

Lily's Letter by Lin Carruthers

To Whom It May Concern Upon My Death:

I have made the easy, delightful transition to being wholly non-physical. I have released the part of my focus which centred on this body and I am happy.

I am deceased, which translates from its Latin origin as Gone Away. I have gone away but I am still aware of you, lovingly focussed on you, and you, and you; each one of you.

I am in your presence always; our connection continues and my love and particular ways of being are available to you whenever you allow them in. Feel for my presence as I am now, rather than noticing the absence of my physicality.

This is what I would like you to do now:

I am not going anywhere so please take your time, there is no need to do anything right now.

Pause, breathe, and take time to listen to what matters to you at this moment, which may not be what you expected.

Take time to listen to the quieter voices, those slower to know what they feel, and to the slow, quiet voice in yourself. Above all, be very kind and gentle with yourself.

I would prefer you to keep my body in my home, or return me there if I died elsewhere.

Accept the help of people who have done this before, who are familiar with transitions and know how to lay out a body and care for it at home.

Spend time just being with my body, getting used to me being no longer physically embodied. Let it be known that anyone who wants to is welcome to spend time with my body.

Please take time to give people locally the opportunity to come together with my body in a way that suits them - some of my choir may want to come and sing with me. They may also sing at a celebration of my life, but that is a performance and very different from singing around my bed.

Please be especially attentive to giving anyone who has cared for me the time they need to say goodbye.

In Maori culture, family and friends visit with the deceased and do things they enjoyed in life:

eat the food they enjoyed,

sing the songs,

tell the stories,

play the games they loved,

have around them the things that were special to them.

I love this idea. I would love you to adopt and adapt it to suit this situation.

I know that from this time being together with my body, you will get used to my new state of being, and begin to relate to me in a new way, begin to embody what you most loved and appreciated in me.

I know that all those who loved me will find their individual and collective ways to do this, small rituals with candles perhaps, with or without words.

You are welcome to touch my body, hold my hand, stroke my hair; or you may prefer to stay at a distance.

I have Gone Away. I have no further interest in this body and I am happy for you to dispose of it in any way that feels right to you. I have preferences but what you do with them is up to you.

I would prefer you to leave me as I am: without "hygienic treatment", which is embalming; without makeup, which I almost never used; and since I slept without nightwear in life I prefer to continue to do so - a sheet will suffice.

Thank you for tending to my body. In this life it gave me so much pleasure, so many wonderful experiences, and I am so grateful to it.

It has been my experience that, having spent as much time as I needed with someone who had taken their last breath, and with their friends and family, I did not feel in need of a funeral. If that turns out to be the case for you, please check with others, who may still want such an event.

I have had an amazing, wonderful life. I have known many kind, generous, beautiful, loving people, and I have no regrets.

If there is to be a funeral to celebrate my life, please bear this in mind when it is arranged - whether it is held in conjunction with a burial or cremation, or some time after.

Hold it in a place you feel at ease. It could be held at the community centre, or someone's house if it is a small event. People could bring food - just tell them which of sweet or savoury to bring, and please, no sandwiches!

I have always loved Saint Saens' Organ Symphony and you know that I have always loved singing. My favourite poem is Wild Geese By Mary Oliver. It would be lovely if those could be incorporated in some way.

Your options for disposal of my body consist of burial or cremation, and I have no strong preference for either. If I do have a preference it would be for options which, as I write, are less readily available.

I love the idea of a funeral pyre, burning through the night; or of being laid, naked in the open, in a forest, on a hill, letting creatures, critters and microbes consume my body and nourish themselves thereby.

If cremation feels right you could scatter the ashes in the sea; if you wish to mark a grave I'd much rather a tree than a gravestone; I prefer no marker at all.

If you have no preference, bury me in a natural burial ground.

These are my preferences. However, what matters to me is whatever is important to you: Are you at ease with knowing I am in the rainbow, the sunlight, the birds, the sea, that I live on in your heart? Do you need a grave or tree to visit, or a place where the ashes are? Your wellbeing is what matters, so listen to yourself.

With others, and even within yourself, you may have differing and seemingly contradictory preferences but please remember, as I used to, and still do, say: "There is a perfect solution". Allow it to come to you. You know what is right for you. All is well.

In the past I had regrets about not being able to spend time with people after they had taken their last breath, and I have found ways to put that right for myself. I would be delighted if you were able to have the experience that feels right to you when someone significant to you dies. I hope that I have introduced you to some ideas and things you could do to tend to yourself at that time, so that you can have a meaningful experience with rich memories to nourish you afterwards.

I love you very, very much,

Lily