

Opening Up Chaplaincy Podcast: Case Study

17/04/2023 - Stig Graham and Joanna Mutlow www.openingupchaplaincy.co.uk

Lina is a young woman who has been taken suddenly and seriously ill whilst visiting the UK as a cultural exchange student. It seems she only has a few days to live. She is in pain and drifting in and out of consciousness. Lina comes from the tiny Pacific Island and has no friends or family with her.

Her belief is a unique, indigenous faith practised only by the people of the island. Lina says she would like to talk about how dying in a foreign land might affect her spirit journey as she would like to return to her native island, the beach, and the trees.

What do you do initially?

You find out that Lina has decided that she wants to be physically returned home, as ashes would be fine, but her spirit would need to be fed for and during the journey, and she suggests some food stuffs need to be gathered and blessed. Anyone could do it, she says, any 'holy' person if a shaman is not available.

Lina says that you are a suitable holy person because of your kindness and would be pleased if you would do the food preparation and associated ceremonies.

How do you feel? What do you do next?

After a lot of research by your administrator, brief radio contact has been made with the island shaman, and you explain the situation. She says that she, Lina's family, and the whole island are traumatised at the thought of Lina's spirit being stranded in a foreign land and they want to know that she will be properly cared for in her difficulties.

The shaman says that the return of the body or ashes is not necessarily important as we are all made from the dust of the stars, and all material places are equal and the same. However, spirits yearn for their home, their place of birth, that their start may be their ending, so ideally Lina should be comforted to know that this will happen, and steps taken to see her returned.

She gives the following instructions for a ceremony to provide provisions for her spirit journey. In a bag made of natural fibre, place a few grains of rice, the entrails of a fish, a few drops of pig's blood and a splash of brandy. As each is put in the bag the following words should be said, 'Holy, wise and eternal Spirit of all the Stars, bless this parting gift to Lina's spirit'. The bag should be burned in close proximity to Lina so that she can feel the warmth and, ideally, inhale the aroma/smoke.

How do you respond to the shaman?

How do you organise to meet Lina's needs?

What difficulties / challenges might there be for you or others?

Who else might you involve?