

## the ultimate in recycling

I feel guilty. In fact I am guilty of excessively polluting our planet. As a member of the baby boomer generation I have used more than my fair share of the planet's limited resources.

I have clocked up flying miles, drive a car daily, have bought too many clothes and plastic items. So when I take my final farewell from Earth the last thing I want to do is to add to the poisons in the soil or air. How disrespectful that would be to Papatuanuku, our mother, the Earth that gives us life.

My friend, Honey Thrupp, first alerted me to this issue following her research into the toxic chemicals used in embalming and their effects. These leach into the soil and, where the water table is high, seep into waterways, making her concerned about the Taneatua Cemetery that is close to the river.

I checked this out with the Environmental Protection Agency. Their publications confirm that the chemicals are highly toxic and great care is needed when handling them.

Honey notes that both Maori and Pakeha do not have to go far back in our history to the times before embalming was common. The practice only became widespread after World War II, when the United States Army embalmed the bodies of soldiers before sending them home. She has looked into alternatives, and it seems that technice packs can keep us presentable for up to five days after we take our last breath.

So, no embalming, but next I need to find a good way to dispose of my body. Cremation is no panacea, I'm told, as it adds to pollution of the atmosphere.

Climate change and pollution can no longer be dismissed as inconsequential. The new worldwide protest movement, now with a nascent branch in Opotiki, is aptly called Extinction Rebellion. Our children and grandchildren will live with, or die, as a result of our actions.



A fortnightly series for seniors by Ruth Gerzon from Eastern Bay Villages.

The answer, it seems, is through a simple process called natural burial. If we forgo adding toxic chemicals through embalming, we can be placed in a biodegradable coffin or shroud or wrapped in whariki (woven mats).

Then we can be buried in a shallow grave, allowing for microorganisms to aid decomposition. Natural burial is the ultimate in recycling. Burial sites, based on a landscaped plan, end up as a regenerating native forest providing habitat for flora and fauna.

A permanent record is kept, with a tree planted alongside with a biodegradable marker. Luckily, modern technology, in the form of a GPS location data, ensures my descendants can locate my burial site in years to come. Taller canopy trees are planted later. Choosing this option means my death can fund restoration of land to a more natural state.

This vision of a natural burial site is a reality in 14 towns and cities in Aotearoa New Zealand. There is even a volunteer run national organisation giving advice and support to councils wanting to develop such a facility ([www.naturalburials.co.nz](http://www.naturalburials.co.nz)). They see their work as part of a wider movement to bring about a psychologically healthier social attitude to death.



grey matters by Ruth Gerzon

Eastern Bay Villages has members proficient in crafts such as knitting and crochet who are willing to share these skills. If any children or adults are keen to learn crafts, do let me know.



A small group of Eastern Bay Villages' members now plan to encourage Whakatane District Council to make this a reality here. One member, recently arrived from Thames, talked to people there who supported the Thames Coromandel District Council to set one up. One woman was determined to hang on to life until the natural burial site was ready. "I want to nourish a tree," she said. I can only echo her hope.

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## Hon Anne Tolley MP FOR EAST COAST

Invites everyone to meet MP for Northcote Dan Bidois  
(select committee Maori Affairs/shadow spokesperson workplace relations and safety)

He went from high school drop out to butcher's apprentice to Harvard graduate and now party back bench.

Monday July 1  
10am

@ The Bridge Club  
Commerce Street  
Whakatane

2pm  
@ Kawerau Konnect  
River Road  
Kawerau



Authorised by Anne Tolley,  
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