

# Geoff

## Who are you?

I'm Geoff, a retired electrical and mechanical engineer and a local resident.

## How do your own experiences of loss help you to think and talk about death?

It's not always easy to talk about death, especially if it's someone who was very close to you. My wife died 7 years ago, and it's still difficult to talk about now. In my family, some people try to avoid it, people don't say I'm going up to cemetery, they say things instead like 'I'm just going up to Clevedon' to hedge around the subject.



## How is death talked about in your family, community, culture, or faith?

I think it falls with generations, when I was small nobody ever talked about it at all. We'd notice how somebody had disappeared and were just told they had gone away, or they are no longer around, nobody sat down and said, 'they've died'. We never to any funerals, it was a very Victorian attitude. It was strange, but as we've got older, I've seen more and more words being used to get people talking about death.

Here at the Men in Sheds, we've all lost someone close, not necessarily wives, but people close to us. There's one chap here who's lost two adult children as well as his wife. We talk about it if we need to, but if we don't then that's okay, as we all know why we're here anyway and in the same boat and we will discuss it amongst ourselves.

I'm a lapsed person with my faith and I'm on the fence about things.

## In your family, community, culture of faith, what happens when someone dies?

Once the person has died, it's kind of like a ritual you know? We have a funeral, we organise it through a funeral director, we go to the crematorium, back to the funeral directors, have the funeral, have a wake, whatever was necessary or available, and then everybody just goes home, where we then never talk about it.

## What ways of acknowledging and thinking about someone's death have helped you?

There's so many reminders you can't forget who you've lost, you see their phone, the photographs or you go out and you remember 'oh we went there', watching the TV and I can just go 'we've been there, we've been there'. The memories will never go, they are there forever.

## Do you have a concept of the afterlife or what happens after death? And has this changed as you've gotten older and with the things you've experienced?

I don't think it's changed, I'm quite skeptical really. I don't believe you go up and sit in the clouds, listening to someone playing a harp and that, meeting everyone you've ever loved. I think when you're gone, you're gone and that's that.

# Janis

## Who are you?

I'm Janis, I'm retired, and I have terminal cancer, well terminal isn't the word I should use, but I'm living with cancer, and I am a person from Highbridge.

## How do your own experiences of loss help you to think and talk about death?

I recall my grandmother who was rather stoic, she had a strong faith. My grandfather had died during the war, and we never went to the cemetery or the grave, which was odd because people her age did. I remember her telling me 'I don't need a stone for my memories'. But on this day, she wanted my father to take me there, and when asked why she said, 'because you need to make sure no-one else is buried in the plot!'. Which I thought was a very realistic thing to do to make sure no-one else's name was on the stone!

When people close to me have died, I have shed a tear, but I haven't really had too much to worry about and I think that death is inevitable, but it's the getting there that is the tough part, this is the part that always upsets me, it the journey there that's the toughest part of death. Its not the dying, it's the getting there. It's like getting on a mystery train, without knowing where it's going, how long it's going to take, or when you are going to have to get off.

## How is death talked about in your family, community, culture, or faith?

It's not talked about very much. It was mainly with my grandmother. But faith wise, and I've shocked myself with this, I went to a convent school, so faith was always there in the background. Since my diagnosis I haven't fell back on faith at all, I haven't found it necessary to pray or anything. I've been to places of worship, but they didn't really mean much, which surprised me.

## In your family, community, culture of faith, what happens when someone dies?

If it's possible we've always tried to see someone before they die. I had two cousins who have died in the past six months, one of them was only a month or so ago and we went over to see him. But my other cousin we didn't get to see, as it was sudden with a heart attack. This has drawn me to the conclusion that I need to think about my own health and whether I want to be resuscitated, which has been difficult to talk with my son about. We have funerals in my family, on my mother's side they quite like a drink and there's a lot of them, whereas my fathers' side is a lot smaller and it's a lot quieter, it's a contrast between them.

## What ways of acknowledging and thinking about someone's death have helped you?

Just remembering them really, remembering their birthdays rather than the day they died helped a lot. It's just momentarily remembering.



**Do you have a concept of the afterlife or what happens after death? And has this changed as you've gotten older and with the things you've experienced?**

When I was younger, I would say it was tainted by religion, these feelings of heaven, hell and purgatory. But now I'm not sure, using common sense I just think, there's nothing, it's just sort of fading away to nothingness.

**Janis - April 2025**

# James

## Who are you?

I'm James, currently living in transitional housing and I'm rebuilding my life. I'm stubborn and I will not give in, I'm looking to have a career again, I'm healthy and sober, and I'm a person of Weston-super-Mare.

## How do your own experiences of loss help you to think and talk about death?

I didn't have a conventional upbringing; I was brought up by two women. My mother had epilepsy, and I was adopted by my grandmother, my birthmother returned into my life later. I never knew my birthmother existed until I was around 10, and I asked my grandmother about it, and why we had different last names. My grandmother gave a call, and I was introduced to my birthmother, it was sad, but it was a good day.

They were both hard workers and I had a good childhood, I never wanted for anything. Just 2 years after my birthmother was back in my life, and we had reconnected, she died from a large seizure whilst I was away at a Scout camp. It was quick, and she wouldn't have suffered. No-one for 10 years would tell me about how it had happened. This really knocked my faith, the way in which a higher power works in mysterious ways, and my mother was gone at 32 years of age. But thank you for still allowing me to have my other parent, my grandmother, but then 2 years later she was gone as well.

That was it for me, faith had gone, both young. I suppressed everything. At the time it made me go down some very dark and destructive paths. I couldn't talk about death. Now, it's the opposite, I can talk about it, I can process it and reflect on it, I've had a lot of help. If me talking about my experiences, what I've lived, the mistakes I've made, can just help 1,2 or more people from not having to go down that path, then it is blessed.

## How is death talked about in your family, community, culture, or faith?

It's not talked about in my family, the surviving members just say, 'oh that was a long time ago, just shake it off', not helpful at all. They deal with it by suppressing it and just saying 'get over it'. In terms of the people I see, friendships, or associates and acquaintances, I don't really talk about it, as I've been through a lot and I shield them for it, because not everyone is comfortable talking about death, it can be a very sensitive area. I'm still working on my faith. I'd love to have a chat with whoever's up there about their mysterious ways when my time comes.

## In your family, community, culture of faith, what happens when someone dies?

When my birthmother died, she was cremated, in my family, its common that people are cremated. We had a funeral service and a wake, I was young at the time and didn't know what to do, I managed to get a bottle of whiskey and sat by her grave. The second death, of my grandmother who raised me, hit me harder. She was cremated



again, a full service, and just a few hours after I was in hospital. I had walked across the motorway and hoped to get hit, and I did. I survived. There was nothing that could have been said to be at the time, I was ill, I was psychotic from what my loss and grief had done to me.

What ways of acknowledging and thinking about someone's death have helped you? I miss them, it's never going to go away and it's never going to get smaller. They are in my head; my heart and they will never be gone. Time doesn't heal or wounds, it heals just closes them over, they'll always be there and can open again at any time but aren't always open. I think about them both always, and still talk to them, they are in me, they are with me, they are such beautiful people.

**Do you have a concept of the afterlife or what happens after death? And has this changed as you've gotten older and with the things you've experienced?**

I've always been a bit of a stargazer from an early age. It doesn't make sense to me that we are all alone in this universe. I do believe that there's something after this. I want to sit down and speak with the higher power and ask them 'why?' at their age, and the good ways they lived their lives, just why.

**James - April 2025**

# Bob

## Who are you?

I'm Bob, alias Bob the Biscuit, because with the Men in Sheds were in one of the main dog walking areas in the town. The dogs know if they come and have a sniff, they get a biscuit off me. I'm a former newsagent and working in the retail trade. I hailed from North London, and have lived in Sussex, to Sheffield, and then to Weston. After that over to Southern Ireland, which is when my daughter died. Me and my wife decided we would rather be this side of the Irish Sea, and here I am, I've been back around 20 years, and I hope I'm accepted as a person of Weston-super-Mare.

## How do your own experiences of loss help you to think and talk about death?

From 2000 my wife and I had lost her mother, my mother, and our daughter in the space of 2 years. Then in 2019, I lost my wife to cancer after 45 years of marriage, I was lost. Literally lost. I can honestly say the Hospice, through the Men in Sheds, has saved my life, it has helped me to talk about death, albeit mainly my wife's, and because here we've all been through the system, in one way or another, we can almost know what people are feeling and maybe be some consolation or some therapy for each other. We laugh more than it is sad, but if it needs to be sad then it can be, and we come together with sympathy and support. It is getting easier to talk about death, but it doesn't mean to say we don't all have our moments, we talk about it and we can be adults, of course were all getting on the old side ourselves, and we know we will all pop off ourselves, but we can talk about it.

## How is death talked about in your family, community, culture, or faith?

In the family, not a great deal, because of the losses we've had, how can I say, we don't meet up that often. But with the Men in Sheds, I consider those boys a part of my family, it's a brotherhood. We drink coffee, chat, take the mickey out of each other, talking about death with them is entirely different than talking with our family, its therapy. It's eased that sort of conversation for me, we know what each other's feeling to an extent. The bereavement is there, sometimes at different levels, but we know its grief.

## In your family, community, culture of faith, what happens when someone dies?

Its obviously deep sadness for the family, but also happiness as we know that person is pain free and they can go on to experience the next phase of their existence in another zone. Also, I believe, to meet up with all the family and friends that have gone before. As far as the family are concerned, we have each other, we keep in contact, but don't talk about the loss as much, anyone, but I hope they all know that they can say anything to me. In fact, one of my sons gave me a book, well a diary, and on the front cover it said, 'I want your story Dad' and he was looking for that, which I'm doing, which is a form of therapy itself. Funerals, things like that, is whatever that person requested. It's mainly been cremations. My wife, and our first dog's ashes



are at home. When I go, I've requested that I am cremated and we are all put together in a pillowcase and taken out to sea, sunk, and then dispersed so we can go around the world together, that was always our view from the start.

**What ways of acknowledging and thinking about someone's death have helped you?**

Certainly, the fact that it's at peace, they are at peace themselves. I'm happy to retrieve those good memories and remember the good times and the bad. Talking about my loss with others, at any time, but especially at those times of the year when we grieve that little bit more, dates etc. A little chat to a photo, twice a day, a small glass of wine whilst

cooking and a conversation with my wife. Always remembering that we have been left to help others and that if that can be done, I could spend 24 hours a day here at the shed if I could, they are my saviours".

*Bob is interrupted by a dog at this point pawing at his leg for a biscuit, to which he obliges.*

**Do you have a concept of the afterlife or what happens after death? And has this changed as you've gotten older and with the things you've experienced?**

Having been brought up in a faith believing family, I've always believed in an afterlife, and that hasn't changed, never will. Even with all the bad things that happen in this world, I truly believe that we will all be together again, in a more contented life.

**Bob - April 2025**

# Louise

## Who are you?

I'm Louise, I'm an independent facilitator and I work for the local ICB (integrated care board) and BNNSSG (Bristol, North Somerset, South Gloucestershire NHS Trust) delivering training on neurodivergence and learning disabilities, and I am a person of Weston-super-Mare.

## How do your own experiences of loss help you to think and talk about death?

I guess the way that my own experiences of loss help me to talk about death is that it helps be to realise that we all process someone dying in different ways and just trying to leave space for that.

When my mother died, a friend of mine posted everything on socials, after the wake, and I felt so offended, it was meant for us, it was not meant to be a public thing. She was a public figure, and her father died just last week, and she had already posted online, posted videos, set up a Go Fund me, and had not contacted any of us, any of her friends, it was just straight online. But what I've come to realise is that that is her way of processing, her world is digital, and it is online, that's where she receives her support. I didn't like it when it happened when my mother passed, and we didn't talk for 4 or 5 years after that because I felt she was using my grief for online clicks. But I think for her there's something very real in it, where she can just be herself.



## How is death talked about in your family, community, culture, or faith?

It's funny isn't it, in my family, my own nuclear family where I have my child and my partner, we talk about death quite openly and quite a lot. I think initially my son was quite nervous about it because it was spoken about so clearly and openly, but he's now reached the age where he is seeing the payoff for being open. He's not afraid of it, not looking forward to it, but the idea of death and the inevitability of it isn't scary. I think that is one of the gifts I wanted to give my family is that it isn't a taboo subject, it isn't morbid, it's just one of the very few definite things in life. In my culture, with the tribe that I come from it is the worst thing that can happen is someone dies. From what I saw when my mother died, everyone just stopped talking about it, and when people pray, it's almost like death is a punishment and I really reject that from my upbringing.

## In your family, community, culture of faith, what happens when someone dies?

So, this was a learning experience for me because I'm Nigerian and Jamaican, when my Dad died, we had the Nine Night and I would have been about seven at the time, and I was learning about the traditions we do when someone dies. When my friend died, who was also of Jamaican descent, and I went to be a part of things, and we did the Nine Night again. When my Mum died, who was Nigerian, there was no Nine Night, but the emphasis on 'she must be in white' her head tie must be just right, all white head tie with silver accents, it must be simple. It was surreal because when she was laying in rest I had to go and make sure she



was well dressed because the funeral team who helped us tried their best, but if you've never had to put Nigerian clothes on someone, how to tie a wrap up, or head tie properly, you can only do what you can do and you need someone else to get the edges.

Both funerals were filmed the whole way through, I've never actually watched them, I've got my grandparents ones, culturally we record it, it's a thing. I'm so glad I got the one of my Dad, and its mad that that is how I learned my Dads name, same with my Grandmothers. Its just there on a DVD, I would prefer it online now and I guess that's a job for me to do.

### **What ways of acknowledging and thinking about someone's death have helped you?**

I think it's been important for me to stop thinking about death as a punishment. When I was growing up in my place of faith it was like a punishment, it was the worst thing in the world if someone were to die, you would pray against it, it was the enemy. Even for one of our great pastors in our church, there's a theory that he will be here for a second coming, be that if he's 200 years old or anything, and I know some people from my church may read this and think 'oh ye of little faith'. But death is not the end, it's a beginning, you get to be with your deity, you get to be with your ancestors, to be spiritual. I don't believe it's an end; I don't view it like that. I look forward to meeting more people who think like that. I just refuse to believe that death is a punishment.

### **Do you have a concept of the afterlife or what happens after death? And has this changed as you've gotten older and with the things you've experienced?**

Yes, I do believe in afterlife, with so many people having died in my life. With my Dad dying I was seven and people would say that I would see him again it was comforting, but then I found out he wasn't a Christian and people who weren't Christians weren't going to go to heaven then I thought 'what are we doing then, what's the point'.

My friend died in a car crash, her boyfriend had been drinking whilst driving, there was a friend as well, and she survived, and came back to school. I can't imagine the trauma she had been through; they were just 17, a driving permit not even a full license. I just hope that she is okay. When young people die, and people lose children, I don't believe it's the end, its not just what we see here, there's something coming and I must believe that. It has changed as I've gotten older, I don't believe you need to belong to Christianity to have a good afterlife, and I know that may be contested.

**Louise - April 2025**

# Ahmad

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## Who are you?

My name is Ahmad. I am originally from Afghanistan, and I now live in Weston-super-Mare, UK. I am a proud member of the Muslim community here in the local area, and part of the wider Afghan diaspora. My life has been shaped by the experiences of migration, faith, and resilience, and I carry with me the deep cultural and spiritual traditions of my homeland.

## How do your own experiences of loss help you to think and talk about death?

Growing up in a country like Afghanistan, where conflict and loss have touched nearly every family, death was never an abstract concept. I have lost family members, close relatives and friends to war, illness, and displacement. These experiences taught me that while death is a moment of sorrow, it is also a reminder of the preciousness of life. I believe that death is not the end, but a transition. This belief gives me comfort and allows me to talk about loss with a sense of acceptance and hope rather than fear.



## How is death talked about in your family, community, culture, or faith?

In Afghan culture, death is seen as a natural and inevitable part of life - not something to fear, but something to understand and prepare for. Our traditions are deeply shaped by spiritual values, and conversations about death are approached with humility and respect. Within families and communities, there is a shared understanding that life is a journey with a purpose, and that death marks a return to where we came from. While it may not be openly discussed in everyday conversation, preparing for death - through acts of kindness, reflection, and fulfilling one's responsibilities - is considered a meaningful part of life. These practices are passed down through generations, connecting cultural identity with a deep-rooted sense of faith and moral duty.

## In your family, community, culture of faith, what happens when someone dies?

When someone dies in our culture and faith, there is an immediate sense of community response. The body is washed (ghusl), shrouded (kafan), and buried as soon as possible, ideally within 24 hours, following Islamic tradition. Prayers are held, including the janazah (funeral) prayer, and community members come together to offer support and condolences. The mourning period is marked by reciting the Qur'an and offering du'a (supplication) for the deceased. Family and friends visit to give comfort and to share stories, meals, and prayers - keeping the memory of the person alive while showing support to the grieving family.

## What ways of acknowledging and thinking about someone's death have helped you?

What helps me most in dealing with death is the strong sense of community and the spiritual practices that bring comfort during difficult times. In our tradition, we often come together to

pray and read from the Qur'an, which offers peace and a sense of connection - not just to our God, but to each other. Remembering the good the person did in their life, and sharing stories about them, helps keep their memory alive in our hearts. One of the most meaningful ways we honour someone who has passed away is through charity done in their name - for example, feeding those in need or supporting a local mosque or community project. These acts are seen as a way of continuing their legacy and offering ongoing blessings on their behalf.

**Do you have a concept of the afterlife or what happens after death? And has this changed as you've gotten older and with the things you've experienced?**

In my culture and upbringing, shaped by a strong sense of faith, the idea of life continuing after death is deeply held. We believe that when someone passes away, their soul enters a transitional space where it waits for a time of reckoning. During this period, the peace or unease the soul feels reflects the kind of life the person lived - their actions, choices, and how they treated others. There is a strong cultural emphasis on living with compassion, dignity, and responsibility, knowing that our legacy carries weight beyond this life. As I've grown older, and as I've experienced the loss of loved ones, this belief has become more personal. It encourages me to live in a way that honours my faith, and the values passed down from my elders - values like kindness, honesty, and service to others - not just for myself, but for those who come after me.

**Ahmad - April 2025**

*Ahmad completed this interview under a pseudonym, and his image has been AI-generated to safeguard the privacy and security of his family in his home country.*

# Helen

## Who are you?

I'm Helen, I'm a Nurse on the In-Patient Unit at Weston Hospicecare, and I am a person of Bridgwater.

## How do your own experiences of loss help you to think and talk about death?

I think here at Weston Hospicecare because we are so open about talking about death it's the main thing we deal with here, it makes it easier to talk about. We can draw upon experiences and other conversations with previous patients, families and contacts to help the next people we meet. It can make it easier. At home it is difficult to talk about, it's

not a taboo subject, but it's something that is

difficult to talk about. Recently my Dad was very ill and it was tough to talk about with him, even though I knew it was a conversation we needed to have.



## How is death talked about in your family, community, culture, or faith?

With family it's not something that is openly talked about, there's been times with Grandparents where it's something that should have been talked about and I get annoyed at myself thinking I should have stamped my feet more that we needed to openly acknowledge that someone is dying. I did manage to do this two days before my Grandfather died, but I think that was only because of my experience with dying here. It's in contrast to my Mum, who is also a Nurse, but works with children, she doesn't have that experience of dying in the same way I do. It was her Dad as well, whereas for me I had that generational gap which made it easier talking to the staff. Here at the Weston Hospicecare, it's easier, we all work in the same job, we all experience the same things. I think as a society, as a country, it's still a very taboo subject, it shouldn't be. It's something we all need to talk about more openly so that people's wishes are fulfilled.

## In your family, community, culture of faith, what happens when someone dies?

In my family it's been a mixture of burials and cremations, but there's always been a funeral, always be a wake. Here at the Weston Hospicecare it's always about giving people time with their loved ones, giving them space, allowing them to be with the deceased, putting their wishes forward and caring for them.

## What ways of acknowledging and thinking about someone's death have helped you?

I know with my Grandparents it wasn't so much the anniversaries of their deaths, but more their birthdays. My Nan always had a sherry, so I have one too now on her birthday, and my Grandad was a beer drinker, I just sort have a tippie and say, 'oh here you are Nan'. Here at Weston Hospicecare, we have people who come in on anniversaries or special days, spend time in the gardens, or in the Haven, and just be where their loved one was.

**Do you have a concept of the afterlife or what happens after death? And has this changed as you've gotten older and with the things you've experienced?**

I always believed there's something there, there's something there after life, whatever that may be I do not know. I don't think it's changed as I've gotten older, but now being a mother, when my daughter has asked me things when a pet has died, or when my Dad was ill, I've had to think about how to explain it to a young child. I found myself talking about concepts like heaven, and there must be something more after death.

**Helen - April 2025**