

# Mourning the loss of fitting farewells

By Cam Lucadou-Wells

In his 32 years as a Dandenong funeral director, Ashley Crow has seen many creative final tributes.

German Shepherd dogs forming a guard-of-honour as a dog enthusiast's coffin was carried out of the chapel, or truckies blasting air horns as their mate is lowered into his gravesite.

A funeral hearse circling a football oval as the scoreboard sounds the final siren.

People sometimes pre-record their own funeral eulogy – a powerful chance to thank their *loved ones one last time*.

The Le Pine Funerals director says his role is to allow families to pay that special, fitting tribute.

But during Covid lockdowns – such as this current one – funerals have been hollowed to 10 mourners.

The past 16 months, families have been opting to delay services until “some time down the track” – when normal service may resume.

Some choose to go ahead with a small gathering, like the family of a widely-admired young school teacher.

“There would have been 1000 people there under normal circumstances,” Mr Crow recalls.

“To have only 10 able to attend, you don't get that impact of how they've touched so many people's lives.”

Lost also are the wake's comfort – the chance to come together, reminisce, regale and share memories about a late, loved one, he says.

Mr Crow worries others will miss altogether that chance to honour and celebrate a loved one's life as part of the grieving process. They'll miss that “platform to move forward”.

“Some families think we'll go back from 10 up to 300 (mourners). That won't happen soon – it may go back up to 50.

“I worry that people can't say goodbye in a meaningful way and come to the reality of what's occurring.

“This Covid pandemic is one of the hardest periods I've observed.”

Meanwhile, funeral directors have adapted to these sparsely-crowded times with web streaming.

The virtual funeral is sure to become a socially-acceptable option for distant mourners in the future, Mr Crow says.

And the funeral videos will remain a permanent record of the array of tributes.

Beyond today's global pandemic, death has always been a part of the human condition.

Mr Crow accepts it as so, saying he has “the best job in the world”.

“I'm certainly not scared of death.

“Being around trauma and grief and loss and death all the time gives you a real appreciation for what you've got.

“It makes me not sweat the small stuff.”



Funeral director Ashley Crow worries that mourners' grieving has been incomplete during Covid restrictions. 247117

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