

# Humanist Ceremonies

**Humanists UK**  
**Funeral Celebrant Training**  
**Sample funeral scripts**

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### **Acknowledgements**

Humanists UK wishes to thank the following celebrants for so generously sharing their time and their scripts: Ian Willox, Alison O’Grady, Felicity Harvest, J Wilkinson and Cate Quinn.

### **Notes**

In each of these scripts is a bespoke-written ceremony. They will give you ideas for structuring a ceremony and - most importantly - making it personal. For ease of reading all stage directions and other ‘working script’ features have been removed. The document has been formatted for double-sided, monochrome print.

## Sample script: woodland burial

**FRIENDS AND FAMILY TRANSFER COFFIN TO BIER AND PUSH TO GRAVESIDE. COFFIN PLACED ON PUGS.**

### OPENING WORDS

We have come together to celebrate the life of B A R who died at S House on 25th Month aged only 31.

### INTRODUCTION

I should introduce myself. My name is XXX XXX. I'm a celebrant for Humanists UK. B's family have asked for a Humanist funeral – a non-religious funeral. That doesn't mean anti-religious. This is a ceremony for everyone – including those with a religious faith.

### THOUGHTS ON LIFE AND DEATH

With or without religion, one of the important things a funeral does is remember. So that B lives on in our memories at least.

So let's remember...

### TRIBUTE

B was born in Oxford, educated in Kidlington and Didcot and, after a couple of years studying Arts and Drama at Abingdon followed by further education in Aberystwyth and Guildford, he returned to Oxford – where he pretty much stayed for the rest of his life. This was his ground.

Before we go any further, B's Nan is going to read a poem that will guide us through this tribute. It's by Nancy Wood. It's from a collection called *Many Winters*. J – please...

### JAKI:

#### **Many Winters**

The earth is all that lasts.  
The earth is what I speak to when  
I do not understand my life  
Nor why I am not heard.  
The earth answers me with the same song  
That it sang for my fathers when  
Their tears covered up the sun.  
The earth sings a song of gladness.  
The earth sings a song of praise.  
The earth rises up and laughs at me  
Each time that I forget  
How spring begins with winter  
And death begins with birth.  
*Nancy Wood*

Thank you J.

When B came back to Oxford he started with pub work before taking a carpentry course at City of Oxford College – which lead to work at the New Bodleian and then to estate management at the Hospital.

In 2009 he was diagnosed with a brain tumour – an astrocytoma. Enough to stop anyone in their tracks. Let alone a young man with everything in front of him.

We're going to pause for another reading – this time from B's Uncle. G is going to read a short excerpt from Terry Pratchett's Reaper Man. G please...

**GEORGE:**

**Reaper Man**

In the Ramtop village where they dance the real Morris dance, for example, they believe that no one is finally dead until the ripples they cause in the world die away—until the clock he wound up winds down, until the wine she made has finished its ferment, until the crop they planted is harvested. The span of someone's life, they say, is only the core of their actual existence.

*Terry Pratchett*

Thank you G.

Time for B's Mum S to give us an idea of his character...

**SUE:**

*[Tribute excluded for GDPR compliance].*

Thank you S.

Six years ago – almost to the day – B met A.

It was at The Library – the pub not the Bodleian. But this is A's story...

**ALICE:**

*[Tribute excluded for GDPR compliance].*

Thank you A.

So this is the B who courts with a swordfish supper. Who will happily eat crocodile and kangaroo – but can't bear the slightest hint of chilli.

This is the B whose idea of a good night in was sitting on the sofa watching Predator – or The Princess Bride.

This is the B who proposed to A on Christmas morning while they were still in bed.

This is the B who engraved teaspoons with the name of every guest who came to the wedding.

This is the B who honeymooned with A in New Zealand – three weeks visiting Hobbiton and the Glowworm Caves. Who went whale watching and seal watching. Who was elected Chief of the Tribe at the Maori Village Experience.

This is the B who would talk to anybody – often in their own language.

This is the B who piloted his maiden flight only two years ago. It was actually S's flight – she'd won it in a raffle – but B and A got to accompany her – and B got a go at the controls. He loved it. Loved it? He actually flew the plane for the whole hour flight, landed it twice and was apparently a natural. A and S just sat in the back!

This is the B behind the “party ward” at the JR. Who had so many visitors that they had to give him a visitors room of his own to cope.

This is the B who as a child would, according to S, roll down that White Horse “in a terrifying manner”.

This is the B who died at S House on 25<sup>th</sup> Month.

This is the B who is still rippling through our world.

### **QUIET REFLECTION**

We're coming to the end of this celebration of B's life. But before we do we're going to pause for a moment of reflection. A chance for you to digest all you've heard. A chance for you to recall your own memories of him. A chance, if you wish, to pray silently.

### **SILENCE**

### **COMMITTAL**

Just as we welcome a child into our lives we must say goodbye to those who leave us. This celebration of B's life is complete. It's time to say farewell to him. This may be difficult but it is important. I hope the memories we've talked about here may give you some comfort.

Gentlemen please...

### ***BEARERS TAKE STRAIN ON STRAPS, PUGS REMOVED, COFFIN SLOWLY LOWERED INTO THE GRAVE***

### **FINAL FAREWELL**

Our atoms and molecules come from the earth;  
Are ordered by ancestry;  
Are fired into life by union;  
Are sustained by the earth and powered by the sun;  
And return to the earth when life ends.

*J Stuffin*

B A R. Beloved husband, son, brother, grandson, nephew, cousin and friend to many. Chief of the Tribe.

We commit your body to the earth. Rest in the hearts and minds of all you love and all who love you.

Or as Terry Pratchett would have it: "We commend your soul to any God that can find it."

We're going to round off the committal with a song. The same song that was sung at A and B's wedding. You'll find the words in your order of service.

**MUSIC:**

**Lean On Me – Bill Withers**

Sometimes in our lives  
We all have pain, we all have sorrow.  
But if we are wise,  
We know that there's always tomorrow.

Lean on me when you're not strong  
I'll be your friend, I'll help you carry on  
For it won't be long  
'Til I'm gonna need somebody to lean on.

Please swallow your pride  
If I have things you need to borrow  
For no one can fill those of your needs  
That you won't let show.

You just call on me, brother, when you need a hand  
We all need somebody to lean on.  
I just might have a problem that you'll understand,  
We all need somebody to lean on.

Lean on me when you're not strong  
And I'll be your friend I'll help you carry on  
For it won't be long  
'Til I'm gonna need somebody to lean on

You just call on me, brother, when you need a hand  
We all need somebody to lean on.  
I just might have a problem that you'll understand,  
We all need somebody to lean on.

If there is a load  
You have to bear  
That you can't carry  
I'm right up the road

I'll share your load  
If you just call me.

Thank you

### **CLOSING WORDS**

We've celebrated B's life. We've said our goodbyes. But we have our memories. And the rest of our lives to remember.

If you want to share those memories – or just some refreshment – you're warmly invited to join the family at a bring your own picnic here in Woodland. From two to five this afternoon B's favourite pub – XXX in XXX Road - will be open just for you. You'll find details in your order of service.

As you leave you'll see that you can make a donation in B's memory to S House, Maggie's Centres and The Brain Tumour Charity. Again you'll find details in your order of service.

But before any of that there's something you could help with. Once you've paid your final respects to B you can help fill in his grave. It's not obligatory and the traditional gravedigger is on hand to guide you. But it might be a final kindness that you want to do for B.

I'm going to step back now and leave you alone with B. L has some earth you may want to scatter on B's grave. Or if you prefer – some sprigs of rosemary.

Please take good care of yourselves and each other.

Thank you for coming.

### **EXIT**





# Sample script: a simple ceremony

## Introductory Words

Welcome. You have come here today to remember JW who died on 29<sup>th</sup> August 2017 after several years of illness. He was fortunate to have been able to die at home as he had wished to do. He was much loved and is sorely missed by his wife E, his children, grandchildren and by old friends and former colleagues. We have come here to this beautiful place both to remember him and to celebrate his life.

My name is Alison O'Grady. I am a humanist celebrant, and I am here to guide you through this non-religious ceremony. As you will know, JW was a man who did not like a fuss. He kept a journal for many years, even when in hospital, where he noted his wish to leave the ward, by making "a furtive escape covered by a flurry of activity elsewhere". We hope to respect his approach to life with this brief and simple ceremony. There will be a poem, a short account of his life, and a time for quiet reflection before we commit JW's body to the ground.

Humanists believe that there is one world and we have one life. Death is simply part of nature and as natural as life itself, and all life has its beginning, its middle, and its end. The death of someone close to us reminds us both of our own mortality, and of others we have loved and lost. And although death separates us from those we love, they live on in our hearts and minds and memories, and their presence may be felt in old familiar places.

## Poem: Remember Me, by Ctine Rossetti, read by H

Remember me when I am gone away,  
Gone far away into the silent land;  
When you can no more hold me by the hand,  
Nor I half turn to go yet turning stay.  
Remember me when no more day by day  
You tell me of our future that you plann'd:  
Only remember me; you understand  
It will be late to counsel then or pray.  
Yet if you should forget me for a while  
And afterwards remember, do not grieve:  
For if the darkness and corruption leave  
A vestige of the thoughts that once I had,  
Better by far you should forget and smile  
Than that you should remember and be sad.

## Life Story:

JW was fortunate to lead several different lives within the span of his 82 years: the Coventry years as a child and young man, the Wolverhampton years as a lecturer and family man, and the Kinnerton years in retirement. The constant threads throughout were his great sense of humour, his unwavering and sometimes long-suffering support for Coventry City FC, his love and appreciation of the outdoors, and above all, his love for the family. He loved music, particularly classical music, as long as it had a tune, and played rugby, football, tennis and badminton in his time. He was an active man, who always preferred outdoors to being inside; a man who embraced life to the full.

JW was born and brought up in Coventry, leaving to go to Oxford in 1954 to study PPE. He met E shortly before leaving home, when he was working as a porter in the local hospital, and she was training to be a nurse. It was not an auspicious first encounter: E told him off for his rough handling of a patient he was bringing back from theatre. But they gradually got to know each other, love blossomed, and once JW had graduated they were able to get married. They became proud parents to M and S whilst in Coventry, and later to J.

JW became a lecturer in Economics, taking up a post in Wolverhampton Polytechnic in 1962-63, and they stayed in Wolverhampton for the next 20 years. These were busy years, with full time work, family life, and various DIY projects around the home. JW also found time in 1974 to write a book, which was to become a standard text for post graduate students of microeconomics. But they also managed to get away over summer weekends with the caravan, often going with other families to a farm near Presteigne, which served as a wonderful introduction to the area. They camped in a field with no amenities of any sort, apart from a stream, and they loved it. Family holidays were generally spent with the caravan exploring parts of France or Spain, and doing their best to avoid other Brits...

JW and E found their house, Cognovit, in Year, using it initially as a holiday cottage, until they both took early retirement in Year. Work then started in earnest to renovate the almost derelict cottage, to create a garden at the front, and to tame the paddock at the back. Trees were planted, flower beds created, and a veg plot dug. Livestock followed, including ducks, chickens, geese, goats, a donkey, various cats and Sal the Scottish border collie. JW was never happier than when he was outside working on the smallholding and enjoying the views afforded by the idyllic hillside location. He acquired new knowledge and expertise – learning about plants and flowers, and became a keen birdwatcher. JW and E were fortunate to be able to enjoy more than 30 years together in their wonderful home.

JW first became unwell in 2014, but he was a good, determined and easy patient, very well cared for at home by E, with excellent support from staff at XXX hospice in his final weeks.

### **Quiet Reflection:**

We now have a short period for quiet reflection when you can listen to the sounds around us, remember JW and think about the times you spent with him.

### **Notices:**

The family would like to express their gratitude to all the staff at XXX hospice who enabled JW's passing to be so peaceful. They would welcome donations to the hospice in his memory.

**Committal:**

We have come to the part of the ceremony where you must say goodbye to JW

"To everything there is a season  
And a time for every purpose on earth  
A time to be born and a time to die  
Here in this last act in sorrow, but not in fear  
In love and appreciation, we say our final goodbye."

JW:

The peace of the flowing air to you  
The peace of the quiet earth to you  
The peace of the shining stars to you  
And the love and care of us all to you.  
Rest now at the end of your days,  
Rest in the hearts and minds of those you loved.

We release you  
Into the warmth of our memories,  
We commit you  
Into the eternal circle of life,  
We free you  
Into the embrace of nature.

JW will now be a part of this beautiful place through all the seasons and for all time; through the long warm days of summer, the cold and chill and storms of winter, through the freshness, green and flowering of spring, and the mists and fine colours of autumn. He will be at rest and in peace.

**Closing Words:**

You have been remembering JW and celebrating his life: a devoted husband, father, grandfather, lecturer, author, smallholder, and ardent if long-suffering Coventry City supporter. He was a man with a great sense of humour, who loved the outdoor life and disliked fuss and ceremony. If he were here, he would be wondering what all the fuss is about....

But he will live on in your hearts and minds and memories, and in the retelling of stories and anecdotes about him.

We will close with the words of Philip Larkin: "What will survive of us is love"



## **Sample script: transgender suicide**

**(Note: although the deceased lived as “K”(female name), the family requested that the celebrant use male pronouns throughout the ceremony)**

*Music: ‘For a Friend’, Communards*

### **Welcome**

We have come together today to remember, with love and appreciation, the life of K J, who was found dead at home by his friends B and C on September 13th.

This will be a non-religious occasion, in line with K’s beliefs. My name is Felicity Harvest and as a celebrant member of Humanists UK I have been asked to lead this ceremony today. Humanism is not simply a non-religious outlook on life, it is a Posophy which takes human reason as its guiding principle, and advocates love, kindness, and support for our fellow human beings. Humanists believe that people are good, and that it is our responsibility to care for each other, for the world, and for all of its creatures.

I’m sure that everyone here today, whatever your own beliefs, will agree that we should do our very best to live a good life, and to support others to do so. These are values we all share as human beings. So people of all faiths and those of none are welcome here today.

In the course of the ceremony, we will hear stories from K’s life, some poetry and some music, and there will be time for reflection, when you can remember K in your own way or in terms of your own faith.

K’s family are of course experiencing a huge sense of loss. They draw some comfort, though, from the presence of all of you who have come today to say your farewells. It is much appreciated that you are here.

### **Thoughts on life and death**

We all know that, in order for there to be life, there must be death. Death is the one certainty in our lives. It comes to all of us and we should not fear it. Nevertheless, it is always overwhelmingly sad and shocking when someone dies suddenly as K did. It’s right and natural that you should grieve, because your sorrow is a measure of your love and affection for him. Though you will always miss K, you will always have fond memories too, which you will take into the future. And that will give him a kind of immortality.

Even when a life is cut short, and had its difficulties, we can still celebrate it. As you remember K’s life today, perhaps you will feel able to smile at memories of the good times, even while you grieve his loss.

K loved music, and we couldn't fit in everything that was suggested for this funeral. One of the songs that didn't quite make it was Linkin Park's *One More Light*, and we had already decided to include the lyrics, before we found out that the band's lead singer, Chester Bennington, took his own life only a few months ago. Clearly there is a lot of understanding behind these words.

*Should've stayed, were there signs, I ignored?  
Can I help you, not to hurt, anymore?  
We saw brilliance, when the world, was asleep  
There are things that we can have, but can't keep*

*If they say  
Who cares if one more light goes out?  
In a sky of a million stars  
It flickers, flickers  
Who cares when someone's time runs out?  
If a moment is all we are  
We're quicker, quicker  
Who cares if one more light goes out?  
Well I do  
The reminders pull the floor from your feet  
In the kitchen, one more chair than you need oh  
And you're angry, and you should be, it's not fair  
Just 'cause you can't see it, doesn't mean it isn't there.  
Who cares if one more light goes out?  
Well I do*

### **The Tribute**

K was born on the 17<sup>th</sup> June Year, the son of N and B J. She was a wages clerk, and he was a sign-writer, printer and window-dresser, including being involved in dressing Selfridges Christmas Grotto. K was the middle of three children, P being the elder brother and J the younger sister. The family lived in Wembley when the older two children were born, but moved to Rainham just before J's birth, and that's where the children grew up.

It was a happy childhood, with a little black dog called S, a psycho cat called Pepsi who attacked dogs, and family holidays in Broadstairs. P remembers them playing together with Lego, Airfix kits and Thunderbirds, and J remembers K attacking her Cindies with his Action Men.

K made lots of friends at school, and the house was always full of them, particularly when there was football on the telly, all of them crammed onto the settee with their cans of beer. Christmas was a big thing for the family, and, after a few sherries, N would have everyone crying with laughter.

After leaving school K went into the building trade, first as a hodder and then after a spell at college as a bricklayer. This period of his life included a time working in Germany, *Auf*

*Wiederseh'n Pet* style. He worked on many of the big projects of the time, including getting right to the top of the QE2 Bridge.

K, as he was known then, had a series of girlfriends at this time, many of them friends of his sister J. It was while he was with N that he went out with a drink with some of his Irish mates from the site after work, and got so drunk that he fell asleep on the train, and was woken up by the cleaner in Ramsgate. He got back on the train to head back to Rainham, where he had a date with N, but fell asleep again and ended up back at Victoria. N was not well pleased. Another time, he and D had been drinking in the Cricketers and K was so drunk that D had to put him in a wheelbarrow to get him to the next destination, the Three Sisters.

It was a big friendship group, and K was a big figure in it in every way. His fondness for dressing up was beginning to emerge – at that stage, he had a flat-top with a huge quiff which stuck out 12 inches in front of him, if P's gestures when he was telling me about it are accurate! In order to achieve this he spent hours getting ready, so was well known among his friends for always being late. And he was even then a bit of an exhibitionist – when he was kicked in the genitals by a friend he entertained everyone who came near him by showing off the bruised result. He'd always take on a challenge, often for a bet, like eating a ridiculously hot curry which he clearly wasn't enjoying.

Gradually, though, the drinking became more than social, perhaps spurred on by the decline in K's physical and mental health, and, as he realised he also had issues with his gender identity, he became more and more depressed.

And things probably weren't helped by his move to London, away from all you supportive friends. In part this move was prompted by his rehab, but he also had a yearning for the bright lights of the capital. And at times, Rainham had not been the best place to be, as K became more publicly K. He suffered some verbal and physical abuse, and it was therefore no surprise that the more cosmopolitan London had a strong appeal. He did make new friends there, who didn't care which version of him came over to see them on any given day, but he could also be very lonely.

Which is not to say K lived a depressing life. He loved seeing his family, and in particular to play with his nephew Sam. He loved animals, though he never had a pet of his own, perhaps recognising that he might let it down – though he used to have a very special relationship with the family cat, Tinkabelle, who would sit on the doorstep with him, watching his every move while he had a ciggy. He enjoyed events like Pride, and sometimes J went with him to gay clubs and saw what a good time he could have. He was artistic, could draw really well, and in his youth wrote poems to all those girlfriends.

And he was very lucky to have a supportive family – he could easily have met with judgement and criticism, instead he had support and acceptance. J describes him as the classic Gemini, able to be two entirely different people at once.

## **The Reflection**

We are now going to pause so you can reflect on K in your own way.

During this reflection, you're going to hear one of K's favourites, Blondie, sing "Dreaming".

*Music: 'Dreaming', Blondie*

### **The Committal**

Please will you now stand if you are able.

We now reach the part of the ceremony where we say goodbye to K's body. First I'm going to read a short poem called "We Can't Judge", which says a lot about a person who died before their time:

*We cannot judge a biography by its length,  
Nor by the number of pages in it.  
We must judge it by the richness of its contents  
Sometimes those unfinished are among the most poignant.  
We cannot judge a song by its duration  
Nor by the number of its notes  
We must judge it by the way it touches and lifts our souls  
Sometimes those unfinished are among the most beautiful.  
And when something has enriched your life  
And when its melody lingers on in your heart  
Is it unfinished? Or is it endless?*

We have been remembering, with sadness and with love, the life of K J. He is now beyond harm and so in this last rite, in sorrow rather than fear, we commit his body back to the elements from which he came.

*K, we feel privileged that you lived.  
We grieve that you are no longer with us,  
but we know that you will live on in the hearts,  
lives and memories of those who knew and loved you.  
We took delight in your friendship and the good times we shared.  
We sorrowed at the difficulties that you faced.  
We remember with gratitude, your character and all your qualities.  
And now with love we leave you in peace.  
And with respect we bid you farewell.*

*The curtains are closed*

K is now at peace. He saw, heard, and felt what others did not and could not. He was different. May you, his family and friends, build on the pain of separation, to strengthen each other, to face the ongoing tasks of life with courage. And with love for each other, and remembrance of the goodness and happy hours you shared.

Please sit



## **Closing words**

As we end our ceremony today I hope you have gained some comfort from being here together. As you return to your work, your homes and the routines of your daily lives remember how you felt sharing these moments. Take away with you your own memories of K and his place in your lives. In our relationships and friendships; in the work of our hands and minds; and by our example, some essence of us remains. So K will always be part of your lives; and in remembering him you will be paying him the greatest tribute.

The family would like me to thank you once again for being here today to support them and to remember K. You are all invited to join them at M and S's for the wake – if you don't know where it is, just ask J or P and they'll tell you how to get there.

If you wish to make a donation in K's memory, please make it to the PDSA in Gillingham, in recognition of his love of animals.

Take care of yourselves, and of each other.

*Music: 'Yes Sir, I Can Boogie', Baccara*



## Sample script: York Cemetery

### Opening words

Welcome to you all. Thank you for coming here today to commemorate and honour the life of Deceased; to express your love and respect for her, and to bring some consolation to her family who are deeply saddened by her sudden and untimely death: her husband Husband; their children Daughter 1, Daughter 2 and Daughter 3 and their families, her sister Sister and brother-in-law; her cousins, her nieces and nephews and Husband's family.

You are all here today because you have one important thing in common – your lives have been touched by the good fortune of having known Deceased.

My name is Cate Quinn and I am a Humanist Celebrant, accredited by Humanists UK. I have been asked to conduct the funeral ceremony for Deceased here this morning by her family, because Deceased wanted a non-religious funeral.

This may feel like a different kind of ceremony from those you have attended before, whatever your faith, or none, but I hope it may prove of comfort to you. Everyone is welcome. We are bound together by our common links of kinship, love and friendship. We will touch on points of Deceased's life that will have affected you in different ways and will mean different things to each of you. They may evoke memories which you can take away from here and keep safe.

We will also listen to some music chosen especially for today - for example, you entered to the sound of 'Venus, the Bringer of Peace' from Gustav Holst's 'The Planets'. This piece was chosen by Daughter 3 as she has special memories of listening to it on trips in the car with her Mum while her big sisters were at school.

Later in the ceremony, there will be an opportunity for everyone to say a personal farewell to Deceased, in a manner that is most meaningful for them, as we share a period of quiet reflection.

Most importantly, this is an opportunity to share memories of the life and personality that was Deceased: strongly principled and socially aware with abundant goodwill towards others and devoted to her family.

Deceased is to be buried in York Cemetery. And so, following this ceremony, there will be a few words at the graveside, attended by those who wish or are able to do so. Everyone is welcome to join them afterwards at The Parsonage hotel in Escrick.

### Thoughts on life and death

Facing the death of a loved one can be particularly hard when a life seems to have been cut unnaturally short. As you may know, Deceased died from a very rare and rapidly progressing illness. From when she became ill to the time she died in the company of her close family, in St Leonard's Hospice, was a matter of just a few short weeks.

Deceased's family are still reeling from the shock, but are thankful to the hospital and

hospice staff that cared for both Deceased's and their needs during this most difficult of times, and who helped to make her as comfortable as possible.

Husband and his daughters are also deeply grateful to Deceased's sister and her husband, who have given them immense support over the last few weeks. They are also grateful to the members of their church who provided them with much-welcomed cooked meals each night when they were visiting Deceased at the hospice.

It is inevitable that you will feel grief and pain today, particularly with the sudden and traumatic nature of Deceased's death. Indeed, you may feel angry, shocked or cheated that Deceased's life ended so soon, in anticipation of the golden years of retirement to be shared with her husband, Husband, and her children; and of the joys of seeing her new grandchildren grow and develop. But this is natural and these emotions need to run their course.

You may feel that her loss is impossible to put into words, or even, perhaps, to accept. It may seem impossible to find the appropriate words to say to Deceased's family - there are no words that can do justice to such a profound loss.

The hardest, but also the most rewarding part of being human is to love; we may experience great joy and fulfilment, but also intense grief and sorrow at the loss of a loved one. But the depth of that sorrow and loss is matched by the extent of your love for them. The neurologist, Oliver Sachs, wrote:

*"There will be no one like us when we are gone, but then there is no one like anyone else, ever. When people die, they cannot be replaced. They leave holes that cannot be filled. "*

But the joy of having known that person, and the comfort of having them in your memories, is never lost. The knowledge that, for all of us, our lives are limited, makes life even more precious, momentous and extraordinary.

Recognition of our dependence on, and responsibility for, each other gives life purpose and significance. We are each influenced by the decisions, characters and attitudes of those that have gone before us, and who, therefore, in a sense live on in us.

It is within this context that you may seek communal joy and comfort in the fact that you were lucky enough to share in Deceased's life, and in the impact she had on those around her.

I am now going to read 'Sonnet 60' by William Shakespeare, which has been chosen, in part, because of Deceased's love for Shakespeare.

**'Sonnet 60', by William Shakespeare**

*Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore,  
So do our minutes hasten to their end;  
Each changing place with that which goes before,  
In sequent toil all forwards do contend.  
Nativity, once in the main of light,*

*Crawls to maturity, wherewith being crown'd,  
Crooked eclipses 'gainst his glory fight,  
And time that gave doth now his gift confound.  
Time doth transfix the flourish set on youth  
And delves the parallels in beauty's brow,  
Feeds on the rarities of nature's truth,  
And nothing stands but for his scythe to mow:  
And yet to times in hope my verse shall stand.  
Praising thy worth, despite his cruel hand.*

### **Tribute**

I did not have the privilege of knowing Deceased personally. But I have spent time with Husband and their three daughters to get to know about her life and what was most important to her.

Deceased was born on 11th January 1956; one of three children born to Mum and Dad. She grew up in the Birkby district of Huddersfield with her sister, Sister, and brother, Brother. Her father was a bookbinder and her mother cared for the family alongside a variety of jobs in cleaning and catering.

Deceased had a happy childhood playing on the rec' and with her beloved cat Timmy, who used to wait patiently by the table waiting for her to slip him a morsel of fish and sneak upstairs to sleep on the blankets of her bed.

As a child, she was a very outgoing person – always the one up for a dare, or to get up to high japes such as riding down the stairs in a baby's bathtub; or borrowing her brother Brother's red bike (without permission) only to hurtle out of control down Leslie Street, buckling the wheel on the kerb on the far side of Blacker Road.

She regularly accompanied her mother on her near-daily visits to her grandmother and would go shopping in town with her mum, Sister and cousin.

Although Deceased's father held many traditional beliefs he was firmly in favour of education for women.

Her mother loved to read and placed great credence on the importance of a good education and consequently Deceased was always encouraged to do well at school. This stayed with her for the rest of her life, shaping the way in which Deceased brought up her own children.

Deceased first met Husband when she was just 14. They both went to the same youth club and used to talk together incessantly. When she was 15 she was involved in a terrible car accident. She was hospitalised for a long time and afterwards chose to leave school and instead attend the technical college, with her Brother.

At the technical college, she completed her O and A levels. This enabled her to progress on to higher education at Huddersfield Polytechnic. Her real love was English Literature and she studied this along with History and Politics in the first year.

But it later became clear that the History and Politics Department offered the better course,

and so in the end she opted for a degree in History and Politics. However, she never lost her love of literature.

Deceased made some good friends at college, and was particularly close to X. She was very touched when, at X's special birthday celebrations last year, she got top billing in X's synopsis of her life to date. She also enjoyed the scone fest, it should be said!

Deceased grew up in a staunchly socialist family, both her father and grandfather were trade unionists and Labour party members. She took her politics and strong sense of social justice from her father.

She read 'The Guardian' every day and was a strong feminist. However, it is only recently that she has become a card-carrying Labour Party member, having felt disenfranchised by the party's policies for the last 20 years or so.

Husband and Deceased rekindled their friendship again one New Year's Eve, when they got chatting in earnest and he walked her home. Husband was keen to get engaged as soon as possible, but Deceased put him off, feeling that she was too young. When pressed she said that perhaps she would be old enough when she was 18.

Husband took this as a promise and happily they did get engaged when she turned 18. Deceased had chosen to study at the local polytechnic so that they would not have to be apart. They married a year later in 1975, and were fortunate enough to be able to move into the house that they had already purchased and been doing up in Golcar, prior to the wedding.

Husband was working for the Yorkshire Electricity Board at the time. By coincidence, so was Deceased's mother - in the canteen. He had no qualms about using his family connections to get extra helpings at lunchtime.

Deceased's first job was working for the Health Authority as the administrator for the Immunisation Team. She was keen to advance and started studying for a Diploma with the Institute of Health Service Administrators. However, she did not complete this because she fell pregnant with their first child, Daughter 1, who was born in 1980, followed closely by Daughter 2 in 1982 and Daughter 3 in 1984.

Husband and Deceased talked long and hard about which of them should stay at home to look after the children, but, in Husband's words, "Deceased won!". Nonetheless, they always had a very 'democratic' approach to childcare. They made sure that their children felt safe and secure in the warmth of a closely-knit family and had happy childhoods. Deceased, for her part, took on her parental duties with fervour.

An avid reader herself, she thought it particularly important to read to the children before bed time. Both Husband and the children have fond memories of her sitting in their big brown chair with babies snuggled up on both sides, telling them bed-time stories; their imaginations flying away to magical lands. She was pleased when the story to picture ratio increased as they got older.

It came as a bit of a shock when Husband was made redundant shortly after Daughter 2 was

born. However, he soon got another job at Joseph Rowntree's, and for a short period of time was commuting between Huddersfield and York. A benefit for Deceased was the fact that Husband brought home six new books for her every Wednesday from the Rowntree's Memorial Library. She had usually read them by the Monday.

A good book was always a safe bet if you wanted to buy a present for Deceased. She particularly liked biographies, but also enjoyed fiction. However, as time moved on, it became an increasing challenge to find something she hadn't already read.

Eventually, Deceased and Husband found their new home in York, where they have lived ever since. They chose it, not for its bricks and mortar, but for its garden.

Deceased had not had the benefit of a garden at home in Huddersfield, and was captivated by the extensive, naturalistic, green space that stretched from the house to an undeveloped field beyond.

The garden has provided a focus for family-oriented activities. The children loved to play in it and the whole family enjoyed eating outside, sitting out long into the night around a fire, debating everything and anything. More recently, it has become a tradition to host an August Bank Holiday BBQ along with members of the wider family.

The garden has also seen some unexpected visitors pass through. The family have opened their curtains not only to be greeted by squirrels, ducks and rabbits, but also a peacock, an unattended horse and even deer!

Once, when Deceased was enjoying a few moments and a well-earned rest in a deck chair, she looked up to find she was face to face with a fox. It is debatable to this day who was the most scared.

Both Deceased's Sister and brother were very important to her. She was delighted when Sister also moved to York in 1986, which meant that they could spend more time together. They would meet each week, alternating between visiting an elderly aunt, whilst she was alive, and having lunch and going shopping in York. They also enjoyed spending Christmas together as a family.

Brother had a special place in the hearts of all the family. He socialised with the adults and always paid special attention to his nieces and nephew.

His home up in Newcastle became a base for family holidays, from which they visited castles and the Northumberland beaches. Every Christmas or birthday brought forth an 'Uncle Brother present', which was usually something special. He was sadly missed, when he died in 2000.

Deceased enjoyed walking in the countryside, particularly in the Helmsley area. She loved the North Yorkshire Moors, little country villages, the dry-stone walls and the sea.

When Deceased was ready to return to work, she thought that she would act on her belief that everyone should have a right to a good education and started teacher training. Although she enjoyed many aspects of the course, it did not fit well into family life and so,

with some regret, she decided to look for another role.

It was fortuitous that the Land Registry had just opened a new office in York and were looking to recruit. Deceased applied on the off chance and was offered a post. This time she studied for a Diploma in land registration law and practice. This was hard work, involving distance learning and several study days in London, but she took to it straight away. She particularly liked the legal aspects and said that she wished she had known about it when first embarking on a career.

Deceased stayed with the Land Registry until the office closed in 2007. She made some good friends whilst working there and continued to regularly meet up with a group of them for a meal.

By this time, she had become very skilled in her work and soon found another job in the conveyancing department at XXX Solicitors in York. Deceased was not only highly regarded for her professional knowledge and opinion, but also, as a person.

But, I think it would be true to say that Deceased found her greatest fulfilment and sense of achievement in being a mother. When the children were little she took her responsibilities very seriously.

She always made sure that the girls had a fun activity to do each day, like painting, making something, or a picnic in the park; and she spent hours playing games with them and teaching them to read and write. She also played an active role in helping to govern the children's play school.

She also taught them how to cook. They got to make the crumble, whilst she made the Sunday dinner. As they got older, they enjoyed sharing recipes and cooking ideas. Deceased would always go out of her way to bring home some special ingredient. Later, she was always at her happiest when the whole family was together.

Deceased's children meant the world to her. Indeed, her daughters say that she would always put them before herself and was always there for them, through tears and smiles. She never let them want for anything she could provide and would have gone to the ends of the earth for them.

They were brought up to always know that they were loved and treasured, beyond any shadow of a doubt, and so learnt how to love in return. This is something they will carry with them forever and which gives them strength and certainty.

The next poem has been chosen by Daughter 2 as it reflects the feelings of Deceased's daughters and Husband. It is called 'In Remembrance' by Christine Currah.

**'In Remembrance', by Ctine Currah**

*You gave me life*

*To live as I please,*

*You gave me love and*

*Support to follow my dreams.*

*Your beauty lives*



*Forever deep in my soul,  
The memory of your love  
Fills my heart  
And I am never alone.*

Thank you, Daughter 2. From what you all have told me, that captures perfectly the gift that Deceased has given to you all.

Husband is so proud of the dedication and affection Deceased showed in bringing up their children to be confident and independent young women.

She felt it was very important that the family sat down to eat together and would carry on her own family tradition of talking about world affairs around the dinner table. All three of her daughters have all gone on to university - Daughter 1 specialising in Physics, Daughter 3 in Design and Business, and Daughter 2 in History, Languages and Politics.

Daughter 2 knows that she inherited her love of reading, history and politics from her mother; sharing her interest in the world, in other people, places and other languages; reading the newspaper; watching history documentaries; discussing, debating and arguing – setting the world to rights.

Whilst Deceased may have found it difficult to let her daughters go, she would always encourage them to make the most of opportunities available to them, and set them free to *go adventuring around the world – but the moment they were out of sight?*

For example, when Daughter 1 went off to India for her gap year, Deceased cried all the way home from Heathrow to York! And in spite of their safe return from far-flung places, Deceased would still be anxious about them coming home from a night out in York. Although Deceased had not had the same opportunities for travel as her daughters, there were enjoyable family cottage holidays in Britain and Deceased also enjoyed trips to France, Greece and Italy.

Deceased was always happy to welcome her daughters back home and exceptionally happy to see any one of them. Equally, she managed to make each one of them feel special. This *made Daughter 1 feel “ridiculously, unjustifiably important”, but she knew it “brought [Deceased] so much pleasure that [she] could not deny it”.*

Daughter 1 has very happy memories of the time she came back to York to live with her Mum and Dad for a wonderful year, which also gave them the chance to really get to know her husband, Son in Law 1.

Deceased was delighted to become a grandparent, when Daughter 3 and Son in Law 2's son, and Daughter 1 and Son in Law's daughter were born within just six weeks of one another. The family were all together on bonfire night to share in the pleasure of their first fireworks and have many other special memories of this time. They shared the grandchildren's first Christmas together shortly before she became ill.

You will now hear a poem entitled “You can shed tears that she is gone”, which reflects how Daughter 1 would like to remember her mum.

***“You can shed tears that she is gone”, (Anon)***

*You can shed tears that she is gone*

*or you can smile because she has lived.*

*You can close your eyes and pray that she’ll come back*

*or you can open your eyes and see all she’s left.*

*Your heart can be empty because you can’t see her*

*or you can be full of the love you shared.*

*You can turn your back on tomorrow and live yesterday*

*or you can be happy for tomorrow because of yesterday.*

*You can remember her and only that she’s gone*

*or you can cherish her memory and let it live on.*

*You can cry and close your mind, be empty and turn your back*

*or you can do what she’d want: smile, open your eyes love and go on.*

Thank you for that, Daughter 1. Whilst it may be hard now, the hope is that in time this is exactly how you will remember her. Today is partly about fixing those special times to memory so that they can be recalled both with joy and when needed.

Deceased was talented in the knitting and sewing department. She started making her own clothes as a teenager to save money, and made the bridesmaids dresses for her own wedding.

On moving to York, she furnished her new home with her home-made curtains and cushions. A new wave of dressmaking began when the children were born, and she began knitting again with the arrival of the grandchildren. Her impressive output has worn out two sewing machines!

Daughter 3’s creative talents may also have stemmed from her mother. Her son, is sporting one of his grandma’s knitted creations today in her memory.

We will now hear a tribute that Daughter 3 has written for her mother.

**Daughter 3’s tribute**

*[excluded for GDPR compliance]*

Thank you, Daughter 3 for those beautiful and heartfelt thoughts.

As Deceased neared retirement age, she started working part-time again, so that she could enjoy more time with Husband, already retired. She was looking forward to her full retirement, but getting increasingly frustrated by the fact that her official pension age was receding further and further into the future.

Sadly, Deceased was never to realise this ambition and died far too soon. However, the family are so enormously glad that they got to spend time together this last year; with Husband retired, Daughter 2 returned from her travels, Daughter 1 and Daughter 3 on maternity leave and Sister living nearby.

Husband and Deceased got to celebrate their 40th wedding anniversary, visiting special

places in Yorkshire where they have always lived, and last year they celebrated Deceased's 60th birthday with a weekend away in Bath together.

Shortly before her illness took hold, Deceased was able to enjoy Grandson's first birthday party and Daughter 2's birthday, when they all had a lovely day out in Grassington. A few days afterwards she managed a quiet celebration of her own birthday. Sadly, Deceased was not well enough to share in Granddaughter's first birthday in February.

### **Quiet reflection**

In a moment, there will be an opportunity to spend a few minutes in quiet, private reflection to recall your most precious memories of Deceased. Please do so in whatever way is most meaningful for you.

As you do, Greig's 'Last Spring' will be playing in the background. This piece seemed particularly fitting and was chosen because of its peaceful nature.

### **Closing words**

Life is a journey for us all, long or short, but it is particularly hard to bear the death of someone close when you feel they are gone too soon and that you should have had more time together.

At times like these, it is very easy to think about all the things that might have been; all the things you might have done.

There is no way to ease that pain. But when we lose someone we love, even in tragic circumstances, life goes on.

So, it is also important to think about the things that you are glad about, for there have been plenty, and these are what will keep you going, and in time help you smile again. As you live your life, do so enriched by having known Deceased as a loving wife, sister, mother, grandmother, cousin or friend. Look beyond the grief of today and recall your most joyous memories of Deceased.

Cherish your family and friends, for they have the capacity to give you the greatest comfort and happiness. Live your lives to the full, to the benefit of those around you, as she would have wished you to do.

The final choice of music this morning is 'Albatross' by Fleetwood Mac. This was chosen because it was one of Husband and Deceased's favourites.

Please stay and listen to the music for a while if you wish. The Funeral Director will lead you out when it is time to leave. On behalf of Deceased's family, I thank you all for sharing in this ceremony and I wish you a safe journey home.

As you leave, you may like to make a donation to the St. Leonard's Hospice in honour of Deceased. Her family want to offer a massive "thank you" to all those who helped care for her and to enable other families to benefit from their care.

In a few minutes, the family will lead the procession to the graveside followed by those who wish or are able to accompany them.

Should you wish, you are invited to make your way to the 'Coach House' at The Parsonage in Escrick, where you may continue to freely share your stories and fond memories of Deceased. The family will join you shortly after the burial.

For those of you making your way to the graveside, please take care as there is a little distance to cover over uneven ground.

Thank you.

### **The Interment (at York Cemetery)**

In love and respect, we have remembered and celebrated the life of Deceased, a unique and much-loved member of the family. We now come to the part of the ceremony, where we must say our final goodbyes.

Deceased, the many people whose lives you have touched will remember you with deep affection and warmth. The story of your life is ended, but the part you played in theirs continues to affect the people you cared about. May your love reside in your husband's heart, your smile be reflected in your children's faces and your voice in your grandchildren's laughter.

Now, in sorrow, but without fear, we commit Deceased's body to the ground – to be returned to the elements and re-emerge as the myriad and beautiful forms of life around you. You have been in the hearts of those you have cherished and will be until they also die.

*The peace of the quiet earth to you, the peace of the gliding stream to you;  
The peace of the shining stars to you; and the love and the care of us all to you.*

Farewell, Deceased.

If you would now like to scatter the daffodils grown by Deceased in your garden. It is now time to leave Deceased in this peaceful setting. Through the snows of Winter, the freshness of Spring, the warmth of Summer and the glory of Autumn, she will be a part of this place forever.

Should you choose to return here, I hope that your positive memories of Deceased will bring you comfort. But remember, the dead do not reside in a grave - they continue to live on in the hearts and minds of those whose lives they have touched. For remember:

*"Loss leaves a heartache no one can heal; love leaves a memory no one can steal"*  
(Anon)

This brings our ceremony to an end. I hope that you have derived some comfort from sharing your thoughts and feelings with all those who cared about Deceased. When you leave here and go about your daily life, hold onto her in your thoughts. Talk about her often, and enjoy your memories of her, just as we have done today.

I would just like to leave you with a few words from Ewan Maccoll from 'The joy of living'.

**From 'The Joy of Living', by Ewan Maccoll**

*Each of you bears inside of you the gift of love  
May it bring you light and warmth and the pleasure of giving  
Eagerly savour each new day and the taste of its mouth  
Never lose sight of the thrill and the joy of living*

There is no need to rush away from here too hastily. Please feel free to linger to say your own farewells before you return to the chapel and people waiting there, or go on to the reception. As and when you leave please take care with your footing.

Thank you.



## Sample script: baby burial

*Baby and parent names anonymised, but not friends and other family members.*

### **WELCOME**

Welcome to this simple ceremony to say farewell to J S. We are here today not only to make that farewell, but also to celebrate and remember his short life.

In keeping with the wishes of J's parents, this will be a non-religious ceremony, with no hymns or prayers. There will be a time for silent thought and contemplation, when some may wish to say a private prayer.

I am an accredited Humanist Celebrant and a member of Humanists UK.

No matter how short, every life affects others, every life matters, every life is unique. Every life is worthy of being remembered and celebrated.

The death of someone we love is an experience that we shall all encounter.

Sometimes death comes far too soon, before the life has had the time to grow and flower. We grieve not only for what we have lost, but for what we shall never have.

We cannot hide from the sadness of the loss of someone we loved, but we can face that loss with courage, and take comfort from the memories that we cherish and keep with us.

**J**

J was a much-loved and much-wanted baby.

J and R have experienced all the joy of anticipation, all the excitement of planning their lives together as a family, to have that joy denied them by a tragic accident of nature.

There may be biological reasons for this, but there is no way that we can answer the question that cries out – 'Why J? Why did this happen to us?' We have no answers. Bad and tragic things happen; there is no 'reason', there is no blame.

We hope that with time, and the love and support of those around them, J and R will progress with their journey through life, and will grow from this experience. That is, I know, of little comfort to them now, in this time of sorrow.

***J never felt the warmth of the sun,  
but he felt the warmth of absolute unconditional love.***

***J never heard the sound of music,  
but he heard the sound of the heartbeat of love,  
and the sound of his mother's and his father's voice.***

***J never spoke,  
but he made his presence, and the beginnings of  
his personality, known.***

***J never saw the light of day  
but he was bathed in the light of love.***

This is what J and R have written about J:

***'J would have been – '  
Handsome like his dad  
Sensitive like his mum  
He would have been adventurous 'n' scared his parents half to death***

***He would have been cheeky, and if he wasn't sarcastic as a teenager we would have failed!  
He would have been a head strong toddler and thrown a thousand tantrums!***

***He would have loved music 'n' would dance like no one is watching like his dad does to make his mum laugh.***

***He would have been best friends with Mac the Cat and always wanting to chase Penny and never catch her.  
He would have helped his mum and nanny in the garden and Faunty Luci in the allotment.***

***But eventually he would probably have developed the same fear of garden centres as his dad 'n' chosen to watch football instead with Dad, Grandad 'n' Uncle Aaron.  
He probably would have been a fussy eater like his mum.  
His dad would have taught him how to play the guitar and football.***

***He would of had to support Arsenal - there simply was no choice.***

***He would have been a dapper little gentleman***

***He would have liked Batman and worn costumes all day***

***He would have gone on surprise adventures with his Faunties and his family and had an amazing time, falling asleep in the car ride home exhausted from the fun.***

***He would have loved his family as they would have loved him.***

***He would have jumped in puddles 'n' still played in the rain.***

***He would have gone swimming with Mummy and it would have forced Daddy to develop his confidence in swimming to protect him***

***He would have had lots of friends 'n' lots of fun.***

***He would have had a big imagination and found the fun in small things.***

***He might have taken after his dad 'n' played football or been awful at sports like his mum.***



*He would have been short with curly brown hair that needed taming.*

*He would have been embarrassed by his parents as a teenager*

*He would have been shown how to love unconditionally and be confident and cheeky.*

*He would have been kind, smart and loyal*

*He would have learned so many amazing things from everyone around him*

*He would have got a stupid tattoo when he was at university 'n' tried to hide it from his mum*

*J I will never forget the day you said goodbye,  
my heartbeat went in search of yours  
and heard no reply.*

*Today our hearts were broken for the hundredth time,  
because we never got to hear you laugh  
or read you a nursery rhyme.*

*At least we got to see you, perfect as you were,  
but it only made it harder to see how beautiful we made you,  
your face no longer a blur.*

*We held you in our hearts since the moment we knew,  
but only in our arms for mere moments,  
which was a beautifully sad thing to do.*

*We vowed not to forget you, and our love for you  
remains within our hearts,  
for we will always wish we never had to be apart.*

*J, you will always be our perfect boy  
who we wish we got to know  
and see all the amazing things we imagined you would do,*

*We will always be your mum and dad  
and we will always love beautiful,  
amazing, innocent you.*

## **REFLECTION**

We will have a few moments of quiet now to allow you all to think about J, and what he meant to you.

## **FAREWELL**

We will now say our farewell to J.

With great sorrow and with great love, but without fear, we commit J's body to the earth -

Thank you, gentlemen.

*The peace of the running water to you,  
The peace of the flowing air to you,  
The peace of the shining stars to you,  
The peace of the quiet earth to you,  
And the love and care of us all to you.*

## **PARTING**

Together, we have been remembering J, and you have been thinking about the effect he has had on your lives.

Your lives will go on, and will grow, and I know they will be enriched by having the experience of knowing J's short life.

This chapter in the story of your lives may close, and although there will be many more chapters, these pages will never be forgotten, these pages will always be a part of that story.

They say that if we do live on in any way after death, it is in the hearts and memories of those that knew us and loved us.

I know that J will live on in your hearts and memories.