

GEORGIA MARTIN



A BEAUTIFUL GOODBYE

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A living funeral is a wonderful celebration of your life before you die.
Georgia Martin helps terminally ill people to say goodbye in their
own way.

PRESS RELEASE

In 2016 a good friend of my mother was given a terminal cancer diagnosis with only a few months left to live. She died 3 months after the diagnosis.

Despite the devastating news, Sheila surprised everyone by announcing that she wanted to have a party to say goodbye to her family and friends. The reaction from those closest to her ranged from shock (at the diagnosis) surprise (at her decision) and, when they had had time to think, the response was both positive and accepting.

Knowing that I had organised corporate events before I had children Sheila asked if I would take over the planning and organisation for what she called her 'beautiful goodbye'. I was honoured to be asked and said yes immediately.

Sheila talked about how much she had loved the 80's and I could see the happiness in her eyes when she thought back to that time. Together we decided that it would be the perfect theme for the part. Sheila wanted an opportunity to share good memories with her friends and family and hear their laughter at some of the antics and fun they had got up to when they were in their twenties.

Invitations were designed and sent out with an 80's dress code and a request to bring a memory of something special about Sheila to bring to the party. An 80's playlist was selected; charity shops were raided for accessories and decorations and I hired a dance teacher to recreate a Saturday Night Fever routine and a waiter to serve Sheila's favourite Cinzano and Lemonade as the welcome drink. Caterers were hired to make and serve an 80's themed menu. Half way through the evening Sheila made a speech where she talked about the things she would miss, but also her acceptance of her time coming to an end. She talked about how, when the time came, she wanted a simple funeral and didn't want a wake. As far as she was concerned this was her goodbye and she wanted to say it in style and in person.

The overall feel of the event was surprisingly happy and uplifting. There were many comments throughout the night about how it was so lovely to share the memories and say

what they wanted to say before it was too late. Sheila was so glad she has done things 'her way' and made lasting memories before she became unable to do the things she used to do with ease. It also meant that her last weeks were spent with family doing what she was able to without the pressure of friend and acquaintances wanting to visit her when she wouldn't be well enough to receive them.

When did you have your lightbulb 'it's a business' moment?

It was after Sheila had died. I got to thinking that a 'living funeral' was a game changer. In a culture where death is still a tricky subject to discuss I knew it wouldn't be an easy concept to introduce in the UK but having experienced the joy of Sheila's 'beautiful goodbye' – both planning and hosting it - I was determined to give it my best shot. My research revealed that other countries – namely Japan and the USA - had already begun to accept 'living funerals' as part of the end of life process. Some of the websites and interviews I read online were very encouraging and inspiring. My idea grew, and I began to research last holidays/last experiences/last wishes. My business idea was taking shape and I felt very strongly it was the right thing for me to do.

Feedback

The feedback I got from Sheila's event was overwhelmingly positive. As a result, I was asked to accompany a lady and her sister on a river cruise before she died – something that had been on her wish list for years and she had never got around to it. Her wider family and medical team were delighted and the agent I used was very supportive.

What was the theme/wish for the events you organised?

The small number of 'living funerals' I have organised to date have all been completely different. I escorted an elderly lady door-to-door on a trip to Rome see her disabled son and his family. I have arranged small, intimate gatherings which included afternoon tea, readings, poems and music. I'm just about to plan an opera themed party for a lady who wants to share her passion for music with her friends.

What do your family think of you doing this? Are they behind you?

They are totally behind me! They have experienced a living funeral and saw for themselves what a difference it made to everyone involved.

What's your work background?

Before starting my family, I was a high street branch bank manager.

Who do you see as your clients?

Without doubt it is terminally ill people who want to have some say in the way they leave this world. They are people of all ages and ethnicities who feel the need to express their gratitude for the lives they have lived and the people who have meant so much to them.

Not every living funeral has to be in the form of a party, it can simply be a gathering, a journey, time spent together in a special place or whatever suits that family. I also want to help anyone who feels their terminal illness will affect their quality of life, e.g. people with Motor Neurons Disease, Multiple Sclerosis and similar diseases which slowly destroy the quality of people's lives. They may want the opportunity to let their friends and family see them at their best and be able to say and do everything they want to before the illness can change that.

Describe where you live - countryside/city, have you always lived there

I was born in Wales and my family moved around the world a lot when I was growing up. I now live with my husband and two children on the borders of England and Wales near the beautiful Wye Valley.

Age of you and your husband, and children

I'm 25 and my husband – a tree surgeon - is 29. Our children are 3 and 18 months. Anthony and I met when I was 17 and we married three years later in Mexico surrounded by friends and family.

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