

Caring for clients.

This month, *Funeral Director Monthly* looks at the period before the funeral when a deceased person is in the care of a funeral home, and the difference funeral directors make to families' experience of death through the ways they care for them and their family.

First person perspectives on funeral service

A new series of features about the different aspects of funeral service and how funeral directors support families after the loss of someone close to them.



Bringing peace to families through preparation and presentation

Jackie Lymn Rose

Funeral Director

Fellow of the British Institute of Embalmers

Jackie Lymn Rose is a Director of AW Lymn, the Family Funeral service based in Nottingham. AW Lymn was founded in 1907 by Jackie's maternal grandfather and great-grandfather, and five generations of the family have been involved in the business to date, including Jackie's brother Nigel (CEO), her niece Chloe and nephews Ben and Matthew - who is the current Managing Director.

One of the areas of funeral service in which Jackie specialises is the care and preparation of a deceased person for family to pay their last respects. *Funeral Director Monthly* talked to Jackie about her work and the difference it can make to families when they are mourning the loss of someone.

Jackie Lymn Rose joined the family business in 1992 after studying at the Midland School of Embalming, and training to be a funeral director in Birmingham.

"I never really intended to follow this particular path," says Jackie. "Our family business at the time couldn't have supported all the members of my generation so I pursued other opportunities but found myself in the profession in the end!"

"I attended an Outward Bound course and, during the assessment, it was suggested that I might make a good PE teacher, so off I headed to Birmingham to Teacher Training College. However, I was not a keen sportswoman and soon realised I didn't relish the prospect of teaching sport to children. However, I really enjoyed the physiology and anatomy aspects of the course and so, in the evenings and free afternoons, I went to the Midland School of Embalming to learn how to embalm. I did qualify as a teacher and completed my probationary year before heading back to Birmingham to train as a funeral director.

"Some 14 years later, in 1992, I came back to Nottingham and joined the family business and, as they say, the rest is history.

"The ethos of preparing a deceased person for a family visit using embalming, cosmetics and hair styling techniques is to ensure the final

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vision of that person is a pleasant and positive one, to ensure they appear to be peaceful and at rest whilst retaining a lifelike appearance.

“If we know something of the person’s background it helps us to make sure they look the best they can for the family. If, for example, the person has been ill for a while in hospital, maybe with tubes inserted or other equipment around them, their visual appearance will have been distorted. Restoring a lifelike appearance of serenity will have a hugely positive impact on the family.

“Even when family is not visiting the chapel of rest, the deceased person must be cared for with respect and dignity. It should be routine to at the very least shave, wash hair, clean finger nails, etc.

“Whilst we do not apply make-up as a matter of course, we will do so at the request of any family to enhance appearance or, sometimes, to mask facial abrasions. It is preferable to work with a photograph of the deceased person to create the appropriate effect and to apply the deceased person’s own make-up. Although there are branded cosmetics available for embalmers, we prefer to use those belonging to the individual as they are very personal. However, applying make-up to a deceased person is more difficult as the lower body temperature will affect that application.

“Every time we move a deceased person into our care it is priority to liberally apply moisturiser to the face and hands. This helps prevent dehydration, which is one of the most visible signs to a family that the body is deteriorating. Once dehydration has begun you can’t reverse it, so we work very quickly, particularly on areas such as the skin around the eye sockets, which is very thin.

“Based on my initial training I have developed my own techniques over the years. The first priority is to talk to the family about the person - a photograph will help to identify hairstyle, colour, expression and personality. Hair is particularly important. We are proud of our hair when we are



alive, so why would it be any different when we are dead? We regularly apply hair colour and styling techniques to make sure the people in our care look as good in death as they did in life.

“Some of our staff are a former hairdressers and the British Institute of Embalmers runs a dedicated hairdressing course. It is a slightly different skill to normal hairdressing and more difficult due to the fact that the deceased person is prone and the hair will fall differently. It takes different methods to arrive at.

“Recently I looked after a lady who had come into our care from another funeral director in another part of the UK. Whilst she had been cared for by them extremely professionally, the family said they felt the make-up that had been applied left her looking a little like a “clown”, which was distressing for them. We made her look more natural to the satisfaction of her family.

“We always ask families to tell us honestly if there is something they are uncomfortable with within the work that we’ve done. We want to get it right and make sure their needs are met as it is difficult to erase a bad memory.

“For gentlemen we might use a little powder, but would only apply make-up in extreme circumstances.

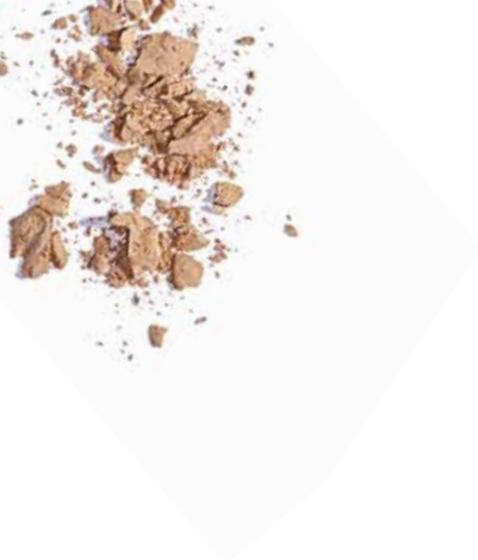
“The length of time since death has occurred and how a person has been cared for, in the interim, makes a huge difference to the result. If a person has been repatriated to UK from overseas our expectation of their appearance is less good. The increased length of time since death and methods of preservation other countries adopt affect the body significantly.

“Also affecting the state of the body will be internal factors such as medication the person may have taken, the cause of death, if a post-mortem has taken place – and also how suddenly the person died. In case of sudden or violent death, the body more quickly deteriorates due to changes in the nervous system. External factors such as the length of time since the death and the environment they were kept in before preservative treatment could commence will also have a bearing on the quality of presentation. The timescale before embalming can commence will be determined by the statutory documentation which must be completed, such as registration of death and completion of Cremation 4 & 5 or Coroner’s documentation.

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"One of the biggest issues for us is the increasing delays between the death and the funeral, particularly delays caused by the Coronial system, as this has an impact on when we can start preservative treatment to the detriment of final presentation. In a situation of extreme delay or a traumatic death we may advise families that spending quiet time in the chapel of rest with the coffin sealed will be preferable to an open coffin. Most families in that situation would accept our advice.

"However, a recent family had to wait 42 days for the Coronial service to issue documentation and release the body, which was in an advanced state of decomposition. Nevertheless, the family wanted to view so we advised them and managed their expectations. The impact of seeing the deceased person was quite severe and the family raised the issue with the Case Officer of Her Majesty's Coroner who responded that it must have been the chemicals applied in the embalming process. This was simply not the case, but demonstrated a lack of understanding.

"If a person suffers trauma resulting in death we are sometimes requested to carry out restorative or reconstructive work. This can be extremely time consuming depending on the situation, but can be incredibly important to a family that will also be suffering the shock of an unexpected death. If it is a cultural expectation for members of a community or faith to wash and prepare the body themselves, or for the casket or coffin to be open in the home or place of worship, it is incumbent on us to make that happen and we will always do our very best with the skills we have.

"Traumatic deaths such as those brought about by motor incidents may be caused by internal factors with no superficial facial injuries. Between 1991 and 2004 I was deployed on a number of mass fatality situations for Kenyon Emergency Services and, even in circumstances when the body had sustained significant damage, such as air crashes, it was not unknown for faces to be undamaged and visually identifiable.

"Nevertheless, we do work on cases where there is facial trauma and, in these instances, we would use Plaster of Paris and special waxes to restore features, as well as cleaning, suturing and repairing damage before applying make-up to make the face as natural, peaceful and undamaged as possible. It is important to remember that a family member may have already carried out visual identification of the body and seen the damage caused, so anything we can do from thereon in will be an improvement.

"It's worth remembering that the environment in which a family visits their loved one makes a huge difference to how they feel. One of the things that AW Lymn introduced 12 years ago was the option for families to visit in a bedroom environment setting rather than in a coffin in a chapel of rest. We have a room that is set up with a single bed and this is often something that families who have lost a child or a baby will choose, especially if the child has siblings to be considered; the bedroom is a gentler environment and can be personalised with the child's own bed linen or quilt cover, pictures and toys.

"Small babies are collected from the place of death and placed in the chapel or rest in a Moses basket rather than a coffin or casket for the psychological benefit of parents, grandparents and especially for siblings.

"In everything we do, our aim is to make sure that the time people spend with a loved one, to say goodbye, is a positive experience. It can make a tangible difference to how they begin to come to terms with their loss in the moment and actually help them to deal with their grief in the longer term too."



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