in order to satisfy the need for a community rite of some kind.

Doing Your Own

Once a Lesbian dies, all aspects of a funeral can be arranged by the partner, friends and members of the family, either following the instructions left by the deceased or by designing the funeral yourselves, and carried out in a personal way without reference to anyone else. That is, you don't need to go through a funeral parlour to see your loved one off on her final journey.

Everything, from claiming and laying out the body and keeping it at home till it's time for the funeral to arranging for the cremation or burial, can be done from home. This involves a bit of filling out of forms, which can be distressing at a time of grieving, but it means you have full control of the process and is, of course, a lot less expensive.

Funeral Parlour

On the other hand, it certainly takes much of the worry out of arranging a funeral if you put it into the hands of a funeral parlour. Choosing a funeral parlour can be a somewhat daunting as there are so many to choose from. Lesbians sometimes go with those services they already know or have heard about from friends. Some Lesbians prefer a service that is culturally appropriate to their particular needs. Sometimes, they want the funeral arranged by a womyn-only service or perhaps cost is a factor. It doesn't hurt to shop around or talk it over with friends. Having this kind of detail worked out well before it's needed, and pre-paid funerals are sometimes a good option in this regard, makes for an easier transition when the time comes.

Planning a Funeral

So whether the partner, friends and family are looking after the deceased themselves or are having the details catered for by a funeral parlour, the form the funeral service and ceremonies take is up to those who are willing to do them. How this happens is entirely up to the imagination of the people involved.

However, funerals that reflect the lifestyle and values of the deceased, and which also give the people at the funeral a chance to celebrate and acknowledge how important the Lesbian who died was to them, are usually those that are ultimately the most satisfying in terms of the grieving process.

Even if the deceased's instructions are totally explicit there still needs to be quite a bit of planning of the service by the partner which can be

done in conjunction with members of the family as well as friends to get as many ideas and support as possible. Funerals are usually in three parts: the main service, the cremation or burial, the wake with food and drink. Or in any combination of the three in whatever order. You might choose to have the service at the crematorium with the wake somewhere else afterwards, or the service in the same community hall as the food and drink immediately after the ceremony followed by a private cremation or burial with only one or two present.

However the funeral is arranged there are so many things to keep in mind that the following information for organising a funeral may be a way to start. This check list is in no particular order and there's no obligation to cover all aspects but it could provide some ideas on where to begin.

Food and Drink

For some, the food and drink are the highlights of what can otherwise be a very sad day so giving everyone the opportunity to eat is very important. Whether the food and drink are catered for or everyone is asked to bring a plate to share or the food is provided by the immediate friends and family, eating and drinking at some stage of the proceedings, and more usually after the main part of the ceremony has taken place, is an essential part of the process and gives everyone the opportunity to relax and talk and grieve and be comforted.

Music

Everyone has special songs and/or pieces of music they would like played at their funeral to be remembered by. All crematoriums have facilities for taped music and tapes and CDs can easily be played at the appropriate times. Live music is another option if there are singers and musicians who are willing to play favourite pieces on the day.

Flowers

Whether or not to have flowers and what to do with them afterwards is a matter of choice. Some people request that instead of spending money on flowers, "no flowers by request", a donation be made to a favourite charity. Others like the abundance of colour and aroma that flowers lend to a funeral. These can be given away afterwards to the local hospital, the funeral parlours usually arrange this, or used as part of the ceremony. For example, individual flowers can be placed in a river if there's one

handy and the loved one remembered as the flowers float downstream. Or people who have attended the funeral might like to take flowers home with them as a memento of the day.

Rituals

Special rituals at any part of the funeral service and wake afterwards that reflect the lifestyle of the Lesbian who has died, give an essentially personal touch to the overall proceedings. There are no hard and fast rules about how ceremonies and rituals are carried out or how elaborate or simple they need to be. Keeping in mind the kind of person the Lesbian who died was, how she might have wanted her life to be celebrated or remembered, whether she was a quiet and private kind of womyn or radically political, musically inclined or a single mother, these and other aspects of herself can be acknowledged and celebrated. This can be balanced by the wishes and needs of the people left behind, what might be appropriate for the family members might not be satisfactory for the partner of a Lesbian and her friends. If at all possible it's best if everyone come to some agreement about how to arrange the ceremonies to suit everyone concerned as much as possible.

Facilitator

Whether you choose to have a friend facilitate the proceedings or hire a civil celebrant or a minister of religion (both the celebrant and the minister usually require a set fee and perhaps a gift to a friend might also be appropriate) is entirely up to you. But having someone prepared to keep the ceremony moving along by introducing the speakers or indicating what has to happen next is often a good idea because it gives everyone a sense of what's happening so they can respond appropriately. On the other hand, a spontaneous gathering where anyone can contribute as it happens can also be satisfying.

Viewing the Body

It's good to keep in mind that whenever a Lesbian dies she can be kept where she is, either at home or the hospice, for as long as it takes, for several hours and even overnight if appropriate, for friends and relations to call round to pay their respects. Of course, if the funeral is being planned from home then viewing the body can be arranged to suit those concerned at any time. If the body has been moved to a funeral parlour provision is usually made for those friends and relatives who haven't al-

ready done so to view the body after it has been laid out either the day before the funeral or on the day itself.

Viewing the body, seeing that someone who has died is both recognisable but not there in the usual sense, is an important part of coming to terms with the death of a loved one. You might want to prepare yourself beforehand because her features will not be exactly as you remembered, although she'll look peacefully at rest, and remind yourself to keep breathing. This not only helps to imprint the death in your mind so that it's real rather than imagined, it gives everyone a chance to say a final farewell to the loved one's beloved form.

Documentation

As with any ceremonial occasion the funeral is over and done with so quickly that it's comforting afterwards to have photos or a video to look at later at your leisure to recapture the memories of that special day. You could arrange for friends to take photos and/or a video in an unobtrusive way so that no-one feels too uncomfortable about it.

Costs

Costs of funerals can sometimes be problematic. There is absolutely no legal requirement or social expectation that you or anyone else has to have an expensive funeral. By the same token if you have the wherewithal to go all out you are perfectly at liberty to do so. As most of us, however, are on limited means it is perfectly reasonable to keep the costs of a funeral within the bounds of whatever can be afforded. In which case, any aspect of a funeral can be adjusted to fit the financial means of whoever is paying for it. There are only a very few costs, such as the funeral parlour's basic fees or the cost of the cremation or the burial if you're doing it yourself that are more or less mandatory, but within that everything else is a matter of personal choice as to whether you include certain things or not.

Notices

As it's impossible to notify all our friends and relatives when someone dies the time-honoured means of putting notices in the local papers with the information that the person has died suddenly, after a long illness or otherwise and is survived by specific relatives, and where and when the funeral is to take place, is a good way of making sure as many people as possible are informed of the event and have the opportunity to say good-bye if they wish to.

Notices are at a set cost according to whichever paper you choose. On the other hand, getting friends to phone around to pass the message on, putting the information out through your internet connections and word of mouth are also ways of letting everyone know.

Memorial Card

A memorial card or leaflet with the order of the funeral service and complete with a photo of the deceased as well as anything else of note to remember her by, a favourite poem, the words of a special song, can be organised and printed up before the funeral so that all who attend have something to follow during the service and to keep as a memorial afterwards. These can be quite simple, typed up on a computer and run off on a photocopier or at a quick printing service. Or you can choose just to have her photo or photos or some other special memorial wording on a card or leaflet of some kind. Especially if you'd prefer the service to be spontaneous and there may be something else, like a flower or a balloon, that people can hold and let go of at an appropriate time or take home with them.

Order of Service

An order of service is usually planned by those who are immediately concerned and by those who might want to have an input on the day. Someone might offer to read a poem, children might be consulted about whether they want to say something or not, parents may have some special story they want to tell, a friend might want to sing a song, others may have to be asked if they'd contribute something special. As there can be more people wanting to contribute than there is time to accommodate everyone's needs time limits can be imposed. To allow for those who might have missed out some time can be allowed for an open section to give everyone a chance to speak.

Eulogy

You might give some thought to having someone write and read out a eulogy. This is usually a longer piece that covers the whole of a Lesbian's life in a few well-chosen words, from the time she was born, through the highlights of her life as a worker, political activist, lover, mother and community member, adding in a few anecdotes about the kind of Lesbian she was, to give everyone a sense of her personally and an overview of a life well-lived. This is a good opportunity for some humour, a funeral doesn't have to be absolutely sad, it's also a celebration of someone's life and praise for the contributions she made.

Venue

Choosing suitable venues for the service and wake again depends on the costs and the personal preferences of those involved. For example, whether the person is to be cremated or buried will determine some part of the service overall. Most crematoriums allow services for up to an hour which can be simple or elaborate within the time allowed. Some part of the service at the grave side is also standard practise.

Usually people choose to have a service of some kind beforehand so another venue would need to be found, perhaps a park or by the beach, a church or community hall, or simply in the backyard at home.

By choosing a suitable venue you're also setting the overall atmosphere of the gathering so it's best if the venue is one that's large enough to hold everyone comfortably or small enough to be intimate without being intimidating. Or as mentioned above the service could simply be held at the crematorium or at the graveside with everyone going back to someone's place afterwards for the wake with plenty of food and drink or simply cups of tea and sandwiches.

Coffins

On the whole, coffins come in standard shapes and sizes but the costs can vary dramatically. Again there is no obligation to spend a small fortune on a coffin although there are some very elaborate coffins for those Lesbians who can afford them. Funeral parlours have coffins to hand as part of their overall service and you can choose one according to your means and taste. Some Lesbians might like to either make or decorate their own coffin beforehand (see chapter four) or have their coffin decorated by their friends and family after they die. Decorating a coffin either with painted images or material is quite achievable and can be a very empowering part of the grieving process.

If the funeral is being organised by a funeral parlour, notify them you want a plain coffin and organise to have it either picked up or delivered a few days before the funeral. Buy some



Maur's Coffin
Photo : Tineke Lagerwey

non-toxic acrylic paints and brushes and/or other decorative material, notify everyone who wants to that the coffin is available to be decorated during certain times and ask them to bring food and drink to share.

While everyone takes a turn at decorating the sides and lid of the coffin they can chat and reminisce and takes breaks for food and drink as they come and go.

Clothes

The clothes a person is buried or cremated in are usually those that are favourites of the deceased or some special garment they are remembered for. Keep in mind that funeral parlours usually cover most of the body with a cloth so that the lower half of the body, at least, is not seen. However, it's often a comfort to know that your beloved is dressed in a way that is familiar.

As can be seen by this long list of things to remember, organising a funeral can be as simple or elaborate as you like. It's a good idea to have a group of friends who are prepared to take on the bulk of the work so that the partner or children aren't left to do it all themselves. But it's also important to keep in mind that the ones closest to the Lesbian who died need to be consulted about their wishes and kept informed about what's been arranged so they're totally prepared on the day. All community ceremonial occasions are important for those involved and perhaps none more so than a funeral. It's best to make sure it's as all-embracing and comforting as it can possibly be.

—*Jean Taylor*

Pauper's Funeral

Some Lesbians express a wish to be buried by the state so as not to incur any expenses for their friends and loved ones left behind. This option needs to be considered carefully and fully understood. Not having a funeral, not knowing how or where the body of their loved one ends up, and not being able to mark or memorialize their final resting place, can be a greater and more distressing burden on those left behind. If you still choose this path, it may be achieved under certain circumstances. In order to have a 'no cost to you' funeral, the body must remain unclaimed. A magistrate will then order the disposal of the remains. The usual method nowadays is a group cremation. Again no ashes will be able to be claimed.

Public graves are provided for a pauper's burial. The plot remains with the State and is used for multiple burials, there is not usually a headstone or marker on a public grave.

In special circumstances, friends and relatives may be able to convince a magistrate of their inability to pay for the funeral, otherwise whoever claims the body will incur the costs. Social workers attached to hospitals, hospices and charitable or church organisations have information on low-cost funeral providers. If the deceased Lesbian is in receipt of a government benefit, the last payment of the benefit is signed over to the undertaker in charge of the pauper's funeral to offset costs incurred in transport and grave digging or cremation.

Anah Holland-Moore

Don't Tell Me I've Changed

*Each of us is made up of what has gone before;
The stories of our childhoods; the welcome at the
door. The people who have loved us, who we've
loved in return. How we choose to spend our time,
the lessons we have learned.*

*So don't tell me I've changed like its some kind of crime
Like it's all my fault this love's on the line.
If you can't spend your life tied with one who's in grief
Then I'm not the one who's ready to leave!*

*Each small event shapes us in many tiny ways
But life's greatest tragedies completely alter who
we are.
3 yrs ago my daughter died and I am not the same;
As I navigate this hell I am redefined by pain.*

*So don't tell me I've changed like its some kind of crime
Like it's all my fault this love's on the line.
If you can't spend your life tied with one who's in grief
Then I'm not the one who's ready to leave!*

*You could walk beside me instead of constant
complaint.
Get to know who I am and who I might become.
I'll tell you if you wanna hear; outpour my heart to
you.
But from my words you'll never know the pain I'm
going through.*

*So don't tell me I've changed like its some kind of crime
Like it's all my fault this love's on the line.
If you can't spend your life tied with one who's in grief
Then I'm not the one who's ready to leave!*

Rosalinda Rayne
2001

Rite of Way

CHAPTER 8.

Funeral services; viewing on the day; open coffin; cremations, burials, eating and drinking afterwards; Rosalinda's Story, personal funeral story



She's Not Heavy

It's the day of the funeral. Decisions have already been made about how it's to be done, who will be involved and where it's to be held. People are starting to gather for the funeral service itself and are waiting outside the venue for the coffin to arrive. What we wear to funerals these days seems to be a matter of personal preference, anything from the traditionally formal black to something more colourful and casual. Being comfortable while being yourself and paying respect are the main things to consider.

The closed coffin is transported from home or the funeral parlour either in a hearse or privately in the back of a van or ute. I rather like the idea of a cavalcade of Dykes on Bikes to lead the way and herald the arrival of the most essential aspect of this crucially important event.

The beloved's body has been laid out beautifully in the coffin and everyone has either already had the chance to view it beforehand, at home or at the funeral parlour, or are expecting to do so today before the coffin is closed for the last time. The open coffin is set up in the venue either in a back room or inside where the service will be held. Friends and family, including children accompanied by an adult, are given a few moments alone with the body of the loved one so that everyone feels they've said their farewells.

Friends and family who want to be pall bearers are instructed by someone in the know how best to line up either side of the coffin and take the weight equally and how to hold it before they actually lift to carry it. Six is the usual number and as different Lesbians can carry the coffin out again this can spread the undoubted honour of holding her in their arms for the last time. Alternatively, the coffin could stay on the trolley and the pall bearers walk either side with their hands on the coffin to indicate a caring connection as it is moved inside and positioned out the front in full view.

It's common practise to close the coffin after everyone has viewed the body and before the service begins. The closed coffin is positioned out the

front and draped with flowers or flags and a couple of large photos of the deceased and other memorabilia reflecting her life well-lived, are placed around the coffin for everyone to see. It's entirely appropriate, however, to have an open coffin during the funeral service so that the loved one can be as much a part of the proceedings as everyone else. This can have a comforting effect and also means the decorated coffin lid can be upended and on display as well.

Funeral Service

The ceremony, whether in a community hall or a park or a chapel at the crematorium, begins. The person facilitating the proceedings says a few words to get everyone to settle down and lets everyone know how the ceremony will unfold and what to expect. She then introduces each speaker in turn, says whether they're going to read a poem, say a few words, sing a song or read the eulogy. She gives those who want to speak spontaneously time to do so but is able to keep everything moving along on schedule.

Everything is going according to plan. Those who want to speak are able to say a few words, tell a personal story or two, recall a favourite anecdote. The Lesbian reading the eulogy has given an overall picture of the deceased's life in such a way that everyone present learns something about their beloved they didn't know before. The musicians sing and play their instruments and lead everyone in the communal singing of favourite songs and hymns. There are deeply familiar moments and moments of spontaneity as well as grief as memories of this dearly beloved's Lesbian life are recounted and remembered with love. By the end of it there's a sense that everyone, including the children, has had the chance to laugh as well as cry and to join in the proceedings in some way.

As a final gesture, everyone stands as the coffin is either carried or wheeled out immediately followed by the partner and family and close friends.

Everyone else then falls in behind to see the coffin being placed in the vehicle to be transported to its final resting place. Some Lesbians might like to surround the vehicle, join hands and do a whoosh or three at this point, to send the Lesbian on her way.

After the main ceremony it's time to move onto the next part of the proceedings. And depending on how the funeral is being arranged this will either be onto the crematorium or graveside or back to someone's place or community hall for food and drink and some more informal ceremonial occasion or some people will simply go home at this point.

It's not always necessary for everyone to go to every aspect of the funeral. Some mourners might only want to go to the funeral ceremony itself, others might just prefer to go to the wake afterwards. Some people might prefer only immediate family members attend the crematorium or that no-one apart from the partner and close friends go to the graveside. Others want as many as possible at all the ceremonies which is why we occasionally see a funeral passing by on the road with the hearse in front and all the mourners following slowly behind in cars with the lights on. Or the Dykes on Bikes could again lead the way for a rip-roaring Lesbian send-off. Everyone grieves in their own way and it's important to respect the wishes of the partner and family as well as work out what the best way to acknowledge someone's death is for each of us.

Cremations and Burials

At the crematorium or at the graveside, if there has already been a large ceremony beforehand, there is not the necessity for anything too elaborate. But as this is the last time anyone will see the coffin it's important that there be some kind of ceremony to mark this occasion. Again this can be simple or spontaneous or someone might like to take responsibility for ensuring that everyone has a chance to express how they feel. Some ritual with music and singing, reading a poem, saying a few words gives a sense of completion. However, being there and supporting each other is the main thing.

It's a significant moment when the coffin disappears into the floor or the wall at the crematorium so it's best to be emotionally prepared for that to happen. It can be a jolt to your whole being, knowing this is the last view you'll have of the coffin with your loved one inside. A special piece of taped or live music can be appropriate at this point. As is hugging and crying and holding and comforting. There can be a similar emotional response at the graveside when the coffin is finally lowered into the ground. It's sometimes a comfort to help lower the coffin on ropes into the open grave. Throwing hands full of earth on top of the coffin can also be a particularly moving moment as a final farewell gesture to a loved one.

Wake

After all the ceremonies it's important that the food and drink be ready to be served at the first available opportunity. Sometimes this is simply done with a cuppa and biscuits in the foyer of the funeral parlour or party pies and sausage rolls at the back of the hall or a barbeque at someone's place afterwards. Sometimes people have gone to a great deal of trouble

to make sure that the food is well-prepared and plentiful, sometimes the wake is held at a pub with an unlimited amount of alcohol on tap. However simply or elaborately it's done, eating and drinking afterwards is not only a time-honoured tradition it's a very important aspect of the overall proceedings on the day.

This is also a chance for some more informal story-telling, for the opening up of memories as we recall the amusing and endearing side of our loved one's life. It's a time for the circus womyn amongst us to do aerial acts and double balances to honour her memory. Private messages can be written on pieces of paper, tied to a broken-off branch of a tree and ceremonially burnt. Incense, candles and flowers can all play a part. Bands can play, jokes can be told, those who were too sad to speak at the funeral might now feel enabled to say a few words, do a mime or perform in some way. Dancing, crying, singing, hugging, laughing, playing drums, it's the opportunity to be present and attentive for each other.

Usually for the first time that day everyone can relax. They can catch up with friends and family they haven't seen in years, they can sit quietly and not say a word, they can cry and be comforted, they can replenish themselves. Eating food together and honouring a Lesbian's life like this in an informal way gives everyone the opportunity to relax and socialise and remember and be nourished.

Going to a funeral can be daunting, especially if you are one of the main mourners and you feel you're the centre of attention. However, funerals can also be very empowering as a social expression of grief and a public acknowledgment of death. Funerals give everyone the opportunity to come together, to grieve together, to start the process of coming to terms with the loss of a loved one, to find some solace in knowing we are not alone, that there are others for whom this death was equally significant. We hear each other's stories about our partner, friend, family member, we reach some better understanding of the one who died, we come to appreciate her life and her place in the world and the connections between us all. We cry, we see each other's tears, we know she was loved and will be missed and there's some comfort in knowing she will be remembered by others as much as yourself.

And really, like life, how we organise a funeral and are present at these kinds of ceremonial occasions is only limited by our imaginations. Go for it.

—*Jean Taylor*

Fit for a queen

As a Lesbian living with cancer, I have made friends with death. I have planned my funeral and now I'm engaging my family and friends actively to participate in my pre-death rituals. After my double Saturn return at the age of 58, I became a Celtic Warrior Queen, in a beautifully pagan ceremony on a rocky knoll, near my home in the country.

This croning ritual marked my entrance into the third trimester of my life. It is my time to attend to the business of the wisdom and stories to be left behind, and to be fulfilled with complete and peaceful dying. For these reasons, I chose to wear a cloak for my croning which would eventually become my shroud when I die. I invited members of my radical Lesbian feminist community each to create a patch for my Cloak. The results were stunning! Each Lesbian gave of herself and her culture in the decorations she designed and made. These colourful patches also honoured her connection to me. I was both moved and delighted.

For my 60th birthday, I am inviting other female and Lesbian friends and family to add more patches to my Cloak. I will be safe and nurtured in my shroud when the time comes to wear it.

I chose to be a Warrior Queen instead of a crone because of the many battles of life I have fought and won. And the scars I bear in the getting of wisdom. No Queen will rest as gloriously robed and gifted by love as I, in the colours and handcraft of my precious family and friends and my beloved Lesbian clan.

—*Anah Holland-Moore*



Anah's Cloak
Photo by Meg Irwin

Rosalinda's Story

My beloved daughter (and only child) died 8 years ago at the time of this writing. And it is still absurdly difficult for me to put pen to paper on this subject.

As we had talked about varying methods of body disposal I knew that her leanings were towards cremation. Yet I was confused by her final note that she wanted to be buried with the boy who had died a scant 18 days earlier. So I did try to contact his family. The official channels that were the only means that occurred to me at the time pretended helpfulness but were actually obstructive. The Coroner's Office clearly did not want these grieving parents to meet.

So I decided to go with her earlier wishes and arranged for her cremation; determined that I would find his grave eventually and at least scatter some of her ashes there. It took a few years but I did.

It seemed strange, the obsession that gripped me, to uncover and honour her wishes. It wasn't until I met other bereaved parents that I realised this obsession (and some others) are fairly standard... To those less deeply involved with the one who has died, funeral arrangements are an opportunity to pay homage to a loved one, access others who will miss them and tie the whole experience up into some kind of package. For those for whom this beloved soul has been central to their lives and hearts however, funeral arrangements are a last chance to express this soul's essence and "do right by" them. So much so that loved ones can be berating themselves years later over some aspect of the funeral/farewell that wasn't appropriate.

There is only this one chance to "get it right". So the pressure is phenomenal. And the decisions have to be made quickly and when one is in a state of shock.

Milly was a spiritual seeker who had formed her own ideas of life and death, reincarnation and spiritual planes by the time she was in her mid-teens. So I knew that a religious service would be nearly as abhorrent to her as it would to me. I also know (from past experience) that most mourners don't take advantage of the (extremely therapeutic) offer of a private viewing. So open coffin was clearly the way to go. Beyond that I had no idea of structure except that I wanted to hear from her friends as she had a vibrant life that extended far beyond my relationship with her.

My sister (by blood) offered to speak of her first. My best friend (and soul-sister) was willing to sing something. Milly's friends offered their insights about her preferred music. And I hoped that I would find the strength to sing at the end (surprisingly I did).

So I asked her friends if they would be able to say something about her; read a poem, recall an incident or something. And many of them did. There were moments of silence awaiting another speaker to come up but in the end (2 hours later) we ran out of speakers just as we ran out of time.

Everyone had been encouraged to write notes to put in her coffin with her (paper and pens were provided) along with loose flowers from baskets. So that everyone, however shy, could say their farewells. At the end of the service Milly was nestled in and covered by a blanket of tightly folded notes and purple flowers. In respect to her privacy (a long habit of our relationship), her coffin was sealed with every flower and note (unread) in place. All honour to my beloved daughter.

Leading up to her funeral I had dressed her, put her own make-up on her and arranged her hair. It felt right for me as I was the one who had first dressed her after she entered this life. It also helped me to replace the wax-like image I had confronted at the City Morgue. It bothered me later that I had been so intent on restoring life-like colour to her face that I had forgotten to brush her teeth for her. Now I am able to see the humour in it though, as it had been an issue at times in her childhood. As if I can hear her laughing voice echo, "Ha ha; I went to bed without brushing my teeth!"

It's worth noting that dressing a body involves heavy lifting; one isn't able to do it alone. And the amount of time a body can be out of a cool room is limited (depending how long before your loved-one was found). Take willing and able helpers with you and be prepared to work quickly!

Now as to the ashes... Wall, garden, scattering, urn or what? I couldn't and wouldn't consign her to being a brick in a wall. I liked the idea of a garden but where? The scattering wasn't yet clear to me. So I settled for an urn. I wished I was a potter (as Milly had been in her early years) so I could make it myself. But I bought one instead. (Is there a Lesbian potter out there prepared to make gorgeous urns?)

But I have no-one to leave Milly's urn to. So a few years ago I started scattering her ashes (half a cup here and there) in places she loved, would have loved or dearly wanted to visit. Because Milly was a traveller who loved natural surroundings. I am slowly compiling a photo album of all the places her remains have been scattered. To show that her travels have continued.

This has been my story. Now what about yours? What do you want for your loved one? What do you want for yourself? The loved ones we leave behind could do with our help when they are stricken by our passing. Perhaps we could talk about our preferences with them or leave a note in a prominent place.

The Lesbian Underground

CHAPTER 9.

Gravesites; grave stones; cemeteries;
death certificates; For my gravestone,
Poem; Heartbeat, Poem



How to Plant a Lesbian

There are 506 cemeteries in the State of Victoria. If you want to plant a Lesbian it has to be in one of these designated areas. Burial on private land is not permitted in Victoria at present.

Contacting a funeral director is the most direct way to achieve a burial. Most funeral homes have women involved in all stages of the body and funeral preparation. The Cemeteries Act of 2005 states you must sign an agreed contract with the funeral director which lists all your requirements regarding the burial. Be direct, if you do not want any men involved, your written requests must be honoured. There is no stipulated time for when the body has to be in the ground, all bodies to be buried by a funeral director are kept in cold storage, either at a hospital morgue or funeral parlour. Bodies can be stored for weeks and embalmed if need be, for longer storage. If you haven't made arrangements prior to your loved one's death, take your time to decide what is really wanted. Shop around for a funeral director who will meet all your needs without hesitation. It is possible to carry out all aspects of a burial without any involvement of professional service providers.

If you wish to bury your loved one without professional service providers being involved you will need the following information.

All cemeteries are owned by the government and situated on crown land. Each cemetery is run by a voluntary trust which must comply with The Cemeteries Act. The Act states all bodies must arrive at the cemetery in a sealed coffin or other sealed receptacle. (See Chapter 4) The body must be received by a trustee (this can be a woman if stipulated) who requires the following paperwork at or before the time of delivery to the cemetery of a deceased Lesbians' body.

- 'Certificate of Cause of Death of a Person'. The original certificate signed by the doctor. (See Chapter 6)

- If the death was reported to the State Coroner for Victoria, an original of the 'Certificate Permitting Burial, Cremation or Other Disposal', signed by the Coroner.
- The cemetery trust's 'Application for Burial and/or Grant of Right of Burial' is to be filled in and signed by the person who is organising the burial (and witnessed).
- 'Permit to Bury'. Signed by an authorised officer of the trust.

All these forms can be signed by the trustee who receives the body at the cemetery. The cemetery trust will want photocopies of the original certificates to keep for their files. If you are driving the coffined body to the cemetery, measure the van or truck you intend to use beforehand to make sure it fits. Cover the van floor with heavy duty plastic before placement of a decorative covering. The cemetery must be less than an eight hour drive, otherwise the cooling system as described in the laying out procedure, must be used. If adequate cooling (6°C) cannot be achieved the coffined body is kept at a morgue or funeral home until you transport it to the graveside.

Any requirements beyond these absolutes can be negotiated with the trustees by the friends and loved ones of the deceased. You may want to dig and refill the grave for example.

It is possible to purchase a gravesite in advance, leaving no questions as to where you want your body to be when you die. Prices for gravesites vary. Country cemeteries are less expensive than city cemeteries. There are two designated Indigenous-only cemeteries in Victoria and other race and religious specific cemeteries such as Jewish, Muslim, Catholic etc. The Department of Human Services – Cemeteries and Crematoria Program holds the data base for all cemeteries in Victoria. For information on locations, costs and contact persons ring 1800 034 280.

Headstones, Plaques, Monuments.

There are regulations governing how one marks a grave. Each Board of Cemetery Trustees develops their own policy regarding how their cemetery will look. Monumental masons (see Yellow Pages) can advise you on choices for headstones etc. All proposed work must be approved by the cemetery trustees. Consult the contact person for the cemetery in which you wish to place the memorial for permit application forms.

When designing your memorial let your imagination fly. Yours may be the first Lesbian marked grave ever to be seen by other Lesbians.

When the Lesbian's monument or grave decoration is established, it is up to whoever applied for the site to maintain it. Most cemetery trusts

will routinely maintain the memorial lawn but not the grave. To ensure the Lesbian's grave is continuously maintained a financial reimbursement is sometimes required by the trustees. The only way a connection to a particular gravesite is held in perpetuity is for the next of kin or designated executor to make sure all their details are registered with the trustees. Any claim made in the future can be traced through these records. Future claims are usually only made to refurbish old or historically significant gravesites. Seems there is also a task for our future in forming a Lesbian Cemetery Trust and creating a Lesbian Cemetery.

When we look to our two hundred year plan to create the perfect Lesbian world any gravesite mentioning the word Lesbian will be very significant to our culture. When you plant a Lesbian in mother earth you may also plant the seed in the hearts and minds of other Lesbians, to claim our identity and celebrate our lives even in death. Reach out from beyond the grave forever, Lesbians are everywhere.

—*Anah Holland-Moore*

Information Contacts

Department of Human Services: Cemeteries
and Crematoria Program. 1800 034 280

Cemeteries & Crematoria Association. 03 93814877

Victorian Cemeteries Act 2005.

www.health.vic.gov.au/cemeteries/legislation.htm

The Cemetery Trusts Manual

www.health.vic.gov.au/cemeteries/victoria/manual.htm

for my gravestone:

*open yourself
as I return
sanctuary
mine
earth mother*

Anah
Oct. 2006



Heartbeat

Death makes a change from life.

The living move

sometimes metaphorically

sometimes metaphysically.

Can you hear your heart beat?

No.

Cathy Wheel

Dykes Up in Smoke

CHAPTER 10

Cremation; Environmental Impact;
In rosy morning light, Song

Lesbian Incense

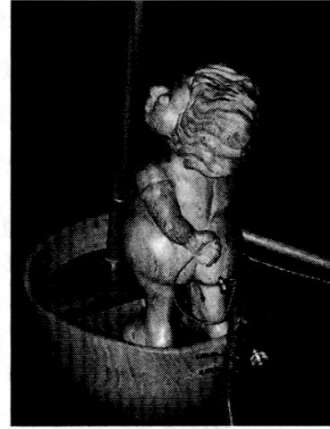
Cremation is an alternative that has at least as many options as burial. Any reputable funeral director can organise this for you. There are now funeral companies that employ wimmin only as well as other companies who will use wimmin-only celebrants and attendants on request.

Crematoriums have chapels and reception rooms (with or without catering) for hire and the entire service can be held on site. You can use as much or as little of their facilities as you wish. Or you may choose to arrange for the farewell/wake and storage and preparation of your loved one yourself. Thereby using the crematorium for the cremation only.

Crematoriums can be a little edgy about dealing with individuals rather than funeral directors. It's necessary to go in and talk to them so they can be confident that all the forms have been filled in properly and that everybody knows what's legally expected of her. This needs to be done at least 2 days in advance of the expected cremation (which is not particularly good news for the newly-bereaved).

This is an understandable position as the body to be cremated is delivered to them in a sealed (closed and fixed shut) receptacle. This coffin/receptacle needs to be of appropriate dimensions (to accommodate the deceased) and needs to be made of wood. Plastic and metal are not suitable (besides sufficient metal screws/nails to hold it together). Please note that "sealed" does not mean hermetically sealed; just closed and fixed shut. Forget lead linings.

If the individual to be cremated has any prosthetics, these will need to be removed before closing. If the individual has any battery-operated medical machinery (like a pacemaker) these need to be removed to prevent explosions. Artificial joints may be left in place. However (depending on the construction) they may not break down adequately to go into the urn afterwards. Some crematoriums will consign such artificial joints to an unmarked grave or merely throw them away. Some will return them to whoever has filled in the paperwork. It's worth enquiring if you have a



preference. (I'm picturing a beloved Lesbian sister's artificial hip becoming an interesting garden curio.) You may choose to remove her jewellery as the precious metals end up coating the inside bricks of the oven. None will make it to her urn.

The basic legal requirements to organise a cremation are

1. Death Certificate (signed by a registered practicing medical practitioner or coroner)
2. The death then needs to be registered with the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages (Victoria ph 1300 369 367 at time of this writing)
3. Then a different registered practicing medical practitioner (from a different surgery) is needed to provide a filled-out "Authorisation for Cremation" form.

...However there may be many other requirements which will vary from one crematorium to another. So it's necessary to make an appointment to discuss their requirements with crematorium staff days in advance of the proposed cremation date.

Other possible requirements could be...

- a meeting with the CEO of the crematorium...
- coffin interior and joins coated with silicone...
- coffin lined with PVA (builders-type) plastic...
- body sealed in plastic...
- complete list of coffin contents in a signed Statutory Declaration...
- coffin not to exceed certain dimensions...
- all plastic and metal to be removed from coffin...
- inspection of empty coffin 24 hours prior to proposed cremation...
- occupied coffin to be transported in a covered vehicle only (not an open trailer or utility tray for example)...

Some of these requirements (besides being apparently contradictory from one crematorium to another) will need to be organised well in advance. So it's best to open dialogue with the chosen crematorium early.

Most crematoriums will allow witnesses to be present in the cremation room at the start of the cremation. Some will charge a fee for this service;

others won't. When a body is delivered early enough in the day (usually by late morning) it may be possible to pick up a Lesbian sister's ashes on the same day. The cremation process takes 4–6 hours.

Legal ownership of the ashes is determined by who fills in the forms; "the Applicant". This person does not need to be a relative or even a friend. This regularly causes rifts between mourners and the crematorium will want no part in it. As far as they are concerned; whoever fills in the paperwork has all the say. So don't dawdle on the paperwork!

Costs vary substantially and the variables differ from one crematorium to another. At the time of this writing one could safely expect to pay \$650 — \$1000 for cremation of an adult; \$150 — \$400 for cremation of a small child. Variables can include; time of delivery; same-day pickup of ashes; use of a chapel; provision for witnesses, reception-room hire for mourners afterwards and catering.

Natural fibre clothing is better. Untreated plantation timber is better. The glues used in particleboard and MDF are hazardous when burned as are the chemicals used in treated pine. Chemical embalming could reasonably be regarded as suspect. It is safe to say that any material you'd hesitate to burn in your open fireplace is not ideal to be putting into the atmosphere. If the one to be cremated cared deeply about the environment, it is up to us to prepare for her cremation appropriately. Rather than using standard paints to decorate her coffin it might be best to carve or burn-etch messages and designs directly into the timber, although non-toxic, water-based paints are available from some suppliers. Or you could decorate a gorgeous drape to be used as a wall-hanging or flag later.

Rosalinda Rayne

In Rosy Morning Light

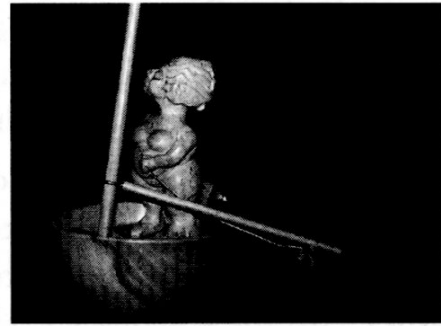
*In that timeless dreamy state
Between sleep & wake
When my body's chiming with dappled pleasure
Of stretching toes & fingers in cosy bed warmth.
My arms ready to welcome
Suckling baby at my breast
Her soft silken head
Holds the scent that I love best
Again I hear her laughter,
Feel pride in her sharp mind;
Awe in her dark-eyed beauty.
Graceful passion in ev'ry move;
Strength & caring in her arms...
Then reality sets In
And I recall again
Her cold alabaster corpse and
Blue stains on her long hands;
Forever stilled! Angry purple
'Round her swan-like throat.
The ache to hug her "goodbye"
Will be with me 'til I die!
And you ask me what's my problem
When I weep in the morning;
Jump out of bed & scurry
To get busy, busy, busy;
Cursing
The deception
Of my heart...
In rosy morning light.*

Rosalinda Rayne
2000

Lesbians Lofting into the Wind

CHAPTER 11.

Urns; scattering and other options for ashes



Dykes in Space

When you pick up ashes from a crematorium they will be in a shoe-box size, sealed plastic box. I've only seen yellow ones but presumably they can be other colours.

There is an abundance of memorial options if you would like remains interred at a memorial park. Gardens, lawns, niches; with or without plaques. All of these options have a choice between 25 year and perpetual lease and will cost something in the order of \$300 — \$1000 (at the time of this writing). For \$3000 — \$6000 or thereabouts it is possible to invest in a "family plot" which can accommodate both buried remains and interred or garden-bed scattered ashes. For a group of Lesbians who consider themselves family this could well be an option since legal or blood-ties are not necessary; only the permission of "the Applicant". ("The Applicant" being whoever originally fills in the paperwork to arrange the "family plot".) On the demise of this applicant, the responsibility is inherited by whoever fills in the forms to arrange for the accommodation of their remains. Thus becoming "the (new) Applicant". So it's vitally important to ensure that this Lesbian's arrangements are made by one of her Lesbian sisters and not taken over by some lesbophobic relative.

One of the wonderful things about cremation however, is that options do not need to be limited to memorial parks and cemeteries.

An urn from a funeral parlour can be bought for \$600 or more but it would be even better if it were hand-made especially. Any large fired pot (preferably glazed inside) with a lid will do. Even a large kitchen canister or a special box. It's a good way to keep a loved-one close – bed-side table, mantelpiece, garden niche, or where ever feels special.

Another nice way to keep her close is to put a small amount of ashes into a gold or silver perfume-bottle pendant. There is even the option of getting ashes compressed and made into a diamond that can be set into an item of jewellery. Check the internet on that one.

Being cremated also makes it possible for the ashes to be buried with someone who has already died (check with 'the applicant' who has say-so

over that gravesite). Or to be scattered at sea, from a mountain-top or into a private garden. It is a legal requirement to get permission from the landowner if you want to scatter on private land. Given time I'm sure there will be the option of scattering from a space-shuttle so one can't even say "the sky's the limit"!

And unless you have religious or spiritual beliefs that say otherwise, who says all the ashes need to be kept together? You might want to take up more than one option with different portions. I carry some of my daughter's ashes with me whenever I travel so I can scatter some in places she would have liked; there's plenty to go around. Or there are businesses that will organise it for you; scatterings at sea; from a crop-duster or boat; or overseas. When I tried enquiring about the price for these services I was told that each case was different and no guide was available; my guess is expensive.

When I travelled overseas I took a kitchen canister with my daughter's photo taped to the lid and I resealed it with sticky-tape for each border crossing. Around the outside was a rubber-band with a copy of her death certificate slipped in (to quell curious customs officials). I crossed at least 25 international borders without attracting even one enquiry to look at the ashes; not even in the USA. (I did carry a large piece of plastic to catch the ashes just in case.) So Be Bold! And I will say that there is something very earthy and real about handling a loved-one's ashes.

If you are making plans for your own ashes it might be nice to give your loved-ones the option to hang onto your ashes for awhile before scattering as it does appear to be useful to have a focus for the grieving process.

Other ideas I've heard:- the plastic box kept on her favourite chair (wearing her favourite beanie) in the lounge-room; urn on Mum's desk; coffee-table; in a curio cabinet; into the river at a favourite fishing-spot; allowed to blow away from a windy mountain-top; or mixed with the soil at the base of a memorial tree. Ashes are rich in potassium of course, so a keen gardener might want her ashes to feed a favourite flowering plant just before each flowering season. She could be tending her favourite plant for years after she's gone that way...

So be as imaginative as you want to be. And perhaps take a pottery class as well.

—*Rosalinda Rayne*

Ashes to Dust

Before she died, Maurs had left instructions that she wanted to be cremated and her ashes scattered up at Gariwerd (Grampians). About six months after Maurs died I wrote to the Aboriginal owners of the area care of the Brambuk Living Cultural Centre to respectfully inform them of my intentions to scatter Maurs' ashes at Gariwerd and asking them to get back to me if they had any objections. When I didn't hear back I sent out invitations to any womyn who wanted to participate in the ashes scattering ceremony to meet at Brambuk on Saturday afternoon at 1pm.

Maurs and I had both been to Gariwerd but had never been there together so as there was no special place she had in mind I travelled up to Gariwerd on Friday with friends and called into the Information Centre just before it closed to get a map of the area. The ranger was most helpful and showed me a place on the map which we immediately checked out and decided would be ideal. That evening we settled in to our cabin at the caravan park and met up with the other Lesbians who'd also booked cabins to make a weekend of it.

The following afternoon over thirty Lesbians turned up at the Brambuk Centre and after we'd had wattle seed damper with our cuppas in the cafe we formed a circle outside to recognise and pay our respects to the traditional Indigenous owners of the land. We then went in convoy to Burrong Falls. It started raining and continued to rain as we stood in a circle in our wet-weather gear and passed round the round basket full of Maurs' ashes so each womyn could say a few words in farewell. I then uncovered the ashes and the basket was passed around again so each womyn could know what the ashes looked like, grey and white gritty granules, before she got round to scattering them. To document the occasion a video was taken of this part of the proceedings.

Some womyn stayed to scatter some of the ashes in the surrounding bush while most of us negotiated our way down the path to the waterfall. We each took a handful of the ashes and either stood on a rock or squatted at the bottom of the falls or wandered amongst the eucalyptus to toss Maurs' ashes into the misty air to join the gently rushing water below or mingle with the earth. It took several hands full each before all of the ashes were successfully scattered. For myself, it was quite a comforting sight to have all those Lesbians dotted on rocks and under the trees as each of us quietly remembered Maurs and the times we'd had together.

We headed back up the path to the clearing where a fire was lit in the fireplace and the food we'd brought with us was spread out on the

wooden table. We stood around warming ourselves, chatting and eating and taking photos of this momentous occasion, and finally headed back to the caravan park for an evening meal together to end the day.

As Lesbian gatherings go this was a particularly significant occasion. Not only were we able to farewell a Lesbian in the way she wanted we were able to strengthen our community connections to one another in an empowering and affirming way.

—*Jean Taylor*

Reference

Brambuk Living Cultural Centre, Grampians Road Halls Gap; PO Box 43
Halls Gap; 03 5356.4452

All at Sea

CHAPTER 12.

Grieving; obituaries; Zen,
Tai Chi; Lost, Poem

Walking Oceans



Funerals: The End – Or The Beginning?

Death tears the fabric of habit. It destroys, as Parkes suggests, many worlds that 'should be' (1988). Like the world where I 'should be' getting up and letting the cat out and getting my partner a cuppa; or the world where we 'should be' ferreting around the opp shops in Glenhuntly Rd, then bantering with Herself at that funny little corner café; or where we 'should be' closing the curtains, throwing a coloured scarf over the standard lamp, lighting incense, and dancing round the sitting room to old jazz singers; or where we 'should be' hearing someone on the radio and chatting with her at rallies. There, that's only four worlds, but death explodes many, many more than that.

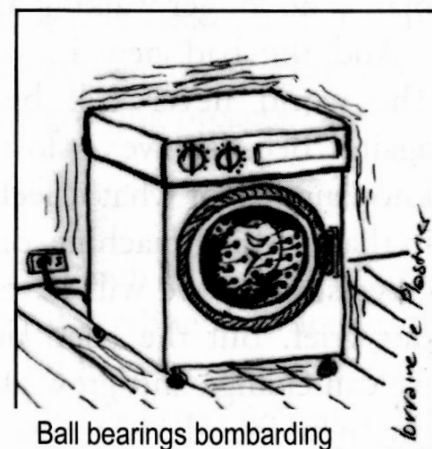


Crevasse opens under our feet

Sometimes bereaved Lesbians think we're going crazy, because there is no safe emotional ground where we can place our feet. It's as if a crevasse has opened up under our next footstep.

It can take years to go back to the places — physical or virtual — where our worlds that 'should be' were; to go to a street, or hear some music, or taste some food, or smell a scent, without that same old grief knife twisting.

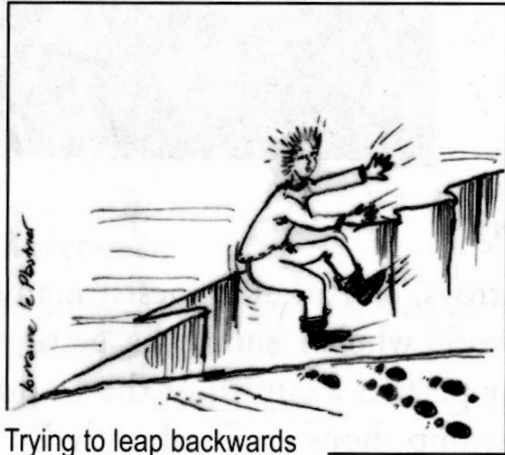
You've probably heard of Kubler-Ross' (1969) five stages of grief, from denial to acceptance? She provided a useful menu of the feelings a grieving person may feel, but grief is not nice and neat and linear and in one direction. It's messy, and all over the place. It's kind of like being in a big wash-



Ball bearings bombarding woman in the washing machine

ing machine that switches directions randomly, with heaps of ball bearings.

In fact, it some-times feels so horrible that we just want to get out of there! And some-times we do, going backwards and forwards into and out of denial multiple times. We might save up a joke because we



Trying to leap backwards over the crevasse

know she'll like to hear it. Or we see 'her' on the street – or at least someone who looks like her. Or we may literally feel or see her actual presence. (Which is often a really nice, comforting feeling). Is this because our systems can take only so much stress at one time, so our bodies and minds give us a little break for a few seconds, or minutes? Then, flip, back into reality we go! And we **DON'T WANT TO BE THERE!** We want it

to be over – quickly! But trying to be over grief quickly is about as successful as trying to be over that crevasse I was talking about before by taking a running leap backwards over it.

Whoops! Here we are, right at the bottom, with a big avalanche of confused feelings raining down on us from a great height! We can thank Kubler-Ross (1969) for suggesting some of the 'stranger' ones on the menu, like anger at the person who's died, or guilt that we've survived. Or more guilt when we find ourself smiling, for one second, out of many days and having a happy thought. Or wondering how everyone else can just seem to be going about their daily business, not understanding the enormity of the change that's happened to the world – forever – because this Lesbian is no longer walking among us.

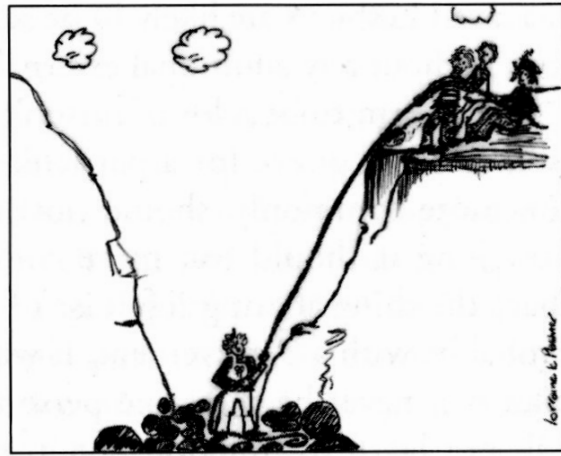
And the bad new is: you're right! The world never will be the same again. Because we've lost our not-knowingness of what it feels like to be in that washing machine, or down that crevasse. And we will never 'get over' our grief. But the good news is that we can change and grow as a result of this new-found awareness. And that,



Rocks falling on us from the bottom of the crevasse

even if we need to travel through the painful process of grieving, we can make it, with a little help from our friends.

Someone once said something about people crossing a road to avoid a bereaved person. If you haven't 'been there', this probably seems quite a bizarre statement. But it can be very accurate. It may be the strength of our cultural death taboo that leaves some normally articulate and compassionate people speechless and powerless to comfort a bereaved Lesbian. Often, it's really disappointing that the people we really expected to 'be there' for us just melt away and disappear. But it's also surprising that some people we may hardly know can rally around most supportively. I reckon that it's people who've experienced losses of their own who can listen to our loss. But I'm willing to be disproved...



We have chosen to write this book, partly to look this taboo in the face, thereby robbing it of some of its power. This section looks at the 'help' that doesn't help; and it offers some suggestions which, we hope, will make it easier to offer support to a grieving womyn that pours balm, rather than vinegar, on her wounds.

'I don't know what to say!'

'I don't know what to say!' What lies behind such a statement of personal disempowerment? Why don't we know what to say? And do we really need to say anything? Do we feel responsible for 'fixing up' 'negative' emotions and 'making it better'? Let's face it: in the event of a death, nothing we can say will undo that death, or 'make it better'. So perhaps the best we can hope for is not to make it worse. We cannot control death, and 'I don't know what to say' is, at the very least, an honest admission of feeling helpless, but it doesn't really help us to deal with the grieving process.

Pouring Vinegar on the Wound

'Shoulds' really hurt! One of the best ways in which to make a vulnerable, grieving Lesbian feel worse is to judge her. Everyone — whether it's a grieving Lesbian, herself, or the people around her — needs to refrain from judging whether she's progressing through her grieving 'properly'.

Bereaved Lesbians are likely to be suffering from information overload as it is, without any additional external pressure.

There seem to be a lot of unspoken rules about grieving and on who is allowed to grieve for a particular person. And on how grief should (or, more commonly, should not) be expressed. (Doka, 1989) And on how long it should (or, more commonly, should not) continue. But that's the thing about grief: it isn't finished until it's finished. And, most probably, with a bereavement, it will never 'be over'. The bereaved Lesbian will never be the same person again. That doesn't mean that she will not learn to function out in the world again. It just means that there will always be a hole in her world where the Lesbian who has died once was. And, even decades after a loss, we can still sometimes, for a fleeting moment, feel that sheer visceral pain of loss just as strongly and clearly as if it happened yesterday – or now. Telling someone (or implying that) they are not progressing through their grief fast enough is definitely unhelpful.

Even though I do not, normally, think of myself as a violent person, I remember experiencing a really strong urge to strangle anyone who said, 'Time heals'. This felt like a minimization of my loss to the point of cliché. Is it because death is sanitized, and funeral rituals often reduced to a one-hour service with green 'sward' placed over the raw earth beside the grave, in denial, that we speak in sanitized words too? Like 'passing away'?

It is definitely not helpful when somebody says, 'I know exactly how you feel!' This is patently ridiculous because, even if the type of loss that they are experiencing is the same type of loss as the bereaved, each womyn's own particular life herstory makes her loss unique.

The fact of somebody's death lurking around in the back of our minds can sometimes cause us to make verbal bloopers. For instance, if somebody has shot themselves, we may say something about 'needing this like a hole in the head'. This is embarrassing, to say the least, and is best dealt with by quickly back-tracking, saying something like, 'Oh, that did not come out quite how I wanted it to. What I really meant was...'

Some people think you should be 'over' your grief by a set time e.g. 6 months, or 2 years. My personal record was a friend who asked me whether I was over a significant bereavement 6 weeks after the death of my friend/ partner. Because some people only have a limited capacity, usually about 6 or 7 weeks, to have their own mortality shoved in their face by talking about a womyn's death, they simply cannot bring themselves to listen to the bereaved Lesbian trying to make meaning of the death by going over and over and over her story. You can see their eyes

between her and the deceased Lesbian; and the strength and depth of the loss is likely to be helpful. It will also be helpful if the mourner gives herself permission to feel and acknowledge the grief she is feeling, and to realize that this is normal under the circumstances.

Sometimes even not saying anything to a bereaved Lesbian is exactly the right kind of help. One of the things I remember most clearly about a time when I was really struggling with deep grief was when a friend came, silently, and put her arm around my shoulder. That was exactly what I needed at that moment. She was able to be comfortable, standing quietly there beside me, letting me know, through her body language, that she was 'with me'. She did not put her need to break a long-ish silence before my need for that non-judgmental, physical comfort. Lesbians who have not been bereaved often do not understand the atavistic yearning for reassurance and touch.

One of the most useful things that someone can do for a grieving Lesbian is to reassure her that she is not going crazy if she 'feels' or 'sees' the deceased person, or if she is experiencing deep, wild, chaotic, changeable emotions.

When I talked of the four worlds that 'should be', but weren't, at the beginning of this section, I was alluding to the destruction of what Parkes (1975) calls our 'assumptive world'. That is, the mental world that we piece together from tiny, tiny pieces of everyday experience, that tells us how things are, and operate, in our reality. When somebody close to us dies, it is not only their physical absence that we have to deal with. Our confidence in the accuracy of our own perception – or the ability to make sense of what happens in the world – is shaken to the core. We can no longer trust our senses. Because what (or who) we assumed we could see, touch, hear, feel, and even smell – we can't any more. Or at least not in the same way. The meaning of everything we 'know' is in question. And the more tiny, everyday places the dead Lesbian occupied in our previous world, the more we have to darn the holes where she used to be. And we often have to visit one of those holes more than once in order for it to be what I call 'exorcised', or to lose the potency of the pain we feel when we go there. This all, naturally, takes a long time. Much more than six days!

Although I talked about sanitized language in the previous section, it's good for anyone trying to support a grieving Lesbian to 'start on the same page' as the womyn she's supporting. Therefore, it's helpful to mirror back to her the type of language she uses, even if it would not be your personal preference.

One of the very best things you can do for a bereaved Lesbian is to keep affirming that you care for her, that you're there for her, and that she's not

alone in her grief – and touch her. And to show it, in your behaviour. Because she may be in an emotional maelstrom due to her grief, it is likely that the everyday family maintenance activities like cooking and cleaning will just not get done for quite a while. So setting up a roster of wimmin to help with the shopping, cooking (maybe just turning up with a frozen meal that can be microwaved), cleaning, dog walking, paying the bills, and special nurturing of that womyn may be appreciated. But make sure that this is happening in an acceptable/desirable way for her, since the last thing she needs to feel at the moment is even more out of control than she already is. After my sister's partner died, she had a wonderful friend who called in, briefly, once a day for about two years. This womyn would suss out where my sister 'was at'. If my sister needed to talk, she'd put the kettle on and sit down, ready to listen. Or, if needed, volunteer to run errands. Or fade quickly and quietly into the background if she saw my sister had other company, or did not need her services. Such a friend is priceless. (But that doesn't mean you have to go overboard and attend to the needs of a bereaved Lesbian at the expense of your own).

Instead of the traditional approach of disengaging with a person who has died, it is helpful for the bereaved womyn to surround herself with memories of the dead Lesbian. So, if you have a photograph to share, of the Lesbian who has died, or, better still, of the bereaved and deceased wimmin together, or a story to tell of their ways and connection, showing/giving them to the mourning womyn will help to affirm her. I'm positive that holding onto a photo of my partner and I hugging and smiling — literally for days on end — was essential to my emotional survival in a very difficult situation.

If you want to say something that will pour balm on the bereaved Lesbian's wounds, it would be helpful to say what are the things that you really remember and treasure about whoever has died, such as, 'I remember how she used to stand at the sink, diligently washing out the milk cartons and squashing them before putting them in the recycling. And I remember how excited she was that they were eventually going to build the circular courthouse that she'd been instrumental in planning. And I remember her smiling from ear to ear, and being so proud of you at your graduation ceremony! Here's a photo of you both, with that smile I'm talking about.' This will affirm that other wimmin also remember, and that the deceased person had networks of meaning for them, too. And the photo is documentary evidence that the bereaved Lesbian's senses — and the way in which she perceived their previous life together — have not betrayed her and that her perceptions were, in fact, shared by others.

This assists in making meaning, both of the life of the Lesbian who has died and also for hers as she continues on through her own life, carrying the dead womyn in her heart.

The Often Unrecognized Grief of Carers

Caring for someone, for instance a Lesbian who has a life-threatening illness, can be a very time-consuming and solitary occupation. It is likely that all of everyone's attention is being focused on that womyn, rather than on the carer. And sometimes a carer can come to feel resentful that she is putting in a lot of emotional and physical energy without getting anything much back. Or, even worse, she may feel as if she is being abused and manipulated by the sick womyn. Sometimes she may have turned the emotional equivalent of three triple backflips to make sure the sick Lesbian gets what she needs, only to be grumbled at for something really small. This seeming ingratitude can really hurt. And the carer may be upset that the grumbling has been turned upon her, who's doing her utmost (and beyond!) But the carer must realize that she is one of the only people available to hear the disgruntlement of the sick womyn (which may be the only way she can express her distress at the thought of dying). Carers need a lot of time and space to debrief, so that they don't take it personally and turn their (appropriate) resentment of the situation inappropriately back onto the Lesbian who's ill. For they, too, have assumptive worlds that have been shattered.

Sometimes a carer may disallow her own grief, in a way, if she feels the need to keep on going. Maybe she withholds recognition of her own, unique, individual losses. This may be the only way in which she can keep on doing what needs to be done. But, sometimes, it helps to take a great big lump of grief that it would be impossible to swallow, and break it down into more bite-sized chunks. It could be useful for the carer, along with the wimmin who are (hopefully) supporting her, to sit down and make a list of the things she has lost/may lose, then talk about each one separately.

What are some of the losses a carer may experience? Often, a carer is called upon to be The Responsible Adult when, in reality, she feels like a Scared Little Child who needs to be taken care of. Can she deal with this situation? It takes a lot of determination, energy, and strength of character to front up and do what needs to be done. She might experience a severe lack of self-confidence in her own senses, as suggested above. And loss of self-esteem because her needs are suddenly subservient to those of the sick Lesbian. She may have lost her fair share of nurturing within the

relationship. She may miss the usual loving touch, or physical comforting, in a time of crisis. And sex. And everyday habits and rituals. And she may have lost that 'normal' sense of immortality that most of us feel most of the time. She may lose her ability to concentrate on her work or, indeed, the ability to work at all. She may over-expend her energy in protecting the sick Lesbian from her (the carer's) feelings, or in maintaining the energy levels of the womyn she's caring for, sometimes at the expense of the needs of her or her partner's friends or relatives. And, after all this 'being good', she may still lose her partner or friend. So she will lose what Little (2001) calls her 'future memory', or how she imagines looking back on her life with the deceased Lesbian and seeing how they achieved what they wanted to achieve. This can be the most bitter loss of all. The carer may be cut out of arranging for the dead Lesbian's funeral by biological family members. She may even possibly also lose the house they shared.

So the Lesbian she has been caring for dies. And maybe the erstwhile carer feels some relief because the emotionally-wearing caring task is over. And then she may experience some guilt at her feelings of relief. Or, secretly, she may feel glad that she has been the one who has survived. And then she may find herself subject to a very common phenomenon called survivor guilt and ask herself such things as, 'Why did it have to be her? Why couldn't it have been me?' It's possible that these feelings of guilt may also be compounded by guilt about having exercised — or, alternatively, not having exercised — a medical power-of-attorney given to her by the deceased Lesbian, if it was her partner.

Guilt seems to be one of the emotions that is hardest to just sit with. It's uncomfortable and it may assault our concept of ourselves. At a time when our self-esteem may be very low due to being 'forsaken' by the Lesbian who has died; or ignored by others in the caring team because they've been focusing all their attention on the womyn who was ill. And maybe, after she dies, they all go back to their homes to relax and recover all of the energy that they have expended. And maybe that is the time in which the carer feels the utmost social isolation. In fact, she may need 'reinforcements', or a secondary care team to care for her!

Later in this section, Jean is going to talk a bit about strategies of self-care for carers. But, in the meantime, I want to suggest a few other actions that we can take to care for the bereaved womyn. One of them includes physical nurturing. We've already discussed the provision — by other people — of nutritious food that's easy to prepare, but there are plenty of other things that can be done. Some of these might be burning candles, incense, or essential oils. Another might be massage, including

that wonderful reflexology massaging of the feet. Or playing relaxing music while the bereaved Lesbian has a hot bath. Or placing a little dob of lavender oil on her pillow at night, to assist with a calm, peaceful sleep. And another might be some really vigorous exercise, to get the stress hormones that have probably been circulating in her body for weeks to move on. Yet another might be having a brainstorming session about meaningful rituals to include in the funeral, or afterwards.

The whole of this book has been aimed at decreasing the stress felt at times of death by those who have not prepared for it. It has also been to provide some ideas on how funerals can be turned into wondrous rites of passage. Partners, carers, and the broader Lesbian community need a lot of care after the funeral, as they proceed through the grieving process. So, again I ask whether funerals are the end, or the beginning?

NOTE: Parts of this article were previously published in Lesbiana, No. 48, July, 1996.

Blaming the Messenger

Be aware that the person who delivers bad news — for instance, news of the terminal illness, or death, of a Lesbian — to someone who is very close to her — is often considered by others (however irrationally) to be responsible for that bad news. The person who delivers the news can easily become a scapegoat for everyone who has unfinished business with the Lesbian who has died. Consider carefully whether you want to take the task upon yourself, or leave it to that Lesbian's health care providers.

Obituaries

Try writing your own obituary: it's instructive! What can you say about yourself? Would you like to write about yourself in the language often used in obituaries? Again, the language used is often sanitized e.g. she died 'after a long illness', is code for cancer. There might be two main benefits from trying to write your own obituary. Firstly, it can have far-reaching effects in changing the way you live and what you choose to spend your life doing. And secondly, it may give you a clue as to how to write another Lesbian's obituary. Do you want it to be used as an occasion truly to reflect the life-way-of-being, achievements, and loving connections made by yourself, or the deceased Lesbian, during your/her lifetime? The choice is yours!

Often sitting down, either by yourself or with other wimmin who knew the dead Lesbian, and deciding what are the most important things to say in her obituary can, in itself, be a valuable part of the grieving process.

—*Barbary Clarke*

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Loose Endings

*She died in a car crash.
Flat road – see for miles!
2.30 pm.
38 degrees, 38 years.
No good-byes; no “I love yous”;
no holding her hand
as the light faded
and the warmth left.
Just the disbelief.... Just the anger!....
Just the “absence
of the expected presence”....
Just the questions, stretching out
like the road she died on....
Fitting the jig-saw together.
At first, the ambulance people
said both drivers died.
Then they changed their story.
Now it was her, the driver,
and the other car’s passenger,
the 17-year-old son of a well-known local.
(The police had known them for 20 years.)
And now they’ve been told to say nothing!
And, if it was head-on, with her coming back
from the wrong side of the road,
wouldn’t it have been both drivers
or both passengers?
No matter how many times
I replay it in my head,
the answer comes out the same:*

*both drivers, or both passengers.
And, if it was the son, driving illegally?
At least that would clear her name!
And, if she died instantly,
as the police say,
why the neck brace?
Why the plastic tube
down her throat?
Can I have legal representation
at the inquest?*

*And sometimes I feel
the presence of her expected absence
very strongly.
I see someone on the street
and think it's her;
I save up a joke
or story because
I know she'll love it.
I talk to her in my head
(and sometimes get an answer!)*

*What can I do with her clothes?
I smell her presence in them!
I want them here!
I want them gone!
I can't bear
to open her side of the wardrobe,
roll to her side of the bed
with no warm flesh to enfold me!*

Sleep!
If only
I could sleep!

I want to howl my loss
to the moon!
I want to staunch the flow of life
from each nerve ending
that's been wrenched
in two,
like a cliff
formed in an earthquake.

I want to heal.
Quickly!

But, for her, I will
lift each leaden weight,
put one foot in front of the other;
stand under the waterfall of feelings;
sit with the pain,
an intimate companion,
as if it were her.

Lop go her potentials!
Lop! Lop! Lop!
Leaf and branch,
trunk and root!
I will conclude her life
for her.
For me.

*I will ring her friends and relatives;
write her obituary.*

*I will cancel the credit cards,
rent, utilities, subscriptions
and overseas trip.*

*I'll answer the condolence cards
which hurt me more
through their denial.*

*I won't blame her friends who disappear
because they can't handle her death.*

I will value the ones who stay.

*I will be patient
with their clumsy comfortings.*

*I won't shout at them
when they match-make me
at dinner parties.*

*Nor will I run
to the first beckoning bed
to fill the aching gap.*

*I will give myself
time.*

And love.

And life.

Barbary Clarke

July 1996. (This took 46 years of life and 6 hours to write)

Zen, Tai Chi and the Art of Writing

When a loved one is seriously ill or has just died and we find that our usual methods of coping aren't quite enough to get us through we might do well to consider alternative means of reducing our stress as we grieve and find some more peaceful way of holding our fears and gaining the comfort we need.

Meditation

Ten years ago when my late partner was diagnosed with ovarian cancer all the books we were reading at the time suggested meditation as one means of coming to terms with this dread disease. We duly went along to free classes to learn about this ancient art. Within a matter of weeks of practising to sit for a certain amount of time each morning to start the day I realised this was for me. However my conditioned westernised mind was so resistant to meditation that I soon realised I needed to find a teacher to guide me.

I read several books and nothing clicked till I picked up *Nothing Special: Living Zen* by Charlotte Joko Beck. And while I found many of her concepts and insights to be extremely challenging at first, I also recognised that her down to earth approach was exactly what I needed to help me sit with my fears so that I could support Maurs in the ways she needed. Having an established routine of sitting and meditating every morning was also especially helpful in the months leading up to Maurs' death and gave me much-needed sustainment during the prolonged grieving time after she died.

However, there are as many ways of meditating and as many interpretations of Zen and other forms of practise as there are Lesbians to do it. If you think you might want to incorporate meditation into your daily life, especially during a time of grief and sadness, talk to friends and look around. Out of all the available options there is bound to be a teacher or a group or a practice to suit your particular need.

Tai Chi

In a similar way, I have found the practice of tai chi to be very helpful in reducing stress and working with grief. A few weeks after I started meditating I joined a tai chi class because I'd just given up being a performer in the Women's Circus and I was of an age where I needed to 'move it' and gyms were not my style. Needless to say, I found tai chi to

my liking, have been attending a weekly class ever since and do half an hour of tai chi every afternoon. At the end of a working day at the computer my whole body is extremely grateful as soon as I do the warm-up exercises leading into the many dao yin, tai chi and wu shu forms I can do these days. Tai chi is not only a physical workout it also very meditative and gives my mind a chance to relax as well.

Writing

Perhaps because I'm a writer, but I'm sure it applies to everyone in one way or another, I found that the act of writing about the loved one who had just died to be extremely beneficial in helping to ease the intense grief. I not only wrote about what I was going through in my journal, in letters to absentee family members and into books and articles and short stories and eulogies for funerals, I also wrote obituaries and sent them off to be included in various lesbian and gay magazines. Writing about the loved one, describing her many characteristics and explaining how she died, is a reminder of how much and why you love her and is a simple and easy thing to do.

While it's important to write about our grief personally, eulogies, books, articles and obituaries give us the opportunity to share our grief about our loved one who has died, in a more public sense and with our community. Obituaries, in particular, are not only of benefit to the writer who is telling the story of her beloved's life in a succinct form they are also immensely useful to the reader who may be learning about the death for the first time, or is enlightened by reading about how she died and other details of her full life. These days, even malestream newspapers encourage Lesbians to write obituaries about our friends and lovers. And our lesbian and gay magazines include obituaries if we write and send them in.

All of these practices, meditation and tai chi and writing, are excellent means of getting in touch with our selves, dealing with crisis and stress, particularly when someone we love is dying or has just died, and help us move into a more wholistic way of living. Others might find that yoga or walking or gardening or running away to join either the Women's Circus or the Performing Older Women's Circus (or both) do exactly the same thing. Whatever it is that moves us into a less stressful and more compassionate way of being is to be recommended. So that when someone we love dies we are better prepared to grieve her loss and honour her memory as we go about our lives.

—*Jean Taylor*

References

Performing Older Women's Circus;
<http://home.vicnet.net.au/~powcirc/>

Women's Circus: <http://www.womenscircus.org.au/>
info@womenscircus.org.au

Expect no Less

CHAPTER 13.

“Lesbian Culture, Cultural Respect”
passing; rituals and ceremonies



Lesbian Culture, Cultural Respect

I believe we are a Culture as distinct from a minority group, a lifestyle, or oppressed group. In defining us as a Culture, I want to affirm the things we build between us, the visible threads of being together in tangible and undeniable forms of culture.

Our existence as Lesbians is varied, complex and remarkable. The many conversations I have sat in on, talking and listening amongst a wide range of Lesbians from varied backgrounds, I have found myself astounded by what I have heard. How we articulate who we are, our music, words, humour, art and understanding. We look each other in the eye. This has occurred time and time again. We are diverse in our interests, our symbol systems, our music, stories and experiences. We recognise each other in chance meetings in strange cities and in unknown environments. Our definitions of ourselves are unique from a heterosexual Culture and our language incorporates our spirit.

Lesbian Culture can include Radical Lesbian Feminists, Gay Women, Lesbian Separatists, Sporty Dykes, Gay Ladies, Butch and Femme, Closeted Women, Bar Dykes, Lipstick Lesbians and the many more names we have used to describe ourselves...all of us have the Lesbian presence.

Being a Lesbian brings me nourishment. When I am around Lesbians I settle into the Lesbian nest with warmth and love. It is a most delicious feeling to gather together, it truly is a coming home. Some of us have described it as being with our tribe.

I believe we are a cultural group and I believe we have always been here and I am determined we will have a future.

To some degree, we have entered the process of being co-opted by the patriarchy through recent anti-discrimination legislation in different States and Territories in Australia, becoming ‘legal Lesbians’, or ‘amended Lesbians’, or ‘normal’.

For some years, I had been concerned that surviving in hostile or unwelcoming environments, and the subsequent oppression being such a

major focus between us, we would see oppression as our only connection. Our focus was to work to change oppression in our home lives, our biological families and our workplaces. We worked to keep our children and to protect our children. My worry was that when we became 'legal Lesbians', what bound us together would fade and we would lose each other.

For some of our sisters the battle was too overwhelming.

Because we understood our experiences with discrimination, we have been at the forefront of many social changes working to improve rights and conditions in hospitals, schools, government departments, country towns, religious groups, as well as many other examples.

Many of us continued to care and to work for change and made space for ourselves to build threads between us across the vast distances of Australia and with Lesbians in other countries.

Our courage prevailed, and we worked to develop and share our Lesbian selves through more formal Lesbian examples: Lesbian Space in WA and NSW, our Lesbian presses, amongst them: Asp House, Grapevine, Dykonoclast, Lesbian Network, Lesbiana, Lesbians On The Loose, Lilac, Lesbian Times.

Our art exhibitions are powerful and our artists move us by the imagery they share. They reflect ourselves and our herstory back to us.

In Australia, we publish our Lesbian poetry, plays and prose. Our poems are intense; our language is our own and tells our stories. We recognise each other, even passing on the street, a woman looks into your eye and there she is a Lesbian! We know each other. We seek each other out. We hum when we come together. We sing our songs, write our stories, go through rites of passage in our rituals – coming out, turkey bastering, mothering, warrior woman, and crone. We work on our self healing and socialising. We gather around and share food, we talk, we laugh and we cry over special brews of tea and coffee. We make beautiful spaces in our homes and gardens that are personal and caring and reflect our herstory.

This book 'Willing Up and Keeling Over' is yet again another example of how we care about each other, speak to each other and share with each other.

We must continue to give ourselves a framework to be in the world where we can be nurtured and allowed to grow. We must continue to make and bring our presences into vibrant places that are a pleasure to be in as a Lesbian, as well as, having the pleasure of being a Lesbian.

Our insistence on our space and our right to it is undeniable and we are

determined to keep it so. And we shall. I am in no doubt about a Lesbian Culture — We are it gals!

We have always been here.

—*Lorraine le Plastrier*

“Lesbian Cultural Respect” previously published as a limited edition artist’s book 2006

Our Sense of Place

Too many assumptions are made about Lesbians and our lives. These assumptions can lead to uncomfortable or insulting behaviour, all of which need to be avoided when in the company of Lesbians. Especially if we are grieving.

If you are to make any assumptions, assume that there is a strong Lesbian Culture, and approach it with respect.

Language

If any professionals (health, legal, funeral parlours, crematoriums, probate, etc) are dealing with the dying or death of Lesbians, don’t use heterosexual language; eg, don’t refer to her loved ones as ‘him’ or ‘husband’ or ‘boy-friend’. Don’t assume that the Next of Kin, or the most important people in her life, are the biological family she was born into. Chances are they are not.

How can I best express my support at the funeral?

The loss of our intimate friends and lovers impacts greatly on our hearts. If a Lesbian loses her partner, it is appropriate to honour her as a widow.

It is helpful for non-Lesbians to know that all Lesbians must face the pressure of whether or not to tell the truth in public about being a Lesbian. Sensitivity is the key – it is not your story, it is hers. She is the one who must get her needs met, and it’s up to others to honour those needs. To ‘out’ a Lesbian is inappropriate. However, to demonstrate that it is safe for her to be who she is could be helpful, should she decide to declare herself as a Lesbian widow.

Passing

Some of us are out as Lesbians and some are not. We are out to some and not to others. If your partner dies and you are closeted, you live the

life of a widow and nobody knows. It can be an isolating burden, on top of your already significant loss. Coming out can be stressful, but not coming out can be devastating.

'Passing' is something many of us can do. It is true to say that we are generally assumed to be heterosexual in the wider community, so many of us 'pass' as such behind that assumption. It is worth considering the impact this has on your life and the lives of your loved ones. This book is all about considering how best to look after those we love when we die. Allow yourself to imagine how best to honour your loved ones and allow others to comfort their true loss.

As Time Passes

For those loved ones living after the loss of friends and lovers, time weighs heavily as they heal. For the rest of us, we get on with our lives much the same as before. Respecting the gap between the two will add to the healing process.

—*Cathy Wheel*

Dear Friends

Rituals to mark special occasions within a community, such as birthdays, name days, commitment ceremonies, are especially important to acknowledge and recognise the ways Lesbians live out our lives. This is no less true when someone we love dies. Funerals and

scattering of ashes can help assuage the deep grief we feel in the short term. As time passes we can also devise other means by which we remember those we love who have died.

Lesbian Candle Ceremonies

In 1992, I was a member of the Melbourne Lesbian Feminist Organising Collective for the National 10/40 Conference (ten years a feminist and over 40 years of age) to be held in Healesville that year. We were approached by a Sydney Lesbian who requested we include a Candle Ceremony into the conference program in memory of her late partner who had recently died of cancer. The timing of the Candle Ceremony, late on Saturday afternoon, was to coincide with the time other Lesbians round Australia who would also be lighting candles.

At the Candle Ceremony we remembered not only the most recent Lesbian to have died but all the other Lesbians we knew who'd died over the years. We sat in a circle on the grass under a gum tree, said their names, cried, told stories about them, lit candles, laughed, remembered, paid tribute to their remarkable contributions to Lesbian community and said how much we loved them. When we'd finished, we all stood up to hold hands while we sang, "Dear Friends".

At subsequent annual 10/40 gatherings the Candle Ceremony was an integral part of the conference program. When the 10/40s stopped in 1997, the Candle Ceremony was introduced into the next Lesbian Festival program to keep this important Lesbian tradition going. Candle Ceremonies have been celebrated at the LesFests each year since then and have continued over into the other Lesbian gatherings as an essential way of remembering and naming all our Lesbian friends who have gone before us.

Lesbian Memorial Table and the Lesbian Book of Remembrance

The Lesbian Memorial Tables were introduced at Lesbian gatherings as an additional way of remembering our loved ones who have died. A small table is usually set up in a corner of the communal area, covered with a colourful cloth and laid out with candles, memorabilia and the Lesbian Book of Remembrance. Colourful pens and paper are also supplied so anyone can either write a message in the book or on the pieces of coloured paper to honour the Lesbian who has died.

It is in doing these simple and yet powerful rituals, with Candle Ceremonies and Memorial Tables and Books of Remembrance, that we aid our own grieving processes and at the same time create Lesbian community. By saying their names and remembering our Lesbian sisters, partners and friends with written words, we can be comforted knowing they won't be forgotten. By honouring their lives and telling their stories, we are upholding Lesbian traditions that will ensure the continuity of Lesbian community after we are dead and into the future.

—*Jean Taylor*

New Growth

Do not sorrow for my tears!
They are the warrior women of my struggle!
I have fought long and hard
To shed each and every one of them.
I try to sprinkle them around,
So as not to harm the land.
Like leaves falling from a tree,
Each tear makes way for new growth.
I sit and muse upon such things
And wonder
How many walking oceans there might be.

Barbary Clarke

1996

Reading list by chapter

Legend for authors: (L): Lesbian, (F): Female, (M): Male, (F/M): Mixed

Chapter 1:

(L) Emily George: *If Anybody's Friend be Dead*, self-published, Dykebooks, Melbourne 1990

(L) Jean Taylor: *The C-Word*, Spinifex Press, Melbourne, 2000

Chapter 6:

(L) Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men, Romantic Friendship and Love between Women from the Renaissance to the Present*, William Morrow and Company, Inc, New York, 1981

(L) Lillian Faderman, *Chloe and Olivia, An Anthology of Lesbian Literature from the Seventeenth Century to the Present*, Penguin Books, New York 1994

(L) Sarah Lucia Hoagland, *Lesbian Ethics Institute of Lesbian Studies*, Palo Alto, California, 1988

(M) *Silent Grief: Living in the Wake of Suicide*, by Christopher Lukas, Henry M. Seiden Jason Aronson; Softcover Ed edition, June 1997

Chapter 12:

Sometimes, when you're trying to understand what is happening to you, either when you're caring for a sick or dying Lesbian, or even when you're dying yourself, reading can be a way of showing you that you're not the only one who's gone through what you're going through. (But be aware that sometimes, under extreme stress, it is simply not possible to concentrate for long enough to take in what you're reading). These are some of the books and articles I've come across in the past ten years or so which I have found to be helpful. Barbary

Basic and accessible books on coping with grief, death and dying, including people's personal stories:

(M) Attig, T., (1996) *How We Grieve: Relearning the World*, Oxford University Press: New York

(L) Sandra Butler and Barbara Rosenbaum: *Cancer in Two Voices*, Spinster Book Company, San Francisco, 1991

(F/M) DeSpelder, L.A., and Strickland, A.L., (eds.) (1995) *The Path Ahead: Readings in Death and Dying*, Mayfield Publishing Co: Calif

(L) Philomena Horsley (Ed.) (2002) *Cancer: An Incredible Journey*, Lesbian Cancer Support Group: Melbourne

(F/M) Klass, D., Silverman, P.R., Nickman, S.L., (Eds.) (1996)
Continuing Bonds: New Understandings of Grief, Taylor and Francis:
London.

(F/M) *McKissock, M., and D., (3rd ed. 2006) *Coping With Grief*,
ABC Adult Books: Aust (A good book to start with)

(L) Pace, A.L., (1992) *Write From the Heart: Lesbians Healing From
Heartache*, Baby Steps Press: Oregon

A book specially for carers

(F) Cantwell-Bartl, A., (2nd ed. 2005) *An Unrecognized Grief: Loss and
Grief Issues for Carers – A Carer's Guide*, Carers Victoria: Melbourne

Healing books on meditation, ritual, and spirituality

(M) Hockey, J., Katz, J., and Small, N., (2001) *Grief, Mourning, and
Death Ritual*, Open University Press: Buckingham

(L) Oswald, R.F., (Ed.) *Lesbian Rites: Symbolic Acts and the Power of
Community*, Harrington Park Press: New York

(F) York, S., (2000) *Remembering Well: Rituals for Celebrating Life and
Mourning Death*, Jossey-Bass: USA

More advanced books/articles

(F) Brabant, S., (1989-'90) Old Pain or New Pain: A Social Psychologi-
cal Approach to Recurrent Grief, *Omega*, Vol. 20:273-79

(F) Bruce, E.J., and Schultz, C.L., (2001) Nonfinite Loss and Grief: A
Psychoeducational Approach, MacLennan and Petty: NSW

(M) Doka, K., (Ed.) (2002) *Disenfranchised Grief: New Directions,
Challenges, and Strategies for Practice*, Research Press: Champaign,
Illinois

Additional reading

General:

(F) Charlotte Joko Beck, *Everyday Zen*; edited by Steve Smith, Thorsens,
London, (1989) 1997

(L) Neti Davidson: *Black Crow Laughing*, self-published, 1990

(F) Patricia Jallana, *Changing Ways of Death in 20th Century Australia —
War, Medicine and the Funeral Business*, UNSW Press, February 2006

(L) Audre Lorde: *The Cancer Journals*, Spinster Ink, New York, 1980

(F) Leah Munro: *The Do-It-Yourself Funeral Book*, 19997, 1999, revised
edition 2005

- (F/M) *The New Natural Death Book*, edited by Nicholas Albery and Stephanie Wienrich of the Natural Death Centre, first published by Ryder an imprint of Edbury Press, 2000
- (L) Sinister Wisdom 68/69, *Death, Grief and Surviving*, quest editors: Judith K Witheron and Sue Lenaerts, February 2006
- (F) Charlotte Joko Beck, (1993) *Nothing Special: Living Zen*, Harper Collins: New York
- (F) *Women's Circus: Leaping Off the Edge*: co-edited by Adrienne Liebmann, Deb Lewis, Jean Taylor, Louise Radcliffe-Smith and Patricia Sykes, Spinifex Press, 1997.

NOTE: If you want to buy some of these books, rather than locating them in a library, Open Leaves bookshop in Cardigan St, Carlton can be a good place to start. For Lesbian books, visit Hares & Hyenas, 63 Johnston Street, Fitzroy, Melbourne, Vic.

Websites and e-mail contacts for information:

Australian Lesbian and Gay Archives Inc; www.alga.org.au

ALSO Foundation: www.also.org.au, also @also.org.au

Victorian Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby: www.vglrl.org.au, info@vglrl.org.au

Over the Rainbow: www.over-the-rainbow.org

Legal Aid: www.legalaid.vic.gov.au

Law Institute of Victoria: www.liv.asn.au

Victoria Law Foundation: www.victorialaw.org.au; contact@victorialaw.org.au

Community Legal Centres: www.naclc.org.au

Probate Office: probate@supremecourt.vic.gov.au

State Trustees: www.statetrustees.com.au

Legal Kits of Victoria: www.legalkits.com.au
webcontact@legalkits.com.au

RSPCA: www.rspcavic.org

Australian Pet Cremation and Burial Service:
www.australianpetcremation.com.au

Bamganie Environmental Services, Pet Cremation Service:

<http://users.windows.chariot.net.au/pets>

Equal Opportunity Commission: www.eoc.vic.gov.au,
complaints@eoc.vic.gov.au

Victorian Civil and Administration Tribunal: www.vcat.vic.gov.au

Dying with Dignity: www.dwgv.org.au

Centrelink: www.centrelink.gov.au

Rainbow Families Council via: www.rainbowfamilies.org.au

Chevra Kadisha: www.mck.org.au

OnEarth Australia: www.onearth.com.au

Sensible Coffins: www.sensiblefunerals.com.au

Enviroboard coffin suppliers: www.lifeart.com.au

Funerals: www.choice.com.au, click 'F' for funeral

Children's funerals: www.sidsandkids.org

Peace of Mind: www.forpeaceofmind.com.au

Cemeteries and Crematoria Regulations Victoria 2005:
www.healthvic.gov.au/cemeteries

Regulations for Interment and for Mausoleums:
www.dms.dpc.vic.gov.au

Matrix Guild: www.matrixguildvic.org.au/index.html

Women's Health in the South East: www.vicnet.net.au/~whise

Women's Health Information Centre:
http://www.rwh.org.au/wellwomens/index.cfm?doc_id=2278

Positive Women: info@positivewomen.org.au

Human Rights & Equal Opportunity Commission (Federal):
www.humanrights.gov.au

Palliative Care Victoria: info@pallcarevic.asn.au

Royal District Nursing Service: www.rdns.com.au, getinfo@rdn.com.au

The State Coroners Office Victoria: www.coronerscourt.vic.gov.au

Victorian Organ Donation Service: www.lifegift.com.au

Department of Births, Death and Marriages: www.dvc.vic.gov.au

Victorian Government Health Information: www.health.vic.gov.au

Victorian AIDS Council: www.vicaids.asn.au

'More than Lip Service: The Report of the Lesbian Health Information Project':
www.rwh.org.au/emplibrary/wellwomens/LHIP_FinalReport_Apendices.pdf

Gay and Lesbian Switchboard Victoria:
www.vicnet.au/~glswitch/

Centre Against Sexual Assault (CASA): www.casa.org.au

Life Resolution: www.liferesolution.com.au
inquiries@liferesolution.com.au

Victorian Cemeteries Act 2005:
www.health.vic.gov.au/cemeteries/legislation.htm

The Cemeteries Trust Manual:
www.health.vic.gov.au/cemeteries/victoria/manual.htm

Performing Older Women's Circus:
<http://home.vicnet.net.au/~powcirc/>

Women's Circus: <http://www.womenscircus.org.au/>
info@womenscircus.org.au

Cardboard Coffins: ABC interview with OnEarth is at
www.abc.net.au/rn/nationalinterest/stories/2006/1785450.htm

National Network of Women's Legal Services

National Network of Indigenous Legal Services

Working Women's Centres: www.nwjc.org.au/wladdress.html

Biographies

Born Scottish, a matriarch's daughter, I am sister, migrant, family violence survivor, catholic school girl, pirate, relinquishing mother, herbalist, wife, mother of six, fat, environmental activist, runner, women's liberationist, feminist, divorcee, women's refuge worker, single mother, owner/builder, plantswoman, orphan, bereaved mother, Lesbian, tap dancer, lover, Lesbian widow, circus performer, birdwatcher, health practitioner, retailer, caterer, counsellor, diabetic, ballroom dancer, radical Lesbian activist, cancer statistic, empathist, friend, Celtic Warrior Queen, walking respectfully on Aboriginal land.

—Anah Holland- Moore

A 65 year old Radical Lesbian Feminist Separatist Crone, I am a dumping shaped storytelling life loving Dyke. Born & raised in the u.s. with white middle class privileges, I am now an auzzie cit. living happily in Melbourne with my dear lover in a magnificent company of lezzos.

—Ardy Tibby

I'm: a late-blooming Lesbian feminist; an advocate for Lesbian human and health rights; a student of Lesbian health, who struggles to remove advocacy polemic from academic presentations and papers; a proud solar panel electricity generation system owner; 'other mother' of Cilla and Wolfie; and a lover of greenery, fresh air, sweet water, slow food, chocolate, spring fruits, loyal friends, Lesbian community, vibrant smells and colours, snuggling in bed with a good book (and without one!).

—Barbary Clarke

I am a Lesbian who has recently returned to Victoria after 21 years in Perth. I have settled in Castlemaine, which gives me great joy. Ever since embracing Feminism in the early 80's, I have worked on many community projects with the intention of making the world a safer, more equitable place to be for Lesbians and women generally. This book is another example of the work I love to do.

—Cathy Wheel

I am a proud Radical Lesbian Separatist, who has been active in feminist and Lesbian groups for 20 years. Nature, animals and other Lesbians (particularly my gorgeous lover and our brindled puppy) are the centre of my life. I still live in hope that one day we will create a perfect Lesbian world, free of all '-isms', full of integrity, respect and caring for all living things on Earth.

—Claudia Huber

As well as being a Lesbian Crone, I am also a radical feminist activist, loving sexual partner, prolific writer of books, articles, plays, poems, short stories and whathaveyou, mother of two middle-aged kids, occasional artist, committed herstorian, long-time archivist, dotting grandmother, active member of the Lesbian community and an old age pensioner who knits.

—Jean Taylor

I am a Lesbian native to Victoria. I grew up sculpting the mud of the Kororoit Creek and spent my adult working life teaching others to create and build and love beauty. I contribute to the world as a Lesbian and surely that's exactly what she needs! At 56 I learned to read music and my mandolin fills me with joy. For 2 years I played with the WA Mandolin Orchestra. Imagine that!

—Lorraine le Plastrier

I have been "out" as a Lesbian for 25 years and was a feminist socialist peace activist long before I'd heard the terminology. Singer, songwriter, traveller and infrequent artist; I am a colourful Lesbian whose satirical humour keeps me laughing uproariously. My constant companion is my husky cross dog. We currently live in rural Victoria.

—Rosalinda Rayne

Afterword

We feel a bravo coming on, after writing and publishing a book collectively. There were times of laughter as well as emotional upheaval. This has been very deep work, getting to know each other at a completely different level. We've needed bravery to start it, and bravery to stay with it – and not only when it brought up memories of our own personal losses.

There have been plusses and minuses in discovering the different patterns we have of coming to decisions and weaving our way through them. We've had to pay attention to process and healing, as well as to the tasks at hand.

Here are some of our memories of our gatherings:

Building a lasting legacy with love for the Lesbian community; being able to do it because we told ourselves we could; hidden skills revealed; Lorraine's wildflower computer wallpaper, with occasional cries of "What's that?", or "There it is!"; remembering those who are gone, and some pretty inspiring funeral ceremo-

nies; Lorraine's and everybody's eyes light up when the chocolate comes out; flights of brainstorming, with Jean's semi-outraged shrieks of laughter at Anah's cheeky and irreverent suggestions for chapter headings; Cathy on the computer layout; Rosalinda's colour; expressions on friends' faces when we tell them we're writing a book about Lesbian funerals; 'The Box' of documents, drafts; Barbary's 'treats', apricots and mangoes, Ardy's banking and stories; overnighters in Castlemaine, house bulging and Jean and Claudia urging punctuality; fantasising about a logo of eight pairs of breasts; creative inspiration from Lorraine's joyous art and sculpture; Claudia's principled vegetarian stand and organically-growing Table of Contents and Index; determination to make a beautiful book.

May the information we present here save Lesbians the additional pain – over and above that of our loss – that arises in a lesbophobic society.

Long Breast Press Collective

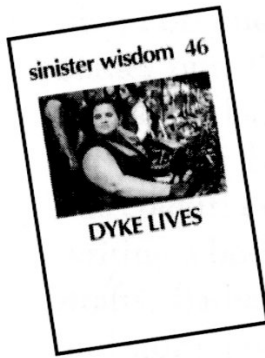
May 2007

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Long Breast Press L to R: Anah, Barbary, Rosalinda, Ardy, Claudia, Lorraine, Jean, Cathy

Lesbians are discriminated against legally and socially in Australia. This book has been written and published to redress some of the inequities Lesbians face in our daily lives and in particular when it comes to our deaths.

This is the book we wished we had when we lost our own Lesbian loved ones and when we first started thinking about our own funerals.

Here is a practical handbook for Lesbians to help with those financial, emotional, and legal details when someone we love dies. It also helps lessen the impact of our own eventual death on the loved ones we leave behind.

This beautiful book is given further depth by the inclusion of our heartfelt personal stories, art and poetry.

