

Dear Richard and Sylvia,

I am writing this whilst I am still very much alive, but in doing so I want to speak to you as if I had just taken my last breath, so that you have time to become familiar with what I want, which is that you look after yourselves:

I have made the easy, delightful transition to being wholly non-physical. I have released the part of my focus which centred on my physical body. I am happy and 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. Give yourself time for the shock of my death (however much you knew it was coming) to ease and for you to regain access to the higher functions of your brain.

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 me 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 prepare my body and tend to it at home.

If you feel able to, spend time just being with me, getting used to me being no longer physically present. If you are willing, tell everyone that they are welcome to spend time with me. Please be especially attentive to giving anyone who has cared for me the time they need to say goodbye.

Please take time to give people locally the opportunity to come together with me 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, if you have one, but that is a performance and very different from singing around my bed.

I learned that, in Maori culture, family and friends visit with the person who has died and do things they enjoyed in life: eat the food they enjoyed; sing their favourite songs; tell the stories they told; play the games they loved; have around them the things that were special to them. I love this idea. I would love it if you felt able to adopt and adapt it to suit this situation.

I believe that from this time being together with me, you will get used to my new state of being, and begin to relate to me in a new way, perhaps recognising in yourself what you most loved and appreciated in me. I know that you will find your 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 taken my last breath. I am happy for you to dispose of my body 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 I consider unnecessary and intrusive, and without makeup, which I almost never used; and dress me in something pretty – one of my dresses to suit the season.

Thank you for tending to me after my last breath. In this life my body 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 public gathering of some sort 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 to share.

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 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 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.

In the past I had regrets about not being able to spend time with people after they had taken their last breath, and I 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 I, or anyone else 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.

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

I love you very, very much,

Lily

