

The Healing Power of a Good Funeral

When Colin, my ex-husband was told he had only a short while to live he asked me; a newly ordained One Spirit Interfaith Minister if I would write and conduct his funeral. I began to put words together and as I read them to him over the phone I asked him to stop me if he wanted to make changes. During this process he opened up in a way I had never known, in all our years of marriage and it was like our hearts really touched for the very first time.

He spoke about the hardships suffered as a 13 year old lad on a naval training ship and his time spent in Korea during his National Service. As he spoke I could hear the pain in his voice as he remembered and verbalised the horrors for probably the first time. I began to deeply regret not having been more compassionate within our marriage. He had buried such traumatic memories that were now being allowed to surface as he surrendered to the inevitable. What a pity this conversation, which led to such a deep understanding between us, had not taken place many years before!

As we discussed in minute detail the message he wished me to deliver within the service, we changed words and refined the meanings and he was absolutely positive as to what he wished to be included or not. The service content was extremely personal and reflected his deep love of animals, fishing and the natural world. It concluded with a committal written especially for hm.

Just before his passing I sent him a letter of love and regret saying 'maybe we'll be better equipped the next time around.' On the day of the funeral the funeral director caught my eye as I began to lead the coffin towards the catafalque, saying: 'He has your letter in his hand.'

Having lived with so many painful memories he had finally, surrendered...

Colin and I had been divorced for 18 years, with our beloved dogs acting as our bridge to friendship.

Colin's request that I play this role within his funeral was an honour and a profoundly healing experience for me and I truly believe for him too. I have always had an inner knowing that by discussing such arrangements prior to need, unique opportunities for adjustment and healing can be found, I now know! Faced with our demise we can think and speak more openly and honestly. Having looked death right in the face, we can get on and live our lives more fully, benefitting from the knowledge gained within the process.

Celebrating the Life of Colin Anthony Francis

Entrance music: [Morning Birdsong](#).

Minister: Just a gentle reminder to please turn off your mobile phones.

Welcome and Introduction:

Minister: A very warm welcome. Most of you already know me, but for those who don't my name is Jean Francis, I am a One Spirit Interfaith Minister and Colin's second wife.

When Colin was told he had only a short while to live he asked me to create and conduct his farewell service and I felt deeply honoured at this request. I'm not sure what he actually imagined my training was all about but he took a risk! It surely is a sad reality that we have to be faced with death to open our hearts to truth and love. The content of this service was written in conjunction with Colin's wishes and the approval of members of his close family?

We are all here today because we knew Colin, and have come to say our farewells. Colin Anthony Francis was born to Reginald and Enid on June 27th 1932. Colin had one younger brother, Sherwin who has gone ahead to pave the way, along with several very dear friends: Nigel, Jan, Mike and others

Invocation:

We no doubt all have different faith paths that lead us to the Divine from which we gain comfort. Colin's connection surely was with Mother Nature. Let ask the God of our understanding to be amongst us today as we honour and celebrate Colin's life.

Colin's first wife is here today. Colin and Helen married in 1960 and in 1962 Kevin was born followed by Caroline 2 years later and I warmly welcome their children Ben, Mathew, Jack, Megan, Charlotte and Hannah.

Minister: At the age of 13 Colin was sent to the training ship HMS Mercury as an introduction to a possible naval career. This was not a happy time. Learning to swim by being made to jump into the freezing sea from a boat was no joke. His memories of this strict, military regime were of desperate unhappiness, which he endured for 18 months.

Home from HMS Mercury Colin joined a scout troop with determination to work his way up to being a King's Scout, he achieved this by the age of 15.

Colin started a scout group in Old Coulson, Surrey, which he ran for many years and with the help of parents achieved what initially seemed the impossible. He was known to all his Scouting colleagues as 'The Eagle.'

I now refer to the 'Jungle Book' written by Rudyard Kipling.

The tales in this book are fables using animals to illustrate moral lessons to humans. Sir Robert Baden-Powell, founder of the scouting movement, approved this book and it was used as a motivational aid by the scouting movement. The main character in the book was 'The Head Wolf' who became the leader in Scout groups and was known as Akela.

Colin loved this book, mainly I think because the stories were told through animals. This was the beginning of his deep interest in wildlife

At the age of 18 Colin joined the army to serve his National Service in Hong Kong, Korea and on the north/south Chinese borders. He was surrounded by bloodshed and fear, sustaining a back injury when thrown from a truck - an injury that affected him for his whole life. While in Hong Kong, off he went again and started another scout group.

He was employed by George Wimpey in Hammersmith as a structural engineer for many years.

Colin was interested in all sporting activities and in spite of bodily pain he rose to the challenge of a game of snooker and golf whenever an opportunity arose.

Always a passionate fisherman, he found the solace and tranquillity he so earnestly sought, while fishing beside a lake (in the first draft of this service I wrote) 'dangling a line.' He quickly corrected me and I quote: 'Fishing is an art. Casting must be carried out correctly then you stalk your catch by observing what is going on in the water before making that final cast!' - Sorry Colin!

Reading: By Helen – Only a Little While

Minister: Thank you Helen

Always at home in the great outdoors Colin enjoyed, walking the dogs while observing the wildlife that surrounded him; the birds and tiny woodland creatures. He took pleasure in observing the changing seasons

and how the wheel of nature turned from spring, summer, autumn and into winter as it is in life; birth, life, death and re-birth.

I now have a message from Colin to Caroline, Kevin and his grandchildren: 'Whenever you wish to be close to me in spirit walk in the countryside, observe nature and recall the beautiful words of this poem by an unknown author entitled: *If You Stand Very Still*'

Reading:

If you stand very still in the heart of a wood
You will hear many wonderful things,
The snap of a twig, the wind in the trees
And the whirr of invisible wings

If you stand very still in the turmoil of life
And you wait for the voice from within,
You'll be led down the ways of wisdom and peace
In a mad world of chaos and din

If you stand very still and hold your faith
You will get all the help that you ask.
You will draw from the silence the things that you need,
Hope and Courage, and Strength for your task

As Colin's health deteriorated he was unable to walk Hobo so I've had custody of him for the past year. When I told Colin the following story it clearly touched his heart. In spite of missing Hobo desperately, he said; 'Hobo is in the right place at the right time.' Hobo's presence has helped me over the death of my beautiful dog Poppy and Carrie, more recently when her dog died. Carrie and her 5 year son old Adam sat in deep grief, mourning the loss of Bramble as they compensated by eating ice cream. Hobo approached Adam and licked his cheek. Adam said: 'Mummy Hobo has brought me a kiss from Bramble.' To be truthful we're not sure whether it was a kiss from Bramble but knowing Hobo it was possibly the ice cream he was after. Dogs have always been the bridge to friendship between Colin and me. I hope you find much comfort in the beautiful words that follow read by Tisha, a dear friend and fellow minister who sometimes looks after Hobo when I go away.

Reading: 'Rainbow Bridge'

Just this side of heaven is a place called Rainbow Bridge.

When an animal dies who has been especially close to someone they go to Rainbow Bridge, There are meadows and hills for all our special friends so they can run and play together. There is plenty of food, water and

sunshine and they are warm and comfortable. Animals that have been ill and old are restored to health and vigour. Those who were hurt or maimed are made strong again, just as we remember them in our dreams of days and times gone by. They are happy and content, except for one small thing; they each miss someone very special to them who had to be left behind.

They all run and play together, but the day comes when they suddenly stop and look into the distance, bright eyes are intent and eager bodies quiver. Suddenly they begin to run from the group, flying over the green grass, their legs carrying them faster and faster. You have been spotted, and when dear Poppy, Susie, Ceaser, Lucy, Bonzee and Tinker are finally united with you, you will cling together in joyous reunion, never to be parted again. Happy woofs rain upon your ears; your hands again caress their beloved heads, and you look once more into the trusting eyes of your beautiful friends, so long gone from your life but never absent from your heart.

Then you cross Rainbow Bridge together. Author unknown

Minister:

Thank you Tisha, I always cry when I read those words – they are so beautiful and so full of hope.

Words from the Minister:

Our lives undoubtedly are a combination of tears of sadness and of laughter. Harsh experiences such as the time Colin spent on HMS Mercury and fighting in the Korean War can colour the way we act and relate to others. Love can be shrouded in confused emotions and sometimes it is difficult to express our feelings.

Like fishing lines, life can become knotted and tangled. Such tangles and misunderstandings can sometimes be unravelled, but not always. But we **can** learn from what has happened in the past and we do have choices. We can either continue to follow family patterns **or** adopt a fresh new approach to life.

I believe that at the end of our days, having lived a full life, dying becomes almost as natural as the setting sun or the ebb and flow of the tides. Death is like the coming of sleep after a pleasant day on the golf course. And now we somehow know, that at the end there is another place without pain or sickness, suffering or fear, where there is a great gathering of love that lives on eternally.

Committal:

Minister: Please stand for the committal - Colin told Kevin recently that if he could live his life over again he would be a game warden, maybe in Kenya. He spent several happy holidays on safari and walking in the wild, which he has visited on a regular basis more latterly through his TV.

Press Button

Play Circle of Life as if 'they' are coming from a distance to collect Colin, increasing the volume for a few seconds - then fade gently for me to speak the words of the committal over background music.

Whether Colin chooses to exit by crossing Rainbow Bridge or via the following committal I have written to honour his love of wildlife; the choice is his.

Let us say together the words on your order of service sheet: Colin, we release you into the oneness, into the wild, where your heart really lies.

Gaining the strength of a lion,

To run with the gazelle,

And fly with the eagles,

A Final Blessing:

As we face the mystery of life and death let the bonds between you be strengthened. Live courageously, for it is the presence of the Spirit of Love that will sustain you now and always

Thank you one and all for coming here today. You are all invited to join the family for light refreshments at the Brigadier Gerard following this service.

Exit Music: From - 'The Circle of Life' from Lion King. Increase volume for the exit...