

# **Jack's funeral: Self-connection serves everyone**

**by Bridget Belgrave**

When I arrived at Jack's funeral I found the large church completely full. Looking around I recognised a lot of people and felt among community. The only space was standing room at the back. I sensed the solemnity among us all as the coffin came in followed by Marie and their two young sons.

I find all funeral services intensely moving. The loss, for those close to the person. The utter, irreversible loss. The power of death. The way it is beyond our grip, beyond our understanding. The way it makes visible the huge thing that is every person's life. All this, and the tragic experience of Jack's family, was impacting me in the first moments of the service.

I felt very moved and began to feel a force rising up within me. I did my best to open myself and let the feelings flow. Sometimes this works for me - I can hold myself as the banks of a river while the feeling rushes through - but this time my river banks were dissolving and the huge surge of feeling was fast becoming all that I was. Any moment now it would burst out as a wild, noisy outpouring. We were in England, where the culture for funerals involves weeping, certainly, but not loud shrieking and sobbing! What to do?

I looked towards the door and saw a route I could take which would barely disturb anyone. I'd go outside. That would help. Then, just before moving, I realised how much I wanted to be present, to be part of the service. Something within me resolved to find a way through this, and suddenly I remembered something I had recently learned: with such a strong feeling, there must be an equally strong need underneath it. What could it be?

From nowhere I could identify, an answer came immediately: to worship. I needed to worship. I was surprised. This was not something I would have thought of, and yet I was immediately calmed by this answer. This was it. It felt true. As I focused on my desire to worship, the forceful push of my feeling subsided, like a wave that flows back into the ocean after breaking on the shore. I could feel my feet again. I could stand steady. I could stay in the church. I could worship. I fell into a deep state, totally centred and in sacredness for the rest of the service.

At the end there was an announcement that family and close friends would proceed to the burial in the cemetery a couple of miles away. I wondered whether I counted as a close friend. Perhaps not, I thought. So I got on my bicycle and pedalled very slowly towards my home - but something stopped me. I didn't feel ready to go home. Instead I headed to the house of a friend who had also been at the funeral, but she was not there.

I paused, wondering what to do next. Then, even though it was at least ten minutes since the end of the service, without thinking further about it, I began cycling slowly towards the cemetery. I noticed I was still in a deep state, and could hear my inner promptings more clearly than usual, so I decided to trust my impulses for action in each moment. I cycled gently, at the exact speed that felt right to me, enjoying the spring flowers along the roadside in the dappled sunlight.

After about ten minutes I arrived at the large cemetery, park-like and beautiful in the May morning sunshine. I could see the funeral cars quite a distance away, and the mourners with the priest, beside the grave. I parked my bike and walked over to join them. Just as I arrived the burial rituals were completed and the group broke up, embracing each other and talking quietly. I was glad to be there to embrace friends and participate in this moment, but sad to have missed the shared graveside prayers.

Marie and her sons were the first to peel off from the group. They got into the leading funeral car. Others followed their lead and the group dispersed. No longer among the mourners, I wanted a moment to be with Jack, to connect with his spirit. I went close to the grave and looked down at the coffin, deep in the earth, where his body lay. I picked a few of the daisies that were growing abundantly in the grass and, with a prayer, threw them in. I stood there in silence for some long moments.

While doing this a part of myself was continually feeling alarmed. My mind was telling me I shouldn't do this, it wasn't right, not my place, not respectful. After all, I was not nearly as close to him as the others. What would they think? And on and on... But my inner connection was still very strong from my experience in the service, so I managed to stay with my inner promptings.

The last of the family and friends got into their cars and drove off slowly together. I was alone, standing next to Jack's grave. A moment later I felt complete there, but not ready to return to daily life. I saw a bench under a tree some distance away, walked over to it and sat down.

As the last car left the cemetery I heard a motor start up. A small truck bounced over the grass to the grave. Two men got out and began spading earth onto Jack's coffin. They talked loudly as they worked, joking and chatting. They were full of the vigour of life. They reminded me of the grave diggers in Shakespeare's plays, contrasting life with death, humour with tragedy, lightness with sorrow. In a few efficient and energetic minutes they had filled the grave and jumped on it to press the earth down, chatting cheerfully all the while. They threw their spades back into the trailer, and drove off.

I sat there a while longer in the silence and stillness. It was done.

I did not see Marie during the next days. I had an urge to write to her to say what had happened after she had left the graveyard, but I felt very unsure. To send something so personal at such a sensitive time, would that really be OK? Several days later I felt

the urge again and, reconnecting to my decision to follow my inner impulses, I penned her a letter.

Some days later Marie rang me. With her voice full of joy she told me how deeply grateful she was for my letter. She said she had left the graveside to care for her younger son, when he could not take any more. Through the window of the funeral car she had watched me go to the grave, pick the flowers, throw them in, and stand in silent prayer. She told me she had been longing to do exactly this herself, and it was as if I had done it for her. It also meant a lot to her that I had seen the grave filled. It brought her solace and completion.

I was amazed. I had never thought of doing it for her. Looking back I could see how, from the moment in the church when I became deeply connected with myself, everything had flowed in a 'right time, right place, right action' way. It felt like grace, and I felt privileged to have been part of it.

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'Jack's Funeral' is one of 45 stories in 'Empathy Stories: Heart, Connection, & Inspiration' ed. Mary Goyer, PuddleDancer Press 2016