that my mother, and I, and others have become because of how he lived and how he related to us. It is a shock facing up to the fact that physically he is no longer with us, and the Shona peoples have their burial ritual and time of mourning to allow this shock to take its course. But the final ceremony is that of settling the spirit, of inviting the spirit back home. The final goal is the continuing community, a community that has worked through the upset caused by the physical departure of one of its members and can acknowledge his or her continuing presence.

When Kingston suggested we invite the spirit of Len Walter back into our home and into our village, he was not just suggesting that we cherish his memory as a fine man, an example to follow. He was saying that he is a part of us, and we are denying that if we do not invite him home. It seemed to several of us that day that here was a wisdom we individualistic westerners would do well to heed.

Certainly the time is ripe. Many of us are unhappy with the individualism of western society. A wholistic approach to life understands how we are all bound up one with another. Some of us are experimenting with more communal ways of living and sharing, but few of us have thought of more communal ways of dying. When it comes to death and bereavement, we have little but an individualistic western psychology to help us. But acknowledgement that the dead are indeed living, 'the living dead', is not so very difficult, as we found in that Cotswold church.

Catholic and Orthodox Christians, of course, retain a vivid awareness of living in the presence of the saints. And those of us critical of the West's infatuation with novelty, with its denigration of old ways and old people, can surely recognise that the ancestors are indeed part of us. This is not ancestor worship, merely a recognition of fact.

Talking

We tend not to talk about the dead. A friend recalls going to a particularly tragic funeral in Britain. At the reception, everyone assidously avoided mentioning the girl who had died. Everyone, that is, apart from the husband of six months, who, to everyone's embarrassment, kept on bringing out photos of her, saying 'she'd have loved this . . .', and generally mentioning her at every possible opportunity. In the West, many of us are unsure how to talk with the bereaved and so keep silent, while the bereaved may well feel like going over the top like the classic romantic heroes Romeo or Tristan for whom the death of the beloved is the death of me.

For the Shona though, the deceased is spoken of as an ordinary member of the community. Kingston encouraged us to talk thus of my father, and personally I found this helpful. I also found helpful the many letters that arrived and that simply and accurately talked about him, his personality, and things he'd done in the past.

The Jews understand this. Like the Shona, they bury the body within a day or so and then the close family 'sit shiva'. They sit in the living room at home for a week, while friends, relatives and neighbours come and visit, bringing food, talking about the departed. Talking endlessly. Laughing, crying, sharing memories. And then after that week, the family slowly get back to ordinary life.

Is it because we do *not* share memories like this that the demand for bereavement counselling has arisen? Because we do not have friends and neighbours to listen, we must go to a professional or para-professional for this. If community means anything, it surely means sharing our memories of the departed.

The morning of Dad's memorial service a letter arrived from an old family friend, who had been bereaved of her husband not long before. She quoted the passage by Henry Scott Holland that her wise old doctor husband had left her. He understood what Africans and Jews understand intuitively. These words are increasingly used at British funerals, offering hope that we are indeed moving towards a more normal attitude towards death.

'Call me by my old familiar name, speak to me in the easy way which you always used. Put no difference in your tone; wear no forced air of solemnity or sorrow. Laugh as we always laughed at the little jokes we enjoyed together. Play, smile, think of me, pray for me. Let my name be ever the household word that it always was. Let it be spoken without effort, without the ghost of a shadow on it. Life means all that it ever meant. It is the same as it ever was; there is absolutely unbroken continuity. Why should I be out of mind because I am out of sight? I am waiting for you for an interval, somewhere very near, just around the corner. All is well.'

Tony Walter's book *Funerals—and how improve them* is published by Hodder & Stoughton. It is available from Cruse, 126 Sheen Road, Richmond, Surrey TW12 3DU, price £8.99 plus £1 p&p.

Reactions to the Death of my Husband

Ursula Bowlby's comments on her reactions to the death of her husband, John Bowlby, whose obituary appeared in the Winter 1990 issue of *Bereavement Care*, provide evidence that the idea that the dead can remain a part of the family and community to which they belonged when alive is not confined to the Shona of Africa. The timely death of a person whose work is done gives little cause for lasting grief. **Editor**

John died last September, unexpectedly, of a stroke. He was 83 and we had been married for 52 years. I hadn't expected him to die first, although nine years older than me. But he had an exceptionally strong constitution and everyone assumed, including both of us, that he was indestructable. 'I'm immortal,' he used to tell the grandchildren.

Anyway I had not anticipated how I should feel. If I *had* imagined this, I am sure I should have believed myself totally shattered. He was my Rock of Gibraltar.

John died on the Isle of Skye, where we had a family house-party of 10, and I had six days warning, between two strokes. This made it possible for the rest of the family to come north for his funeral and burial on the island (which he had asked for. Being immortal was just a joke.) So I was anything but alone, and this was a tremendous comfort.

At midnight on 2nd September, Broadford Hospital rang through to say that John had died, of a second stroke, without pain or discomfort.

Instead of being shattered, I felt suddenly comforted. He seemed secure in my heart and I knew I would carry him about with me for the rest of my life. I have this sense of continuous companionship. I am never lonely. I can't understand the 'how' or 'why', but as a believer I accept it as a wonderful gift from God.

And I know it will last, because although I didn't expect it, I *recognise* it. My greatly loved mother died 12 years ago, aged 88, and the same thing happened then. I had spent my life dreading losing her, yet when she died I felt her safe in my heart, and *free*—free from the disabilities of old age. She is still in my heart. The two people I most dreaded losing, are not lost to me.

I feel that John has both expanded—into a world of total freedom, together with the winds, the sea, the hills, the flowers—and contracted, into my heart.

After his memorial service at Southwark Cathedral on 8th January, I talked to Colin Murray Parkes and he encouraged me to write to *Bereavement Care*—it may be that other widows share my experience?

Ursula Bowlby