

Rick's Letter

Dear All,

I'm not as young as I used to be even if I still felt twenty-five last birthday ... at least inside! So I think it's time we talked about when I'm not here chatting with everyone. At first, I thought I'd sit you all down together when I was in your part of the world, but then I realised it would be unfair to spring it on you, so I decided to write instead, which gives you something to hold onto and refer back to.

Until a few days ago, I'd have said that when I die, I want my body disposed of as quickly and cheaply as possible with no fuss. Now, I'm not sure that would be the best thing for you. What happened to change my mind? I went to a get-together to learn about a charity called Pushing Up the Daisies who, they say, 'support people in looking after a person who has died'. Joy and I have been talking about getting things sorted out before either of us goes, and this seemed an excellent place to start.

There were eleven of us, two from Pushing Up the Daisies, and the whole session was a right eye-opener. There were practical details about keeping the body cool and making sure flies don't get in, but what got to me was folk talking about their experiences. Some had had what I would call a 'normal' experience—someone died, maybe a parent or a grandparent, and then the funeral director came, took the body away, came by later to talk with the folk and offer them options for coffins, flowers, cars and the like. Did they want burial or cremation? Then the funeral director went off and sorted it out. Everyone turned up for the funeral a week later, and that was that. That's what everyone does, right? Except that three or four folk spoke of having regrets afterwards—they had wanted to see the body or say goodbye afterwards. Some had spoken up and said they wanted to do these things, but someone had persuaded them it wasn't a good idea.

It had never even occurred to me that I'd want to see the body. That seems a bit gruesome to me. Other folk spoke of looking after the person who had died, laid out in their own home, and how helpful they had found it. They said it gave them time to get used to the person being dead and gave them a chance to say goodbye properly. What they said had a big impact on me and got me wondering what would be best for you folks and for Joy too. Maybe I'm being thoughtless, making a decision like that on my own.

One of the reasons I thought of a quick 'disposal' was that with some of you so far away, I had the thought that rather than you all flying here on expensive last-minute tickets for a funeral, my body could be cremated and then you could come over for a decent holiday a while later and have a celebration then—whether you'll be celebrating the life I had or the fact I've gone only you'll know!

The thing that kept coming up was the importance of taking time. Somebody actually suggested that you don't necessarily need the body for this ... it's just that it provides a focus

for everyone. The other thing was listening, really listening to what you each really need, and making sure that the quiet, shy and stunned-into-silence ones are heard too. There was a suggestion that a friend might be helpful for that—someone not quite so involved.

I'm open to all your thoughts and ideas on this. With modern technology, maybe you could sit with the person who died through a video stream. You could dip in and out, see and hear what's going on—even rewind it if you missed a good joke or story—and not need to fly halfway round the world until you really want to.

Have a think about this. I would really appreciate knowing your points of view. I have had an amazing life so far and plan on a good bit more, as you know, so when I do go, I'll be ready. I would be happy if you were able to celebrate all that we had together and then get on with your amazing lives, knowing I am happy wherever I am.

Big hugs to you all,

Pa