



# Taking a very personal approach to funerals

"Attitudes towards death are slowly changing and today people want to celebrate a life, they tell us that having a Colourful Coffin brought a smile to everyone's face on a sad day, and that's how we like to think of the service we offer."

**A**s a grandmother of three who's worked all her life, you might expect Mary Tomes to want to take time out with her family. Instead however, she's the driving force behind a very unusual business – producing bespoke picture coffins.

It's a role she and husband Kevin, who is chief designer, developed after deciding it was time to hand the family printing business on to the next generation, son Bob and daughter Kate.

With no intention of retiring, Mary was looking for a new venture and, after musing one day that she would love a coffin with a bright yellow daisy on it when her time comes, she set about finding one. Unable to do so, she decided to investigate further and 18 months later, in 2005, Colourful Coffins was born – the first company to launch personalised picture coffins into the UK market.

The rest, as they say, is history and today the Oxfordshire-based business now produces an average of 150 picture coffins a month. It is not only the country's

leading quality supplier, but has also recently expanded the business into Europe.

Mary and her team take a very personal pride in their work. Although their coffins are sold exclusively via funeral directors, once an order is received, they may deal directly with the family who want to talk about the designs they would like to commemorate their loved one.

"Many people see choosing a Colourful Coffin as a final gift or tribute to the person they have lost," said Mary. "They often talk to us at great length about their loved one, their hobbies, their family, where they liked to go on holiday, and we often feel we really know their personality by the time we have completed their picture coffin.

Although a range of template designs are available, over 90% of Colourful Coffins are personalised, with families supplying photographs, drawings and often words from a favourite song or poem, to go on to the coffin.

Themes may include sunsets or flowers, sports memorabilia, music or countryside

scenes, while some reflect an individual's profession, such as a chef, painter or musician.

The design team goes to great lengths to ensure they meet the family's wishes and a proof of the design is always sent to the family, either directly or via the funeral director, to ensure it is absolutely right. Each completed coffin is personally checked and approved by Mary or Kevin and they are usually designed and completed within a maximum of 48 hours.

Colourful Coffins are available in traditional wood or, for those who want a more environmentally conscious option, in 100% recycled cardboard. A pre-plan service will also be available in 2010 through Golden Charter.

To talk to Mary Tomes or to find out if a funeral director in your area supplies Colourful Coffins, visit [www.colourfulcoffins.com](http://www.colourfulcoffins.com) or call 01865 779172.



# Special memories

When Alex Arter and Sue Harrison each lost a loved one, they said choosing a Colourful Coffin helped them and their families cope on a very sad day.

Alex chose a montage of favourite family photographs to celebrate the life of her late husband Terry; while Sue picked a pretty rose design for her mother, Rosemary.

Here, they each tell their stories:

Terry Arter, a commercial carpet planner and fitter, died aged 60 and it was the funeral director who gave his widow Alex details for Colourful Coffins.

"The funeral director gave me catalogue after catalogue but I kept saying 'that's not my husband'. Then they gave me a leaflet on Colourful Coffins and I knew straight away that was what I wanted," she said.



With daughter Nicole, she chose a design which showed lots of photographs of Terry and the family in happier times; on their wedding day, pictures of Nicole as a child and of Terry with friends.

"Terry was always laughing and playing jokes on people and that's why I didn't want his funeral to be morbid, I wanted it to be a celebration of his life. I didn't want to be staring at a 'boring' old coffin, this meant I could look at nice pictures of him laughing and making other people laugh, which is how he would have wanted to be remembered," added Alex.

"Nothing was too much trouble for Colourful Coffins and when I saw it finished, I couldn't believe it, I was so, so pleased. It exceeded my expectations and was absolutely fantastic."



Sue Harrison, from Dorset, wanted to give her mum Rosemary – known as Rose – a very special send off and, together with her family, she chose the Beautiful Roses design because they felt it was so perfect for her.

She asked the funeral director to order the design, which features a montage of pink roses set against a cream and green coloured background, after seeing it on the Colourful Coffins website.

"From the moment we walked in to the church and saw that beautiful coffin with a few real roses scattered on top, our hearts were lifted and it set the tone for the whole day," said Sue.

"So many people remarked on how lovely it was and how it was just what she would have chosen for herself. She was a very creative person who loved to paint designs, pictures and patterns and some people even said it was as if she'd designed it herself.

"We have such positive rather than negative memories and much of this is due to that lovely coffin. It made such a difference."



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