

Thinking Outside the Box – Foreword

I was eleven years old when Granny Betty died. There was the usual debate of whether or not children should be allowed to attend the funeral.

Unfortunately for me my first day of secondary school was the same day set for the funeral. My parents asked my new school what they should do. The school's advice: send her to her first day at big school. It was as if they believed children should not attend funerals. Nobody thought that, seeing as how I was eleven, I would be able to handle it.

For me I don't know if my Gran is dead. The last time I saw her she had just suffered a stroke. I was the first to find her and raise the alarm. Then she was in hospital for a week or so and then she was dead. I've never seen the coffin she was in, I never watched it progress into that space behind the curtains at the crematorium. Supposedly it was her ashes we ditched into the Atlantic, off the sands of Porthtowan.

But I don't know if my Granny is really dead. Photos of a coffin are not good enough.

I was once a friend with a guy I had known since a toddler. He came to my third birthday party. His present to me had been a cuddly toy bunny rabbit with a cloth body with a green pattern on cream, fuzzy face and paws all cream in colour. I was still cuddling it in bed at night, at the age of twenty-one when I learned of his death.

It was his death that really started me thinking about how I might die. I had already cheated death about three times: being run over, burst appendix, and anaphylactic shock. Only one of those can never happen to me again. I'm not sure if I've quite accepted it yet: that I'll die, young or old, or middle aged, but one thing is certain – I want to go out my way.

For me death has always held a slight fascination. In the course of just over a year I went to Four Funerals and a Wedding. I've been a fan of *Six Feet Under* since it was first aired on UK television.

I'm going to find out what makes a good funeral service. I'm going to explore what I've witnessed in past services, and I'm going to look at alternatives. And one thing I've learnt from going to eight funerals since I was seventeen: everybody needs a plan.