



Some people keep their Vivas and put them on their bookshelf, but if you're done with yours (after a thorough reading, obviously) don't just throw it in the bin; either pass it on to a friend or recycle it

Illustration by the multi-talented Joda
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Death Café

Exploring the last taboo

A death café? Tell me more... "They were started in London a couple of years ago, by Jon Underwood, based on the work of Bernard Crettaz and they've spread really rapidly, I suppose as a reaction against the taboo of talking about death in western cultures. We launched ours in November last year and will hold our second this month."

What happens? We invite people to write down topics or questions they have and put them in a hat. We then ask them to sort themselves into groups and pick one to discuss. At the last one we had: is there life after death? Why is there such a taboo about talking about death? One table talked a lot about the needs of dying people and what the living can do for the dying, another talked about the practical problems when someone dies.

Sounds a bit bleak... Not at all. The atmosphere was really quite jolly. Being more aware of and comfortable with the idea of death tends to make us more appreciative of the value of life.

What sort of people come to a death café? There were quite a few older people feeling the need to address their own mortality; one of the conversations was about how people discuss the practicalities of dying with reluctant families. But it was really a very mixed gathering. The age range was from 20 to people in their 70s.

Did you have trouble finding a venue? No. Jane from Redwood Coffee House got it imme-



diately, and was really open to giving it a go. There are really clear guidelines when you sign up to run a death café about what it is and what it isn't. We won't promote any particular line. It's about facilitating discussion.

What inspired you and co-host Emily Lovick to organise it? I'm a celebrant

and Emily's a funeral director so both of us are very used to talking about death and dealing with funerals but I think I'd have been interested in death cafés even if I wasn't [in that business]. I've always been quite conscious of death after being bereaved as a child and I'm very aware of the difficulty people have discussing it.

Have we ever been comfortable talking about death? I think it used to be more commonplace. Death used to be dealt with at home, with the laying out of the body and so on, but the rise of undertaking changed that. Now, developments in healthcare mean people die in hospitals more so we're even further removed. But it feels to me like there's a sea change happening. Assisted dying is on the national agenda, there's more discussion in the media – and of course, there's the rise of death cafés. It feels to me like a very positive, healthy thing.

River Jones was interviewed by Nione Meakin

The next Brighton Death Café takes place at Redwood Coffee House, Trafalgar Street, on January 15. Visit www.deathcafe.com or find Brighton Death Café on Facebook.