



How to Enjoy Your Own Funeral

by Cenarth Fox

A comedy about immortality

THIS IS A PREVIEW SCRIPT AND CAN ONLY BE USED FOR PERUSAL.

THE COMPLETE SCRIPT IS AVAILABLE FROM FOX PLAYS.

There is a female version of this comedy. Georgina is an artist in her garden studio.

Synopsis

Retirement kills more people than hard work ever did.

Malcolm S. Forbes

George Muffet retired many years ago. He spends a lot of time in his shed where carpentry brings great pleasure. Making something practical for someone in need doubles George's pleasure.

But George has thoughts about the end of life, about when he can no longer make things. In recent times George has been to the funeral of his parents, brother, brother-in-law, several bowling-club mates and last month, his favourite, elderly aunt.

Now George is fussy. He doesn't want any uncertainty once he dies. Everything must be well-organised – his estate, funeral, burial, even his wake. So, in-between tales about his fastidious spouse and wonderfully whacky neighbour, George shares his thoughts on headstones, obituaries and all things funereal.

Some Reviews

Highly entertaining. We would happily recommend your play to all other retirement villages

Camberwell Green Retirement Village

*Excellent, superb! Very clever play! Congratulations
David played every part with good-humoured realism
There are some wonderful snippets on present-day life and attitudes*

Pilgrim Uniting Church

A wonderful evening and we received some terrific feedback from our large audience most of whom were over 70. Some of our residents in the serviced apartments, including one who is 100 years old, could all see and hear David Small's amazing performance and chuckled along with the rest of us.

Cen Fox deserves great praise for his witty and in-depth feelings re death especially from one so young. Good luck and wishing you a long run. We hope to continue with your shows for many times to come.

Cameron Close Retirement Village

Everyone commented on how enjoyable the night was and we raised almost \$2000.

Encore Theatre Company

How To Enjoy Your Own Funeral is still being talked about in our village. Residents loved the well-scripted lines delivered so beautifully by David Small. Many thanks for a grand evening of entertainment

Donvale Retirement Village

*We received very good feedback. Everyone thoroughly enjoyed the play and even the vicar was laughing a lot. **All Saints Anglican Church, Nunawading***

*Excellent entertainment and thoroughly enjoyed by all **Claremont Terrace Village***

*We had people attend How To Enjoy Your Own Funeral who never come to our plays. It was a wonderful night. **Bundoora Village***

A very important subject handled with sensitivity and humour. Word of mouth will guarantee a full house when you present The Real Sherlock Holmes next month.

Village Glen, Rosebud

How to Enjoy Your Own Funeral



A one-person play by Cenarth Fox
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Music

How to Enjoy Your Own Funeral uses some well-known hymns and popular music. Performers provide their own music and sound effects.

Production Package

Groups staging a **FOX PLAYS** play or musical receive free production notes [*set-design, costumes, lighting, props, etc*] and with each large-cast musical, free lyric sheets for chorus members. Your local agent may have colour photos and/or video/DVD recordings of previous productions and offers friendly, helpful service.

CD – Funeral Recorded

The world premiere season of *How To Enjoy Your Own Funeral* is available as a radio play on CD. Contact Fox Plays via the address on the final page of this script.

David Small as George Muffet
“George in his shed”



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Costumes and Make-up

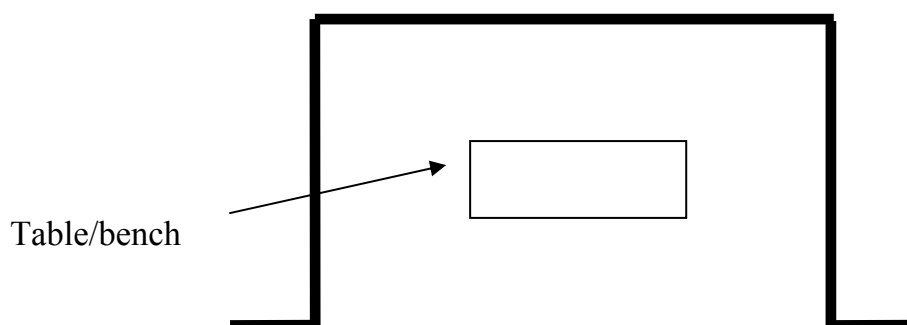
George is dressed in his favourite working clobber - fleecy shirt and overalls. He's working in his shed. He is avuncular and approachable. He would never frighten the horses. If anyone could be deemed ideal to discuss death, it's George. He is caring, open and honest.

Make-up is plain. There is little, if anything, outstanding about George's appearance. He has the usual hearing and eyesight concerns of those in the bus-pass class but all in all, he appears to motoring quite well.

Set Design

There is only one set – the interior of George's shed. It can be as plain or as detailed as you wish. A table centre-stage with a rug or cloth covering is all that is required. Or you could have a work-bench centre with tools upstage. Items George has made or is making sit in the shed. Lighting concentrates on George and occasionally the various bits and bobs he produces throughout his chat.

George's chat is easy to take on the road.



Character

George is 82. He is a lively soul with a dry wit, keen on life and loves making things. He's a thinking man, well-read with a formal education in mechanical engineering. He began life working in the State Electricity Commission becoming a senior engineer. But that's another story. Today he's retired and happy to chat.

Local Language

Some words in the script refer to local events and places. Directors may wish to insert the equivalent term for their location.

Sub-headings in the Script

Headings such as **ORGAN DONATION** and **WILLS** are not to be spoken but act as rehearsal points.

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[As the audience enters, some of George's favourite New Orleans or traditional jazz music is playing. The bench is well lit but not the rest of the shed. Once the play is ready to start, dim the house lights and slowly raise the shed lighting. It's day-time. George enters. Gradually fade the jazz music and George begins. He could be sanding the dovecot at different times]

[Working] G'day. I'm George Muffet. I'm 82 and making this dovecot. *[Indicates dovecot. Pause]* What? You don't know what a dovecot is or you can't believe I'm 82?

[Pottering] The dovecot's for Mrs. McCrae next door. She's 94, her cat, Godfrey, is a 105 and, between them, they've got four and half teeth.

Mrs. McCrae's worried Godfrey might attack the birds she feeds every day hence the *[Indicating dovecot]* backyard bird house.

Actually Godfrey's flat out catching a dead tortoise but this'll make Mrs. McCrae happy and ... well it makes me happy too. You see, I reckon there's nothing like making something useful with your own two hands. *[Grinning]* It's good to have a hobby.

I've got a mate at the bowling club who's a bit wobbly on his pins. He should be in care but the only way Gus'll leave home is feet first. Bit like me.

Anyway I made Gus a hand rail for when he sprints up the hall for his morning paper; mind you it takes him longer to get to the front door than it does to read the paper.

[Happy, proud memories] I used some jarrah with a curved inlay for easy gripping and polished it till it whistled. *[Realises he's excited]* I still get excited making things. *[Grinning]* It's good to get excited.

Now, introductions. *[Indicating shed]* Everyone, this is Shed. *[Indicating audience]* Shed, this is everyone.

We're an item. We're walking out. At first we did our courting on weekends but once I retired we're like two young lovers – you can't keep us apart. *[Correcting possible misunderstanding]* Ah my shed's a female in case you were wondering. And boy, do I cop the jokes. *[Imitates friends]* "Hey George! When are you and your shed gunna get married?" *[Grinning]* It's good to have a shed.

[Potters] A hobby keeps you healthy. You hear about blokes who retire then drop dead. Not me. Pottering keeps me sane - that and the missus.

[Picks up or points to wedding photo or pretends to see wife in audience] There she is, *[Honey's gone]* was, my better half, my helpmate, the little woman, the old lady, the wife, the spouse ... the boss. *[Returns to sanding dovecot]*

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I call her the Queen Bee [*Serious/secretive*] but never to her face. [*Normal voice*] It's true. Behind every ordinary husband is an extraordinary wife.

Honey and I've been married fifty-six years and our continued happiness is based on mutual acceptance of territorial ownership. She gets the house, garden, nature-strip, sideway, driveway and garage ... I get the shed! [*Indicating shed*] This is my mistress and the Queen Bee, bless her, turns a blind eye to the other woman.

So much so that in the fifty-three years we've lived here, my wife's only been inside my shed once; which is once more than I've been inside her walk-in robe.

Her famous visit was in 1975 [*or a year some 30 years previous*] and all because of a terrible tragedy. I can still see her face today – she'd lost something.

Now my wife is fastidious. She irons her underwear and numbers the tea-bags. She's so fanatical about tidiness that when her mate Sophie rang with news that Honey had won first-prize in a raffle, Honey went crazy when she couldn't find the tickets. We couldn't believe she'd lost something.

I was ordered to search the house, car, garage, rubbish bins and garden. She even made me search the shed. "Why in here?" I asked. *Wrong!*

Then the anti-climax; Sophie got her raffles wrong and we were looking for something that no longer existed and was useless anyway. Well not quite useless. It brought Honey to hubby's hideaway.

Mind you she comes here regularly by intercom because my wife is not the type to throw open the kitchen window and scream, [*Rough voice*] "George, your dinner's on the table!"

No, Honey is polite and dignified and we use the good-old intercom. Two buzzes – [*Imitate dignified HONEY*] "Dinner is served". Three buzzes [*HONEY again*] "You're wanted on the phone".

Four buzzes [*HONEY tad anxious*]. "The house is on fire" [*Serious*] Five buzzes – [*HONEY aghast*] "Your mother's at the front door".

Actually Mum died years ago but her baby sister Flo would be arriving in Heaven right about now. How long does it take to get to Heaven? And do you need a ticket?

[*Sad*] We buried Auntie Flo last week. She was ninety-eight, Mum's favourite sister and a wonderful, old lady; sharp as a tack and the last of her generation. Now it's me. Now *I'm* the old generation.

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[Surveying audience] Speaking of old, some of you fit that description. Good-looking of course but like me, with a use-by date not too far away. You know you're a certain age when a regular social outing is going to a funeral. We're graveside groupies.

I find funerals make me think. I'm in a church or cemetery and the old brain says, 'This'll be you soon, George. One of these funerals has got your name on it.'

These days I think more intimately about death and being a fusspot, I've decided to tackle my mortality head-on. *[Takes out book]* This is my funeral folio, my planning diary for death. *[Grinning]* It's good to have a plan. *[Puts book aside]*

Did you know that death is one of our oldest institutions? Ever since the first amoeba plopped ashore, death was waiting to be discovered.

I wonder who invented death and did they take out a patent? I reckon whoever got the copyright on death would have made an absolute killing. *[Pause. Did he intend the pun?]*

And death does not discriminate. You can be as poor as a church mouse or as rich as Rockefeller but *[Serious]* we've all got a date with you know what.

[Snaps out of being introspective and gets busy tidying] Hey, life's for living and I've got a dovecot to finish. But as far as my death is concerned, I'm very well prepared. *[Stops. Refers to book]* It's all in here.

I don't want my family worrying about money, eulogies and undertakers. When I go, *everything* will be taken care of.

It probably sounds strange, but I've decided to enjoy my own funeral.

[Fetching cardboard headstone] I've made a start with this model headstone. It's not finished ... *[Shows headstone and stands it facing front. It has a small support hidden behind or a base to allow it to stand]* and I'll leave the stonemasonry to the experts. *[Indicates 2023]* It's good to be hopeful.

[The 2023 projected year of George's death could be pushed forward depending on when the play is performed. The date of birth should be 82 years prior to the year of performing the play. Obviously George's death is, as yet, unknown. Soothsayers need not apply]

[Headstone reads]

George Muffet
1924 – 2023

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I fancy some unique words like, “Best lawn bowler in Murrumbreena” or “He used the same motor-mower for 36 years”. *[Grinning]*

[Stops reminiscing] But there’s a problem. When Honey dies, she’ll be joining me in the same grave and the Queen Bee won’t have flippant remarks on *her* headstone.

She won’t be like the widow who had hubby’s headstone inscribed, *[Looking heavenward]* *The light of my life has gone out* but then fell for a new fellah so added, *I’ve struck another match.*

I’ll have a problem if Honey dies first. She’ll want to be on top so she’ll have to come out before they put me in. The cemetery’ll have some by-law against it but can you imagine what it’ll be like if she dies first? *[Imitates Honey – dignified but determined]* “George, get off me! George, I can’t see a thing. *Move George!*”

[Back to his model headstone] So my headstone’s very basic. I may add to it as the mood takes me. *[Referring to audience]* Maybe you’ll inspire me. *[Looks at headstone]* Something struck me the other day. *[Goes to lie on floor beneath headstone]* Everyone should learn to read upside down. I mean imagine the frustration lying in your grave and trying to read what they’ve put on your headstone. *[Up on one elbow. Gives tip, grinning]* It’s good to read upside down.

[Hops up and takes out/refers to his book and flips to a page]

ORGAN DONATION

Now I haven’t started at the beginning. *[Finds page]* Here we are. Organ donation. I’ve signed away my body. *[Holds out hands indicating himself]* Obviously I’m no oil painting but one of my body parts might just be priceless.

It’s a great feeling knowing I might help someone who needs a new kidney, heart or lung. Mind you, the old eyes and ears ain’t too flash.

[Thinking] Does one size fit all? *[To audience member]* Will my heart fit your body? *[To another]* Can females accept male organs? *[Realises]* Sorry, I should re-phrase that.

[Indicates hip] I’ve got a bit of plastic here and *[Taps heart]* a new pacemaker but hey, what’s mine is yours.

Think about donating your organs. Better still, *do* it. I got the brochure at my Medicare office. *Then, [Emphatic]* make your will.

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WILLS

[Takes out copy of will from drawer or tool-box] You know what they say – where’s there’s a will, there’s a relative. *[Serious]* But does your family know what you want done with your stamps, your super – your Sidney Nolan collection?

[Waves will] Make your will and keep updating it as circumstances change.

Do you know our second-biggest mistake? *[Pause]* Labelling possessions. *[Referring to piece of jarrah]* It’s true. Some folk put tags on the bottom of every knick-knack so when they die, the right item goes to the right person. *[Shaking head]* Complete waste of time.

But our *biggest* mistake is a doozie.

It’s opening a joint bank account with one of your children and asking them to share the money with their siblings once you’re dead. *[Gentle sarcasm]* Just remember, blood is trickier than water!

And as you obviously can’t be ga-ga when making a will, you don’t have to be on top of your game. The key words are “sound mind”. Do you understand what’s required to make a will? Fine. Then get will-making.

By the way, *[Grinning]* there’s no charge for my services as your friendly solicitor.

My mate’s missus told him they should have mirror wills. You know; I leave everything to you, you leave everything to me. So my mate writes, *[Dopey]* “To my wife I leave all my mirrors”. *[Grinning]* It’s good to have a mate.

Now will-making can get tricky when people re-marry. Let’s say it’s an elderly widower who’s worth a bit and the father of middle-aged children. They’ve got big spending plans for when Dad snuffs it when suddenly – disaster.

[Raises arm on for the imaginary bride-to-be] Pop pops round with a new floozy. *[As old man]* “Meet my trophy bride,” and the middle-aged offspring have instant high blood-pressure.

Oh no! Once the pater passes, step-mama will live another thirty years, slowly spending *their* inheritance. What a bummer!

That’s what’s wrong with elderly parents. They show no respect for cash-strapped, middle-aged kiddies. And besides, nothing is more disgusting than wrinklies having sex! *[Sucks in breath and makes sound of disgust. Pause]* Not that I’d know anything about that. *[Correcting himself]* Being a wrinklie, I mean.

So I’ve double-checked my will and made sure it’s fair, watertight and crystal-clear and once I’m gone, if the Queen Bee wants to play the mating game, our kids and grandkids will be well-looked after.

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[Sound of tennis ball landing on roof or tennis ball bounces across stage between George and the audience. The bouncing ball could be mimed but George retrieves a planted pill]

I told you the Queen Bee buzzes me on occasions, well, when dear old Mrs. McCrae next door wants me, she tosses a tennis ball over the fence. *[Fetching tennis ball]* Every month, George the ball-boy takes back a bucket of her calling cards.

[Goes to opposite edge of stage, calls] Thanks, Mrs. Mac. I've almost finished y'dovecot. I'll pop round tomorrow. *[Starts to walk back then returns to call once more]* Oh, and nice serve.

[Comes back to peruse book] Now, where were we? Wills. No, I've done that. Ah, burial plot.

GEORGE'S GRAVE

I've decided to be buried but our local cemetery is chockers. Inner-city graves close to sporting amenities, shops and theatres are as rare as Honey's trips to my shed. And a city grave will cost you an arm and a leg ... and a head and a torso. That's why we're being buried out of town, in a semi-rural cemetery.

It's un-crowded and far enough away to give certain relatives the excuse not to visit. *[Mimics whining relative]* "Why did he have to go and get buried way out there?" *[As GEORGE, sarcastic]* To get away from *you*, sweetheart.

The Queen Bee likes the spot although she's not keen on discussing death. She thinks she'll live forever. *[Grinning]* For some folk, it's good to bury your head in the sand.

[Looks in book then nods his head. This is interesting and/or amusing]

LANGUAGE

Mind you Honey's not the only person who doesn't like talking about dying. In fact the English language is littered with words which soften the harshness of death – euphemisms, like *he kicked the bucket*. *[Plastic bucket kicked?]*

Why do we speak in this roundabout way? *[Shrugs]* Maybe so as not to offend; we meet the bereaved and change our language.

We avoid words like *dead* and *death*. We don't even like *old*. We have *seniors* or *Darby and Joan* or my favourite, the *chronologically gifted*.

It wasn't like that in Victorian England. People would carry hair from the deceased in a locket and set the corpse in the front parlour to receive visitors.

[Mimes looking into coffin and perhaps removing small piece of lint]

But we're so sensitive that today our dead are alive. We now say someone is *living with the Lord* or has gone onto *eternal life*.

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No-one is de-composing. Instead we're *in a better place* or *the land of the living*.

Our dead are *at rest*. Headstones proclaim we're *asleep*, to which Billy Connolly once said, *[Imitating Scottish]* "I don't think so."

Even Shakespeare used euphemisms. He "shuffled off this mortal coil".

[The following paragraphs build in volume and speed. Start soft and slowish]

So no-one dies now; instead they *hang up their hat*, *jack it in* or *call it a day*. They *cash in their chips* or *bite the dust*.

We're not buried but *pushing up daises* or *resting six feet under*. We don't die; we *conk out*, *croak* or *drop off the twig*.

And because we use euphemisms, we allow the noble medical profession to pronounce death in a new and meaningless way. Once the quack signed a death-certificate, "So-and-so is dead." Not now. Today the deceased is a *negative patient-care outcome*.

[Angry] No, doc. He's dead!

[Settles, regains composure] And once you're dead, sorry, *terminally inconvenienced*, there's the funeral where the *dear departed* get *restorative cosmetics*, a *slumber robe* and *wooden overcoat* before a nap in the *viewing-room*.

And if you're cremated, the *cremains* cop an *inurnment* before the *send-off*.

[Shaking head, reaches for book, finds page and laughs]

JOKES

Well now the language may have changed but not the humour. *[Looks around, intimately]* It's good to have a laugh.

Did you hear about the bloke who knocked on a coffin? *[Knocks on dovecot]* Who's there? Wooden. Wooden who? Wooden be seen dead in one of these.

[Mimes face of hilarity then shrugs at the lack of response]

I knew a bloke who read the death notices every day from A to Z just to see if he was still alive. Strange how people always seem to die in alphabetical order?

[Flicks through book] I made some notes. *[Finds page]* The words people spoke just before they died.

I wonder what my final words will be. "Go Saints" or "I'd kill for a cuppa" or *[Anger]* "Who's been in my shed?" *[Smiles, refers to notes]* Here's what some folk said just before they died.

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[GEORGE could act out some/all of these tales using accents where applicable. Maybe sit in the chair/stool which doubles as the coffin]

Brendan Behan was an Irish playwright and on his deathbed was cared for by a Catholic nun. Brendan looked into her eyes and uttered his final sentence. *[Irish]* “God bless you, Sister, and may all your sons be bishops.”

[GEORGE could mime dying for a moment before coming alive to tell the next tale]

The Irish pianist John Field was close to death. It was time to call a priest but which one? A friend whispered in the dying man’s ear. “Are you a Papist or a Calvinist?” *[Refined Irish?]* “Neither. I’m a pianist.”

Conrad Hilton was a hugely-successful international hotelier and great-grandfather of the hugely talent-less, Paris Hilton. In his last hours Conrad was asked for some special words of wisdom. A hush before the great man spoke. *[American]* “Always place the shower curtain on the inside of the tub.”

One of my favourites came from a General Sedgwick in the American Civil War. Inspecting his troops, he stood on a parapet to better see the enemy. His men urged him to be careful. *[Crouching as nervous soldier]* “Take cover, General. Please sir, duck!” The General scoffed. *[Standing, strutting. American]* “Take cover! *Take cover!* Why, they couldn’t hit an elephant at this dist”

[FX of rifle shot? GEORGE could fall into his chair when “shot”. Pause then GEORGE feels himself where he was just “shot”] I may need an organ donation. *[Slowly considers his diary before resuming his talk]*

BURIAL

Okay, you’ve signed the organ-donor form, made your will and chosen the cemetery. Of course you won’t need a graveyard if you prefer cremation but I’d rather the worms got me than the flames.

Some folk don’t like either. They suffer from *taphophobia* - a fear of cemeteries or being buried alive. Of course you can be buried *above* ground if you can afford a family mausoleum.

[Fetching torch. Lighting could dim as George is underground. Shines torch on walls]

But when it comes to burials, the ancient Egyptians had the Mummy of all methods. *[Imitating Boris Karloff]* Bodies were carefully wrapped so the mummified body was preserved for the next stage of life.

[Could approach audience and shine torch on one person- not their face] Hello Mummy.

[Back to tour] The ancient walls were decorated with art-work of food for the journey. And work tools were included so the deceased could continue their trade.

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[Torch under chin still as Boris Karloff] My wife must be Egyptian. When we head down to Anglesea *[local seaside resort]* for the weekend, Honey packs enough stuff to take *us* to the next world. *[Putting torch away, lighting returns to normal]*

Even today, people are buried with their football scarf, musical instrument or photo of their hero. One bloke was buried with his motor-bike.

But it wasn't only the ancient Egyptians who believed in life after death. I've got a mate keen on re-incarnation.

His wife doesn't believe but had no problem until my friend announced that, in a previous life, he was a magnificent butterfly. Sadly, there are problems in the bedroom. Every time they make love, the wife breaks into uncontrollable laughter – reckons his wings keep tickling her.

[Refers to book] Now where was I? *[Looks in diary]* Oh this is interesting. The day you die.

GEORGE'S DEATH

Would anyone want to know the exact day of their departure? I wouldn't.

[Switches on jug and makes a cup of tea or peels a piece of fruit. Happier topic] I'm enjoying old age and thankfully my body and mind are not out to lunch - yet. I don't fancy old-age as a zombie.

[Brighter] I want all my wife, kids and grandkids to be happy and healthy. I'd love another St Kilda premiership and then I'd like to depart this earthly paradise in a quiet, no-fuss fashion.

Some time in my ninety-fourth year, I'd like to die peacefully in my sleep - my own bed, best jim-jams, dentures in a nice, clean glass and snoring ever so softly, *[Snores. Grinning]* It's good to have a snore.

Sadly, many of us go before our time and in a somewhat bruised and battered condition. *[Nodding, thinking]*

[May now be making cup of tea, perhaps from a thermos. Could have small cakes/biscuits wrapped in wax-proof paper or cling-film. Or is eating manadarin]

I guess like me you find suicide depressing. *[Pause. Suicide is sad]* There was a time when some Christian churches wouldn't allow the coffin of any poor beggar who'd topped himself to pass through the church gate. Suicides had their coffin heaved over the wall. Now there's some Christian love for you.

As the old Yorkshire saying goes, *[West Riding accent]* "There's nowt so queer as folk".

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PLACES TO DIE

[Changes subject] And talking of queer, what about unusual places in which to die? A punter could take a tumble at Flemington. *[Name well-known local racecourse]* A gardener could drop into the hole they've just dug for a new rose-bush. And a person pegging out the washing could peg out themselves.

CEMETERIES

And it's not only people who peg out. Sometimes it's their grave. You see if you've ever wandered around an old cemetery, you'll notice that some graves are a bit sick.

I don't like a grave covered with weeds, where the plastic flowers have died and even parts of the grave have collapsed. *[Excited, demonstrates gardening]* If it were my grave, I'd hop out and do a spot of midnight gardening.

Mind you, many graves are spotless with fresh flowers but the times today are a-changing.

[Could refer to an Internet magazine] You can now have a grave on-line. True. A website to celebrate your dear departed. You list their achievements and add photos, audio and video clips. Visitors drop by to light a digital candle and sign the on-line condolence book.

Visit your computer cemetery as the dead go digital. Let your mouse meander round the mausoleum. Freshen the flowers. Change the music. And when your teenager yells, *[Kid calling]* "Just going to visit Gran's grave," you'll feel proud as punch even if after the visit they go back to playing *Alien Grunge Version Four Point Two!*

And if you're worried about your grave falling into rack and ruin, get buried in one of those lawn cemeteries. It gets a bit noisy when some geezer with a ride-on mower whirrs around upstairs but it's like living in a bowling green.

So yes, I'm going to be buried but I understand why more people choose to be cremated. If you don't like worms or monuments, fire up the barbie.

CREMATION

Being cremated means you can be sprinkled on your favourite river, your beloved garden or *[Indicates biscuit container]* simply kept in the cupboard with the biscuits.

But I've got reservations. What happens if the family get the wrong ashes? And how would they know? Does anyone ever look in the container and say, *[Removes biscuit]* "This ain't Kevin! Where's his moustache?" Or, *[Sniffs]* "Evelyn's not wearing her *Chanel Number 5!*"

And what about the family who hired a boat to scatter their loved one's ashes at his favourite fishing spot? The scattering was torpedoed.

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Everyone got sea-sick, the lid wouldn't unscrew and they dropped the urn in the water where it sank like a stone. One relative tried to catch it, fell overboard and it was almost a double burial.

Another family went up a mountain to scatter Grandma's ashes to the four winds. The wind was fickle and no sooner had the ashes taken flight then they changed direction
[Mimes waving/wiping ashes or spitting]

So if you don't fancy burial or cremation *[Pause]* you can get stuffed.

Well you stuff your pets so why not your relatives? – literally. It's called plasticating and is a bit like the ancient Egyptians turning bodies into mummies.

You plasticate old Uncle Jim, stick him in the broom cupboard and bring him out for family re-unions. At Christmas, plonk him next to the family drunk and the two'll keep each other entertained for hours.

Or you can fire the ashes into outer space. *[Examining the skies]* At night, look up and watch Granny racing round the heavens. *[Waves and calls]* "Hi Granny! *[Following her disappearance]* Bye Granny!" *[To audience]* She comes round every third Tuesday.

And if your loved one's a greenie, sink their ashes in an artificial reef. It gives a whole new meaning to *[Gangster]* 'swimming wid da fishies'.

Or why not bung the ashes in fireworks, light the fuse and watch as your loved one *[Imitates a whoosh]* sparkles one last time? It's called "going out with a bang". Better still; sprinkle their ashes on a board over which an artist paints a picture.

[Imitating guest] A guest admires the painting of a rural scene. "Oh that's lovely." "Yes," you reply, "but can you see Grandpa hiding in the woods?"

And if it's bizarre to put your loved one's ashes inside a photo frame or tennis racquet, now you can *wear* your relative; turn the deceased into diamonds.

You see during cremation, carbon is produced which is turned into graphite. This becomes a coloured diamond. *[Flashing imaginary ring]* Much cutting and polishing later and *[Indicating hand]* da-dah! – a sparkling spouse in a variety of wonderful colours.

And they only use a small amount so you get back most of the ashes.

[Getting excited] There's a whole new enterprise here; collect celebrity diamonds. *[Pretending to be a collector. Gushing. Waving fingers]* This sea-green one is Jacques Cousteau. This pink one is Liberace. This yellow one belonged to Elvis' roadie's, next-door neighbor's, cousin's, dentist's, mother-in-law. Not sure about this blue pendant. According to the *Da Vinci Code* it might be Mary Magdalene.

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[As himself, shaking head] E-Bay will never be the same. And it gives new meaning to the expression, ‘the family jewels’. *[Puts imaginary jewels back into pocket]*

HEAVEN

[Wanders to one side or upstage and looks up – to the heavens]

What do you reckon? *[Pointing up]* Is that where we go? Is that the way to heaven? *Is there a heaven? And if so, where is it?*

I’m actually worried about the location of heaven because *[Pointing]* if it’s up there, someone who dies on the other side of the world, when they take off, will be heading in the wrong direction. *[Calling down, pointing up]* Oi! It’s *this* way!

Then what about people who get blown to bits? Do they arrive in heaven stuck together?

And do you age in heaven? If you’re about to turn 4329, how long will it take to light the candles? Will birthdays be cancelled on fire-ban days?

And what about heavenly real estate? Is paradise overpopulated? With the boom in born-again believers, is there a housing crisis?

And don’t think true believers haven’t got worries. The Queen Bee is sure she’s going to heaven but doubts remain; what will she wear?

[Looking in diary] Now where were we? Ah, yes. Headstones.

HEADSTONES

[His mood lightens] Time for a laugh, George. *[Puts model headstone on chair/stool]*

I really do fancy a touch of levity on my headstone. Something like Spike Milligan’s, “*I told you I was ill!*” or W.C. Fields, *[As Mr. Micawber/W.C. Fields]* “*On the whole, I’d rather be living in Philadelphia.*”

Of course headstones with unintentional jokes are quite acceptable. “Here lies an honest man and a politician.” How did they get two of them in the one grave?

And headstones can be confusing. Michael Murphy died but his headstone read “Mary Murphy”; everything was in his wife’s name.

[With small prop as pretend mic] You remember Dean Martin? His headstone cries out to be sung. *[Sings a la Dean?]* “*Everybody loves somebody some time.*”

And Mel Blanc, the man with a thousand voices, including Bugs Bunny - Mel lies beneath a headstone which reads, *[Could sing to “da” the final bars of the Bugs Bunny cartoon finishing with speaking these words]* “*That’s all folks!*”

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Of course Australians are known for their parched-dry wit. *[Ocker]*

*“Wherever you go
Let your wind go free
For holding it in
Was the killing of me.”*

WAYS OF DYING

[Replacing headstone and stool] Now just as there are different headstones, there are different ways of dying. Death offers variety.

Attila the Hun was a fierce warrior but had a soft side and got married. Sadly, Attila suffered a nosebleed and bled to death – on his wedding night!

James Fixx invented jogging and died of a heart attack – while jogging.

A Frenchman, Monsieur Toubon choked to death when some of his girlfriend’s edible undies got caught in his throat; should have stuck to truffles.

In the Yorkshire village of Haworth, home to the famous Bronte sisters, people were dying because the village water supply flowed under the graveyard. The dead killed the living.

Then there was the woman who swallowed some ants and panicked. Would they tickle her to death? Would they attack her vital organs? What should she do? “I know,” thought the terrified woman. “I’ll kill the ants with insecticide.”

So she drank the poison and it worked. *[Grabbing throat]* Good-bye ants, goodbye madam.

[FX Excerpt of music by Lully. Continues under dialogue fading as story finishes]

But my favourite unusual-way-of-dying concerns the French composer Jean-Baptiste Lully. He’d conduct musicians and kept time by thumping the floor with a long stick. *[Demonstrates]* One day he accidentally thrust the stick into his foot, gave himself a nasty abscess and expired from his wounds. He did more than suffer for his art, he died for it!

[Limping back to book; trying to get his thoughts in order. Sighs] What day is it? Who am I? Have I forgotten anything? *[Discovers the answer in book]*

Of course! The whole point of you being here – *my* funeral!

You see the most important person is not the spouse, family, friends, celebrant or even you the mourners – it’s *me!* - the deceased.

And yet the only person who doesn’t see or hear a jolly thing is the stiff. Hence my plan - have your funeral *before* you die?

BREAK IN PAGES IN PREVIEW SCRIPT

How to Enjoy Your Own Funeral 19

BUSTER *There was an old codger, George Muffet
Who out in his shed liked to rough it
He hammered and sawed
Till was called by his Lord
Cos sadly George Muffet did snuff it.*

MINISTER *[Chuffed] Aw, thank you Buster. That was lovely. [To congregation] Now my friends, today we remember George [Interrupted by BUSTER]*

BUSTER *'Scuse me. [BUSTER whispers in MINISTER'S ear]*

MINISTER *Another poem? [BUSTER nods. Pause before each poem. Perhaps throat clearing]*

BUSTER *George Muffet he lived for his shed
There even was talk they were wed
With tools all in rows
George turned up his toes
And took off for heaven instead.*

MINISTER *Thank you Buster. And now let's sing one of George's favourite songs which he loved when played by a trad-jazz band – and it's also the theme song for his beloved St Kilda - Oh When The Saints.*

[Music begins. The words of the hymns are part of the theatre programme. It's assumed that the audience will join in. MINISTER encourages the congregation to sing]

Now come on, you heard what a nice chap he is. Give it your best shot.

[BUSTER helps with the singing for the first time through then is quietly retired during the repeat. The verse is sung twice with GEORGE encouraging the audience between refrains]

*Oh When the Saints, go marching in
Oh when the Saints go marching in
Oh Lord I want to be in that number
When the Saints go marching in.*

[Music stops and George continues describing his funeral service]

[As GEORGE] Next are the eulogies and the first is from my old work colleague, Bluey McMahan.

[GEORGE as BLUEY goes to lectern. He is quite elderly and could use a stick]

I'm sad to be here today because I worked with George for twenty-seven years and we were great friends. As a matter of fact I go to as many people's funerals as I can. I'm hoping they'll all come to mine.

I went to a baker's funeral last week. He was cremated at a hundred and sixty degrees for twenty minutes.

Never thought I'd come to George's funeral because I'm 92. They say you know you're old when you wake up two hours before your body lets you get out of bed.

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Now George had a great sense of humour. I remember when our old boss died and George took me to the funeral. The celebrant couldn't shut up. Said our old boss was the most wonderful bloke in the world. Never spoke a cross word, never took a day off and never made a mistake. *[Scoffs]* Ha!

Then George whispered, "Have a look in the coffin Bluey and see if it's the right body."

I got to the church a little early today. I wanted to see George before they closed the coffin. He looked magnificent lying there in his best suit. Got me thinking about the ungodly. I feel sorry for atheists when they die - all dressed up with nowhere to go.

But I know George believed in the after life. One day he left work early to see his beloved St Kilda. Next day the boss asked George if he believed in life after death. "I certainly do," replied a nervous George. "Well that's good," said the boss, "because after you left early to go to your *grandmother's funeral*, she called in to see you."

You know, I never considered George to be anything less than a wonderful friend. His middle name was Optimism and I loved his favourite saying.

"Every day I beat my own previous record for the number of consecutive days I've stayed alive." God bless you, George.

Thank you ... very much.

[Bluey walks into audience and turns and returns as George] Thanks Bluey. *[To audience]*

Now next is my dear old cousin, Gertrude. We're both 82 and when we were kids, my family used to visit her family on their farm. Great days. Gertie taught me to ride a horse and I've still got the sore backside to prove it. Where are you, Gert?

[Looking around, sees Gert and moves to help her up to the lectern. She is bow-legged and pops on a floppy hat or sun-hat. She's a yokel with a lively sense of humor]

Hello everybody. I've got lots of beautiful memories of George. I remember when we wuz kids on the farm, Mum gave him sixpence for the collection-plate at Sunday School. After church, George was scoffin' a bag of lollies and Mum was hoppin' mad. She said, *[As George's aunt]* "George," she said. "Where'd you get them lollies?"

As cool as a cucumber was George. He sucked his sherbert-bomb then said, "It's okay, Auntie Nell. I met the minister at the door and he got me in for free."

I reckon every family's got one dopey relative. *[Gives dopey laugh]*

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George never lost his sense of humour and he was brilliant at repeating stories about some of our funny relations. *[Aside]* I reckon every family's got at least one dopey relative. *[Dopey laugh]* Anyway, I remember George telling us about Great-Grandpa Rogers and his farm on the Victoria-South Australia border. There was some dispute as to which state his farm was in and the court ruled the land was in Victoria. "Thank goodness," said Great-Grandpa. "I couldn't stand another one of those South Australian winters!"

And George was very wise. I once asked him, "George, what's the best way to live to a hundred?" He thought about it then he said, he said, "Get to ninety-nine and then be very, very careful."

Did I tell you George was a wag? Well he was. Years ago he was playing golf with old Uncle Fred who was a very big man. Half-way round the course, Fred had a massive heart attack and was in terrible pain. *[Serious]* But you know George carried his uncle all the way back to the clubhouse.

"That must have been difficult," I said. George nodded and said, he said, "The carrying wasn't too bad. The hard bit was putting him down and picking him up every time I played a stroke."

Now let me tell you what George got up to at my brother Stan's funeral.

In the church, one of Stan's mates went up to the coffin and dropped in twenty dollars. "Brings good luck," he said and sat down. A second mate did the same thing.

Then both mates looked at George. He just sat there. The mates kept staring so George reaches in his pocket, takes out a cheque-book, writes in it, goes up to the coffin, drops in a cheque for sixty bucks and pockets the two twenties. *[Laughs]* D'ja get it?

Ah, God love ya, Georgie. *[It's time to go]* Now, I'd better go and put on the kettle.

[Gertrude departs and George bounces back on stage]

[Calling to her] Thank you, Gertie. Remember I like mine hot and wet.

Now let's sing a hymn and I've chosen something old. I love *Abide With Me*. *[Music begins]* It's a great community hymn. It works well in a church or a packed football stadium. You don't need to be a special singer and the words are spot on. Everyone hates being lonely and with this hymn, you'll never be alone. Please stand and sing with me. *[George leads singing. If the audience is elderly, GEORGE may not ask them to stand]*

[Sing Abide With Me after which GEORGE indicates the audience may sit]

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Abide With Me

Words by Henry F. Lyte Music by William H. Monk

Abide with me; fast falls the eventide;
The darkness deepens; Lord with me abide.
When other helpers fail and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, O abide with me.

I've always loved the Irish blessings and one in particular. It never trumpets religion or race. It can apply to everyone. It takes into account the weather and work and life itself. I'd like my funeral service to finish with just this blessing.

*May the road rise to meet you. May the wind be always at your back.
May the sun shine warm upon your face and rains fall soft upon your fields.
And, until we meet again, May God hold you in the hollow of his hand.*

[Lights dim, pause, then return to setting before the funeral. GEORGE is in high spirits]

Well I rather liked that. Good music, down-to-earth eulogies and a simple, heart-felt blessing.

I haven't quite decided on the music for when they carry me down the aisle. *[Winks]* I'd prefer to walk. I knew a dear old lady who was cremated and as her casket slipped into the furnace, her musical choice wafted through the room. *Smoke Gets In Your Eyes*.

Those who weren't crying were laughing and most of us were doing both.
[Collecting bottle of champagne from bucket of ice. This could be done offstage by the stage manager who then becomes the waiter/waitress] So, I've left the church, they've popped me in the ground and now we're round at my son Colin's for a farewell drink to George. Me.

[He pops the cork and pours champagne into tray of glasses. Talking as he pours, GEORGE becomes his son at the wake. The drinks preparation could be done by the stage manager]

Ladies and gentlemen, if I could have your attention please; thank you. First on behalf of Mum and all the family, I'd like to say how grateful we are that you came to Dad's, to George's funeral. He'd be tickled pink to see such a wonderful turnout.

[The glasses, once filled, are offered to members of the audience]

I think you'll agree the funeral was just as Dad would have wished.

And you won't be surprised at how smoothly things went today when I tell you he planned the lot. Dad chose the service, the cemetery, the music and even this champagne.

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He was not only a good man, he was a great man. We all loved him for different reasons but we are united *because* we love him. We'll all miss him very much and Mum, you know that Dad's even done the paperwork for *your* funeral.

[To audience who are now guests at the wake. Music begins softly. Sitting On Top of the World]

But now it's time to say farewell. Please, raise your glasses and join me in a toast to our father, grandfather and friend. To George. *[Colin toasts and drinks. Hopefully the audience with glasses will respond. Music swells. COLIN turns upstage, places glass on bench then turns as GEORGE and takes his bow. Repeat if required]*

The End

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