



TENDER

A **STUDY GUIDE** BY ROGER STITSON

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BAILEY AT THE CEMETERY

TENDER

A STUDY GUIDE

by Roger Stitson

Set against the stunning backdrop of the industrial seaside town of Port Kembla, a feisty and resilient community group are determined to take back the responsibility that most of us leave to someone else – to care for their own dead. Scattered throughout are stories that cut to the core, revealing why this small community have decided to take on a practice that is – for most – taboo. As their plans for community-based funerals gather momentum one of their own is diagnosed with a life-threatening illness. Tender is a glimpse of an extraordinary community taking on one of the most essential challenges of human life...its end.



THE PORT KEMBLA COMMUNITY PROJECT COMMITTEE VISITING A POTENTIAL CEMETERY FOR THEM TO TAKE OVER MANAGING

Curriculum links

This study guide is mainly aimed at mid to senior secondary school levels, with relevance to English, Film and Media Studies, Psychology, Ecology (including Permaculture), Society and Culture, Business Studies (Small Business), Legal Studies, Philosophy and Ethics.

Background setting

Carry out the following background activities about Port Kembla, the region on the New South Wales coast where the events depicted in the *Tender* documentary film take place.

- First, for general geographic context, draw an accurate scale map of the eastern coastal area of New South Wales, showing the locations of Wollongong, Sydney, and Newcastle. Also mark the location of Canberra, to the west, and other seaboard locations south of Wollongong, such as Batemans Bay and Eden, to the Victorian border.

Draw a larger, more detailed scale map of the Wollongong region, showing the location of Port Kembla and other suburbs.

- To accompany your maps, carry out research then write a short history of the development of Port Kembla as a heavy industrial site, a major port, and a source of workplace labour. Account for the changes in population in Port Kembla, via British and European im-

migration. Also look at the effects of change on the local Indigenous populace. Comment on the issues of local industrial pollution, its causes and effects, and its relation to community health and the environment. Is unemployment in the region a problem? What is the future for Port Kembla in terms of employment and as a place to live? You may wish to include photos to illustrate aspects of your text. (See 'Port Kembla' in website references.)



THE COMMITTEE MAKING A SITE VISIT TO PORT KEMBLA HOSPITAL



Tender: the participants

Carry out the following activities on the central participants in *Tender*.

Write a short account of the importance of the following participants in our understanding and appreciation of the main issues and themes arising from *Tender*.

Jenny – Manager, Port Kembla Community Centre,

Staff at the Community Centre (Misty, Sheryl, Adrienne, Tina),

Nigel – Caretaker, Community Centre,

Andrew – Volunteer, Men's Group,

Volunteers at the Community Centre (Nella, Ann –who is also a Wollongong Councillor),

Women at the Coomaditchie Aboriginal Community (Lorraine, Narelle, Coral),

Zenith – Natural Death Centre,

Michael – Palliative Care Physician,

Bailey – Andrew's dog.

Community undertakings

Carry out the following activities on the concept of 'community', and the issues surrounding the plan to institute a community-organised local funeral service.

- Have you ever attended a funeral, most likely a family funeral? As a general introduction to this theme from the documentary, you may wish to discuss in class or to write a short piece about your experience of attending a funeral, especially your first. What, for example, did you expect before the event, and how did it compare to the reality?
- As the sub-heading above may suggest, a connected theme throughout the film is the concept and the reality of 'community'. Before looking more closely at the issues depicted during the documentary, discuss in class what you would take to be the meaning – or possible range of meanings – of 'community', drawing from your own observations and experience. Define 'community' as you think it applies to the contents of *Tender*, drawing from specific examples or scenes from the film. For example, at one point of the program Andrew says, 'The community means a big thing, doesn't it? Yeah, it's a big word'. Why does he say community is a 'big word'?

How do you think a sense of community is forged, maintained and strengthened? How might a sense of community be broken, destroyed? Consider such elements, within a community structure, as equality, democracy, singularity of purpose – and perhaps even the positive and negative aspects of inspired leadership. You may also wish to discuss, from the film, the purpose and range of activities of a town or city's 'community centre'.

ABOVE: MONTHLY COMMITTEE MEETING, PORT KEMBLA COMMUNITY PROJECT

BELOW: PORT KEMBLA MAIN STREET



- Drawing from the previous activity, plan and write a short fiction story in which the drama centres on a community under stress. You may wish to discuss the range of genre possibilities and settings. For example, your community may be a small outpost on a distant planet. Or it may be an ethnic or religious group in a contemporary city, or a community from a past era, beset by the ravages of a disease.
- In the opening scenes of the documentary we are introduced to Jenny, the manager of the Port Kembla Community Centre, who is explaining why she wants to set up a non-profit local community funeral business. Discuss in class and make notes on the reasons behind her aims. Explain, for example what she means by the statement that a funeral run by a typical for-profit business is 'set to order'. What does she mean by suggesting that a community funeral service can offer an 'authentic experience', in contrast to what a typical funeral business might offer?
- Later on in an interview, Ann expands upon some of what Jenny has said about the need for a community-based funeral service. Comment on Ann's view that what they are attempting is to rediscover an aspect of the past that has long disappeared over time. What is it that she says has disappeared – and what have been the forces, the elements, that have gradually come into play over many decades, to make these societal changes complete?
- Describe the unfortunate experiences with funeral businesses that some of the other participants in the program endured after the death of partners and family members. Consider, for example, the experiences of Andrew, and the women from the Coomaditchie Aboriginal community.



JENNY BRISCOE-HOUGH, MANAGER, PORT KEMBLA COMMUNITY PROJECT

- Gordon, the mayor of Wollongong, says, 'I think we're in a society that likes to clean everything up very fast, and then we call in the professionals. Death has become so sanitised and turned into a technology that we are disassociated from'. Comment on what you think he means, in terms of when someone dies.
- During the program Michael (palliative care physician) says, 'The area I'm interested in is empowering community before death, because anyone can become a death doula, or an amici or an amicus. But we're creating roles that existed 500 years ago, when community actually cared for the dying'.

Explain the meaning of the term, 'death doula', where it derived from. Define the roles of a death doula, and whether these roles and positions still exist in our





SOUND RECORDIST MARK CORNISH AND CINEMATOGRAPHER SIMON MORRIS FILM ANDREW IN THE CEMETERY

contemporary world. You might also combine the words 'death doula' with 'amicus' or 'amici' to find out the relevance of these other terms used by Michael. (See 'Death doula' in website references.)

- Carry out research on the types of roles that Michael refers to, whereby members of families and the local community from 500 years ago were actively involved in funerals, burial rites and procedures. Find out when the profession of funeral undertaker came into vogue, and why? Write a article designed for a popular history magazine, including illustrations where appropriate – or, alternatively prepare and deliver a short talk to your class on the topic. (See 'History of death and funerals' in website references, where an example of 17th century funerals in England is provided. Use search terms to find information about funerals from other centuries or past eras.)
- Following from the previous activities, you may wish to discuss similar types of social change over the past 100 years or more, where it might be considered that we, as a community, have lost something valuable that once may have been taken for granted. You may even want to turn this into a piece of creative writing – perhaps a short fiction story, a poem, a song, or even an illustrated poster display.
- At the conclusion of the initial meeting depicted in the program, a man who has been observing proceedings begins to ask questions about the funeral service Jenny is attempting to inaugurate. What kinds of questions is he asking about the service, and why? Who is he speaking on behalf of? What are his concerns and worries? How do the members at the meeting react to his presence and to his questions and comments? Do you think he receives a fair hearing and an acceptable response? Taking into consideration the requirements and restrictions on total running time when producing a program for television, comment on whether the filmmakers presented this sequence adequately. For example, should they have interviewed the man? Do you think they tried to, and if so, what might have been his reasons for refusing an interview?
- Explain why the concept of a non-profit community funeral service has become a personal issue for Jenny. What do you think might be the benefits and the disadvantages of organising, instituting and managing a

non-profit, local funeral service? Consider, for example, the issue of competition with an established corporate, multinational business organisation, and why land ownership, or some form of lease control of land, is an important element to take into consideration.

- Explain Jenny's comment that she intends to run a community workshop in which an aim is to 'demystify' the occurrence of death and dying, and to 'bring things back into community knowledge rather than professional knowledge'. What does she mean by 'demystify', and how might you define her interpretation of 'professional knowledge'?
- Imagine you were on the type of committee that Jenny is organising. You might wish to research and then, perhaps in pairs or small groups, prepare a written report on the legal restrictions, rights and legislation of running a dedicated funeral service in Australia (or, alternatively, within your own state or territory). Note, for example, that there are sequences in *Tender* where the legalities of keeping a dead body in the home for a certain length of time are discussed, and there are laws preventing Australian Aboriginals to bury their own in the traditional way, even though immigrant Muslim communities are allowed to have different forms of burial due to their intrinsic religious beliefs. (Also see 'Tender Funerals' in website references. Note that this website has links to a set of Fact Sheets.)

You may wish to research and write a commentary on the issues and laws regarding multicultural burial practices and Indigenous burial practices in Australia. For example, why would a local council prevent Aboriginals from burying their own in traditional ways

- View the sequence which begins with an on-screen title, 'Zenith, Natural Death Centre, Australia' (about 28 minutes into the film), in which Zenith talks to a local group about the moments that occur when you are alone with a partner who has just died at home. Instead of immediately alerting the 'professionals', what is it that Zenith suggests that you should first do, and why? Why does she add that, '... you will never get that time back'? What is important about this time, and why is it 'your' time?



MICHAEL BARBATO, PALLIATIVE CARE DOCTOR, FUNERAL STEERING COMMITTEE



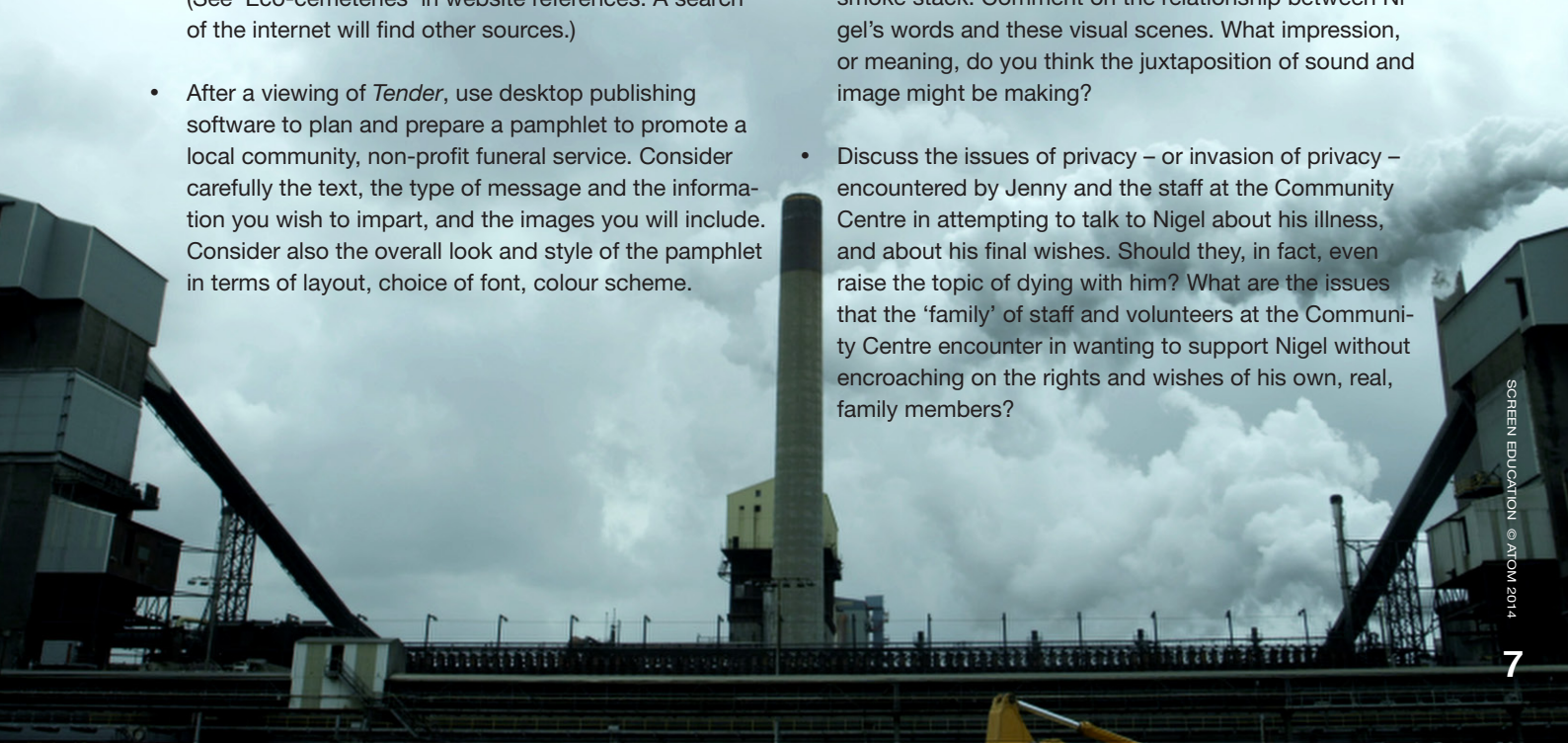
ABOVE: NIGEL SLATER IN HIS HOUSE AT PORT KEMBLA; BELOW: PORT KEMBLA STEELWORKS

- Following from the previous questions, then, drawing from Zenith's words, plan and write a first-person stream of consciousness, in around 200-250 words, from the viewpoint of someone whose husband or wife of 50 or 60 years has just passed away. What are they thinking? How are they reacting? Consider the mood of the moment, the silence, the knowledge that the outside world is oblivious, and what will happen when you make *that* phone call.
- You are a member of the local community who has heard about the plan to develop a non-profit community undertaking business. Plan and write a letter to the editor of the local newspaper in which you express your views in 200-300 words about the venture.
- Near the beginning of the film's final credits, an on-screen caption informs us that Jenny's group is '... searching for an affordable building to house the funeral service and a location for their eco-cemetery'. From the film and from further research, discuss and define the meaning of an 'eco-cemetery'. What might be its essential characteristics? Create an illustrated poster, with explanatory text, of what an eco-cemetery constitutes. (See 'Eco-cemeteries' in website references. A search of the internet will find other sources.)
- After a viewing of *Tender*, use desktop publishing software to plan and prepare a pamphlet to promote a local community, non-profit funeral service. Consider carefully the text, the type of message and the information you wish to impart, and the images you will include. Consider also the overall look and style of the pamphlet in terms of layout, choice of font, colour scheme.

'One of our own'

While Jenny and others at the Port Kembla Community Centre are planning to set up their non-profit funeral service, one of their own, Nigel, the Centre's volunteer caretaker, is diagnosed with terminal cancer. Suddenly the entire issue becomes interconnected with the personal. Carry out the following activities.

- First, from information divulged in various sequences throughout the program, piece together an account of Nigel's life – his schooling when young, his years of employment, and how he came to be the caretaker at the Community Centre. Explain Nigel's views about the kind of employment he had in Port Kembla, and the circumstances of his resignation. Comment on the ways in which Nigel would have preferred to have spent his working life. What were the circumstances he felt that prevented him from a more fulfilling calling in life?
- While Nigel is talking about his working life, there is a long sequence of time-lapse camera shots of the Port Kembla steelworks, the port foreshore, and the giant smoke stack. Comment on the relationship between Nigel's words and these visual scenes. What impression, or meaning, do you think the juxtaposition of sound and image might be making?
- Discuss the issues of privacy – or invasion of privacy – encountered by Jenny and the staff at the Community Centre in attempting to talk to Nigel about his illness, and about his final wishes. Should they, in fact, even raise the topic of dying with him? What are the issues that the 'family' of staff and volunteers at the Community Centre encounter in wanting to support Nigel without encroaching on the rights and wishes of his own, real, family members?





NIGEL SLATER IN HIS HOUSE AT PORT KEMBLA

- Following on from the previous activity, discuss why you think Nigel won't discuss with Jenny and the staff what already seems clear and obvious to them – that Nigel's illness is terminal. To help you, listen in particular to Michael's views, as a palliative care physician, on Nigel's reticence to broach the subject.
- During his last interview on film, Nigel's views about being close to nature, and the general concept of Nature as an entity, are encapsulated in his comments about death and burial, and rejuvenation. View the interview. Describe Nigel's wishes as to where his body should return after his life concludes, and what should be done after the burial. In what ways does this diverge from the normally accepted procedures in our society, of completing a person's final rites?
- What does Nigel mean when he says that, after burial, he will '... return back to the stardust. That's what we're made out of'? In connection with this, explain Sheryl's comment, almost immediately after, that Nigel's belief system is '...very permaculture, and it's very generous of spirit.' What does she mean by 'permaculture', and why does his attitude display a 'generosity of spirit'? (See 'Permaculture' in website references.)
- Following from the previous two activities, a book that had an impact on Nigel's views on life, was *Ishmael: An Adventure of the Mind and Spirit*, by Daniel Quinn (see title listed in Book References). You may wish to read and review the book, in line with the issues of nature, life and death, as presented during *Tender*.
- During Nigel's funeral service one of the men from the Port Kembla Men's Group says of Nigel that, 'He was a caretaker'. It is not likely that the man is referring merely to Nigel's non-paid job at the Community Centre, but to a metaphor, something larger, deeper, and more profound in meaning. Discuss what you think this man is really saying of Nigel.
- When Nigel's brother, Steve, speaks at Nigel's funeral, he refers to Nigel as having been 'an enigma'. Why does he say this? What has now changed in his estimation and new awareness of his brother, and why does he refer to the day's experience as 'humbling'. Also explain why Misty suggests that Nigel's funeral has been his 'gift to us'. In what sense could Nigel's death and funeral be considered a 'gift' for those with whom he worked and associated with at the Community Centre?
- Discuss and analyse the final camera shots of the sequence of Nigel's funeral, in which Jenny stands outside the crematorium with her back to the camera. Examine all the content of this scene, including the appearance of rising smoke, and the closing movement of the camera. What do you think the filmmakers are saying throughout the scene? (Note that we will return to this scene in the Media Studies section later in this study guide.)
- Plan and write an imaginative fiction story or a poem based on Nigel's belief that we will all 'return back to the stardust'. You may choose the approach and the style of narration and narrative viewpoint you think is best for your story or poem. For example, you may tell a story in the form of a legend or an ancient dreamtime myth, and include illustrations. Or you may even present your story in comic strip form, on poster paper or as a computer or tablet display.

Film and Media studies

Carry out the following Film Studies activities that arise from a viewing of *Tender*.

- Discuss why the producers considered that *Tender* was a suitable title for the documentary. If you were asked to give the film an alternative title, what would you call it, and why?
- Examine the opening sequence, which takes place at night, at the Port Kembla steelworks. Discuss and write your own analysis of the edited sound and image, looking at the purpose of the sequence, and how you think it is intended to affect the impressions, mood and the thought processes of the viewing audience. Why, for example, at the end of the sequence, does the camera slowly tilt upwards to the sky, then cut to a day scene of a cemetery. Why do you think these two scenes are immediately juxtaposed, linked via editing?
- Compare what we have seen on-screen at the beginning of the film to what we see throughout the entire final sequence, which opens with a shot of Jenny standing outside a crematorium. Discuss all the similarities between the opening and the closing sequences of *Tender*, including the camera movement. Comment on what the filmmakers' objectives might be.
- There are many long time-lapse, inserted sequences throughout *Tender*. What do they mean to the viewer? View them carefully, especially in context with the scenes that immediately precede each one, then discuss the possible purpose and objectives of these time-lapse sequences, shot by cinematographer Simon Morris.



NIGEL SLATER'S 58TH BIRTHDAY PARTY AT THE COMMUNITY CENTRE WITH JENNY BRISCOE-HOUGH AND LOCAL CHILDREN

- There is a sequence during *Tender* in which Zenith speaks to a group about how to prepare a body, laid out in a family home, for a funeral (at approximately the 44-minute mark of the film). Throughout the entire sequence we only hear her voice on the soundtrack. We see neither her nor what she is displaying; we only see camera shots of the audience. Listen and watch this sequence carefully, then comment on why the director, Lynette Wallworth, has filmed it in this way.
- Consider and discuss the following ethical questions confronting the filmmakers.
 - When Nigel dies the community watches a video of his last wishes which the director Lynette Wallworth has recorded in an interview with him. What do you think the ethical considerations were for the director and producer Kath Shelper in deciding to show this material to Nigel's friends and family after his death, given that Nigel did not speak to them about the fact he was dying?





MARK CORNISH (SOUND), SIMON MORRIS (CAMERA) AND LYNETTE WALLWORTH (DIRECTOR) PREPARING TO FILM AT PORT KEMBLA POOL

- o Given that Nigel's family chose to have Nigel cremated, do you think this dilemma regarding the screening of the interview to his friends, and of the content of the interview, adds to the core issues in the film that the filmmakers are trying to foreground? Documentary film makers often face difficult ethical conundrums when people reveal things on camera that they have kept secret from others. How would you resolve such a question and have you ever had to reveal a secret that might hurt those you told? How did you manage to solve this?
- Discuss whether *Tender* is what you might call a political film, with a particular political agenda. As well as elements of the film you may already have noted, look, for example, at the content of the screen captions at the film's conclusion. You might also examine the comments of many on-screen participants, and query whether any alternative, or opposing argument is advanced. Consider such issues as balance and objectivity, and whether they are even relevant to our understanding and appreciation of the film.
- One of the great cinematic clichés in a drama film – either live action or animated – is that it rains at a funeral. Why? Discuss the nature, mood, and setting of some funeral sequences you've seen in films, including comedies. You may even wish to write a story, or script a sequence for a film, in which a funeral is an important part of the narrative.
- Discuss the film's final on-screen credits, looking at why the decision was made to present them in form of a sewn crochet. Comment on the accompanying dialogue, spoken off-camera at Nigel's funeral. Why do you think was included at the end?
- Working in pairs plan and construct a scripted storyboard for a 30-second promotional video about *Tender*, designed for television screening. In groups you may then wish to produce, record and edit your promo. Consider your use of text captions, sound and film 'grabs' of visual content, music, sound effects and dialogue to tie it all together into a cohesive, effective advertising message.
- Plan and write a review in 250-300 words of *Tender* for a daily newspaper or a movie discussion TV program.



LYNETTE WALLWORTH



ABOVE: ADRIANNE TALBOT-THOMPSON (PORT KEMBLA COMMUNITY CENTRE EMPLOYEE) IN THE FUNERAL CHAPEL. LEFT: ANDREW ALLARD AND BAILEY AT HOME



Impressions and conclusions

Carry out the following activities.

- Discuss in class your overall impressions of the planning, the efforts and the objectives of the participants in *Tender*, in instituting a community-based funeral undertaking. What do you think of their overall chances of success in a business environment where they are up against well-established, and in some cases, large multinational forces? Do you think they are offering services that would attract a wide clientele, or might it interest only a specific, niche socio-economic group?

You might wish to follow up on the endeavours of Jenny and her staff and supporters at the Port Kembla Community Centre, to ascertain further developments. Note, for example, that since the film's production there has been a name change to the funeral business. What is it now, and why is it different?

- Write a commentary on what you think you have learnt and newly appreciated from a viewing of *Tender*.

References and further resources

BOOKS

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Margaret Coffin, *Death in Early America: The History and Folklore of Customs and Superstitions of Early Medicine, Burials and Mourning*, Nelson, Nashville, 1976.

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Robert Larkins, *Funeral Rights: What the Australian 'Death*

Care' Industry Doesn't Want You to Know, Viking, Camberwell, Vic., 2007.

Rosemary Long and Trudy Coffey, *Rest Assured: A Legal Guide to Wills, Estates and Funerals*, The Federation Press, Annandale, NSW, 2011

Daniel Quinn, *Ishmael: An Adventure of the Mind and Spirit*, Bantam Books, New York, 1992.

FILM

Dying Green: Natural Burial and Land Conservation (J. Ellen Tripler, producer-director), Green Planet Films, 2011, Kanopy Streaming Service, Subiaco, W.A., 2014.

(This is available as a 27-minute streaming video file.)

A documentary film about natural burials titled *A Will for the Woods* is promoted at the website below, in a trailer:

<<http://www.awillforthewoods.com/>>, accessed, 9 May 2014.

WEBSITES

Death Doula:

<<http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2014/may/04/death-doulas-helping-people-face-up-to-death>>, accessed 7 May 2014

<<http://www.wisegEEK.com/what-is-a-death-doula.htm>>, accessed 7 May 2014

Eco-cemeteries:

<<http://sustainababy.com.au/blog.aspx?tagname=eco-cemetery&groupid=4>>, accessed 8 May 2014

<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WEIU67HgaLs>>, accessed 2 May 2014

History of death and funerals:

<<http://obiwonknobi69.blogspot.com.au/>>, accessed 7 May 2014

<<http://thefuneralsource.org/history.html>>, accessed 7 May 2014

<<http://www.trinity.edu/mkearl/funerals.html>>, accessed 7 May 2014

Indigenous and multicultural burials:

<http://www.ashgate.com/default.aspx?page=637&calcTitle=1&title_id=8163&edition_

[id=8403](#)>, accessed 12 May 2014

<<http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/people/mourning-an-aboriginal-death>>, accessed 12 May 2014

<<http://www.aboriginalculture.com.au/religion.shtml>>, accessed 12 May 2014

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Natural Death Care Centre:

<<http://www.naturaldeathcentre.org.au/>>, accessed 1 May 2014

Newspaper interview:

<<http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/1929081/tender-farewell-helping-families-deal-with-dying>>, accessed 1 May 2014

Permaculture:

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Port Kembla Community Project:

<<http://www.pkcp.org.au/>>, accessed 1 May 2014

Tender Funerals (previously Community Undertakings):

<<http://www.pkcp.org.au/#!tender-funerals-back/cle9>>, accessed 1 May 2014

Michael Barbato

<<http://www.caringforthedying.iinet.net.au>>



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