



**FROM HERE**



*It used to be that your choices after death were being laid to rest in a churchyard, sitting in an urn on the mantelpiece or, perhaps being scattered somewhere exotic. But now, there's a whole industry designed to keep your memory alive in the most unique ways. So, which would you choose?*

*BY Helen Foster*

# TO ETERNITY





**A**n intricate silver crucifix hangs around the neck of Stacey Glen, a 41-year-old entrepreneur from Solihull. Set in the middle, are the ashes of her father who passed away in April 2016. "I wasn't ready to let him go yet," Stacey explains. "Scattering felt like I was discarding him but interment meant choosing his final resting place and I'm not sure where that is yet. This felt like a way to keep him close without being obsessed by the grief of loss."

Closeness, helping fulfil ambitions the deceased didn't manage in life, or simply reflecting their personality are all common reasons why a person, or their family, might choose a non-traditional send-off. "It's now possible to have a death style that reflects your lifestyle," says Professor Douglas Davies, director of the Centre for Death-Life Studies at Durham University. "This not only creates more communication around death, but it also helps those left

behind with the grieving process. You can now do something for your mother, father or spouse that feels more positive."

Less traditional send-offs can also help tackle some practical concerns. "An ashes ceremony doesn't have a deadline, it takes the pressure off the decision-making," says Richard Martin, founder of memorial company Scattering Ashes. "Family and friends can take their time to organise something that suits their budget, time frames, and travel commitments. And if there is a disagreement then the ashes can be split so that everyone gets to do something meaningful in their own way."

However, Professor Davies does point out that this explosion of choice can come with a downside. "People can start to worry that they've done the wrong thing—put the ashes in the wrong place, or that they should have had a priest at the ceremony—which is why it's so important that you make your actual wishes known in your will." And with that in mind, here are 12 ideas you might want to consider...





1

**LEAVE A MARK:** It's possible to combine ashes into a vial of tattoo ink that can then be used as part of a loved one's tattoo design. This can't be done as a DIY service, as, not only must the ashes be sterilised; the molecule size of the ashes must be changed to ensure it will work within the tattoo process. Companies such as Cremation Ink ([cremationink.com](http://cremationink.com)) can talk you through what's involved. One vial of ink costs around £120.

2

**NATURAL BURIAL:** Here, you're not buried in a churchyard, but a field, forest or another wild piece of land. If you have a coffin, it's likely to be made from cardboard, or another biodegradable material, or you can just be buried in a shroud. Some of the practical benefits include a lower cost (a natural burial costs around £1,150, a traditional one closer to £5,000) and it's also kinder to the environment.

"When you talk to people about this type of burial, a positive feeling comes through that we don't see with traditional burial," says Professor Davies. "People like that they will be surrounded by trees, birds and animals. It feels like ending up in a place full of life and activity rather than a cemetery which is as dry as dust." To find out more, visit

[naturaldeath.org.uk](http://naturaldeath.org.uk)





**3**

**DONATE YOURSELF TO SCIENCE:** Every year around 1,500 people enquire about this option, where your remains might be used in medical research or to teach future doctors or surgeons their craft. "Many donors state a desire to make a contribution to the advancement of medicine and to be useful after death," says a spokesperson from the Human Tissue Authority who regulate the process. "But if you want to choose this option it's essential that you give consent before your death—no-one else can give this permission." Discover more at [hta.gov.uk](https://hta.gov.uk)

**4**

**FLOAT OUT IN A VIKING BOAT:** Add your ashes to the miniature replica of a wooden longboat, set it on fire and then send it out on water just as depicted in Viking legend. "There's something about fire and water that's very healing," says Richard Martin. "Our Viking boat urns have particularly helped some very hurt families cope with their loss of their children." The boats start from £350 at [scattering-ashes.co.uk](https://scattering-ashes.co.uk)



**5**

**GET SHOT INTO SPACE:** Aura Flights started offering this service in 2017. Choose it and your ashes will soar 100,000 feet above the earth, then be released into the upper portions of the stratosphere. Carried around the globe by winds they eventually fall back to earth in rain or snow. "One launch which I personally found very affecting was a couple whose daughter passed away just weeks before starting a job at the European Space Agency. It was an honour to fulfil her dream of travelling into space," says Alex Keen from Aura Flights. "Originally we thought we'd mostly see interest from say, pilots, scientists, science fiction fans, but we also work with people who have travelled, or lived, in many places and so don't consider themselves citizens of any one country." See more at [auraflights.com](https://auraflights.com). The service starts from £495.



6

**BE A FIREWORK:** It's not quite as futuristic as a space mission, but it's a lot more fun. Tribute fireworks require around 200-400g of ashes that can be added into rockets and other whizz bangs and launched hundreds of feet into the sky before you explode in a cascade of colour. Prices start at £1,200 for a full display. See more, including rules about where displays can be held, at [scatter-ashes.co.uk/sky/firework-display](https://www.scatter-ashes.co.uk/sky/firework-display)



7

**BECOME A CORAL REEF:** The less Mafioso way of sleeping with the fishes, Eternal Reefs is a service where ashes are mixed with environmentally-friendly concrete and then sunk onto the ocean floor as an artificial reef. "Families receive the reef's coordinates and many choose to visit the reef later, boating and diving to see all the marine life thriving around their loved one," explains Becky Peterson from the company. Right now, the reefs themselves are only located in the US, but UK ashes can still be used. Contact [eternalreefs.com](https://eternalreefs.com) for details of the service which costs from \$3,995.



## 8

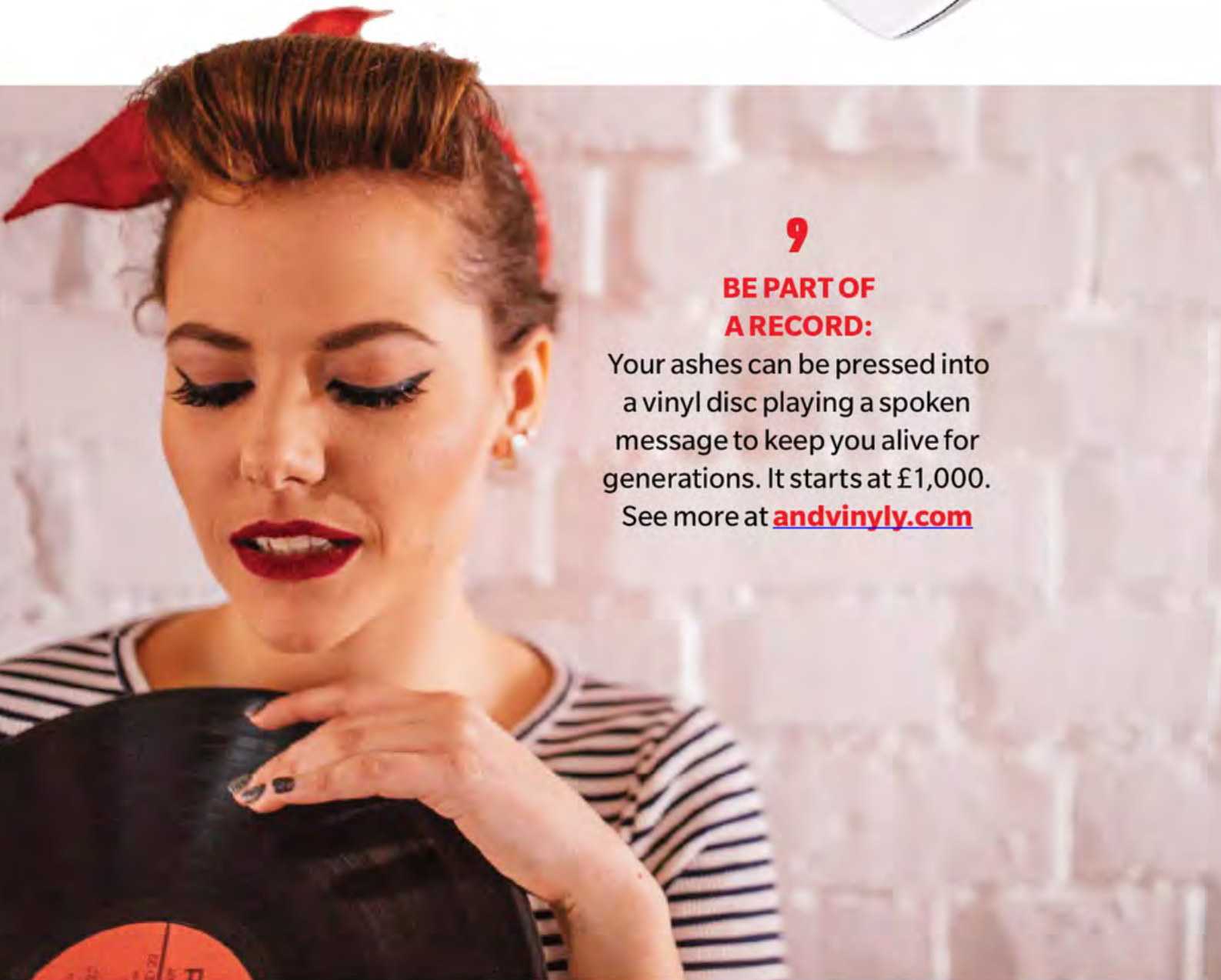
**GLITTER IN SOME JEWELLERY:** Jewellery designer Ruth Mary made her first piece of memorial jewellery in 2017. It included the ashes of a baby girl. "I only need a pinch of ashes then I mix them with resin and hardener before setting it into the jewellery," she told us. "You can incorporate jewellery inherited from your loved one or come up with a unique design that reflects the deceased." See more at [ruthmary.com](http://ruthmary.com)



## 9

### **BE PART OF A RECORD:**

Your ashes can be pressed into a vinyl disc playing a spoken message to keep you alive for generations. It starts at £1,000. See more at [andvinyly.com](http://andvinyly.com)



10



**FLOAT OFF IN A BUBBLE:** Paola Dyboski-Bryant was more used to creating bubbles for children's parties, but after combining her father-in-law's ashes into a bubble to float in Andorra—a place he'd always wanted to visit, she felt it was a send-off others might appreciate. "I always shed a tear when I get an order but one that really stood out was from a man who started the call with, 'My wife told me to ring you, she died yesterday.' She had asked him to buy

four kits, one for each of the grandkids, to make bubbles, to spread her ashes. That one got to me." Memorial Bubble kits cost £89.99 from [drzigs.com](https://www.drzigs.com)

11

**LIVE WITHIN A TREE:** Companies like The Living Urn incorporate containers of ashes into the root system of a young sapling, so, once planted, you and the tree live as one forever. Right now, you can only plant the tree on your own land, but they're working to create memorial forests in the UK in the next few years. The urns cost £137 from [thelivingurn.co.uk](https://www.thelivingurn.co.uk)



12

### COMING SOON...WATER

**CREMATION.** It's not yet legal here but Professor Davies says that's likely to change by next year. In the process water, heat and chemicals are used to break down the body in about four hours. This leaves just bones that can be powdered and treated like ashes; and fluid that can be poured back into the earth. With a cremation contributing the same amount of greenhouse gases as using two tanks of fuel in a car and burials using up land, it's the most planet-friendly solution so far. "And again, that's something many people feel positively about," says Professor Davies. "There's a real feeling of giving back to the earth."

