

To the CMA – Funerals

I was at my Uncles funeral five years ago as a loving niece and I worked as a Nurse. I had been a District Nursing Sister for many years and had been to many funerals, as I came away from his funeral two things struck me, funerals were 'stuck' in the dark ages and 'I could have done better'. I felt deflated, wished I had become more involved, felt like I had let him down. The celebrant called him the wrong name, talked about a cruise he had been on (he had never been on a cruise in his life). My reflection now is the Funeral Director just 'took over', didn't involve the family enough, didn't offer a good match to our family of the celebrant, we had regrets.

My mission after that was to decide which Funeral Director I would use for my Mum (when the time came). I decided I wouldn't use any of the local four. Three are big corporates (hiding behind old names) and the other independent so 'old fashioned'. My search continued and I did find a very good company 5 miles away, still very traditional but felt they were professional and helpful.

By this time I had become fascinated by the 'funeral industry' and what was going on.

What really struck me was the lack of choice, the lack of transparency, the 'old boys' approach. In my humble opinion they had got 'stuck' in the dark ages.

During that year I trained as a Funeral Celebrant and that October took my Aunts funeral. What a difference. Even then though the funeral director told me to 'bow' to the coffin 'really'

Fast forward 5 years. I have set up my own funeral company, the company I was looking for when I went looking as a 'funeral consumer' for my Mumthat if I found then, I knew I would use. I couldn't find what I wanted and my guess is neither can many other bereaved people.

OPALS was born out of the need to offer 'Choice' and 'Transparency' to people arranging funerals. I don't want any of my clients to have regrets, I want them to feel supported, work out what they want, not be told what to do. To feel involved funerals to be 'Family Led'. My premises have been open for nearly 2 years now and as I become busier and busier most of my families come from recommendation. Nobody has ever come through my door, met me and not used me, I am very proud of that.

I urge you to consider that any regulation needs to take into account the small businesses that are striving to make a difference in the funeral world. We may be small, but we make a huge difference to the families that use us. As you are aware i'm sure, we haven't the financial resources that large corporate companies and trade associations have. []

Looking back I was quite 'brave' (some may say 'foolish') to have taken that massive leap to have my own premises but I am so pleased that I did.

My testimonials say it all a daughter last week in her thank you said 'you really are a shining light'. I hope this investigation 'shines the light' on 'bad practice' and allows the funeral world to move forward into the 21st century feeling proud and serving the bereaved families as they should be served. Please take a look at my website to gain a bigger picture.

Comments from Frances Alcock – Founder and Managing Director of OPALS

www.opalsfunerals.co.uk