

Digital Afterlives: A Verbatim Play About Death in a Digital Age

Constructed by Missy Mooney

NOTES ON TEXT:

This script is constructed and edited together from excerpts transcribed verbatim (word-for-word) from 12 separate interviews conducted via Zoom in Aotearoa New Zealand. Consequently, any stutters, misspeaks, repetitions, ums and ahs or grammatical errors have been re-presented unedited. While the verbatim testimony has been carefully collated and edited into a performable narrative, the only words represented here are those that were spoken. The interviewees range in age from mid-20s to mid-60s with five identifying as male and seven as female. All the interviewees have experienced the loss of a loved one and have engaged with digital social media platforms (such as Facebook) to communicate, acknowledge, share, remember, and memorialise that loss.

While death could be considered the ultimate uniting factor (it comes to us all), it is not a homogenous occurrence but an experience as individual, subjective, and nuanced as the lives we live. Thus, the interviewees contribute different stories and insights around the digital legacies and afterlives of the deceased on social media. Drawing from their lived experiences, they provide a range of perspectives on the new and emergent digital bereavement practices in the contemporary griefscape. *Digital Afterlives* also explores how generative AI technology, serving as virtual extensions of life, might impact how we accept and acknowledge death and alter our navigation of grief.

The testimony included in the play was gathered as part of a larger research project led by Professor Gareth Schott titled *Digital Afterlives and Memorialisation: A study into emergent online remembrance practices* which was funded by the University of Waikato Strategic Research Fund.

This script was published before *Digital Afterlives'* inaugural production and may differ from the play as performed. Additionally, there are only a few stage directions and suggestions for how technology might be incorporated into the play's staging. The heart and value of *Digital Afterlives* lies not in its theatrical potential but in the lives, experiences, words, and inherent humanity of those it represents.

VOICES

Interview Participant	Demographic Information
P1	60s male
P2	Late 30s - early 40s male
P3	Late 20s - early 30s female
P4	60s female
P5	Mid 30s - mid 40s male
P6	50s female
P7	Mid 30s – mid 40s female
P8	50s female
P9	20s female
P10	Mid 50s - mid 60s male
P11	40s male
MM	Interviewer – late 20s female
GS	Principle Investigator

NOTE

To protect the interviewees' privacy and the privacy of the deceased loved ones they speak of all names have been anonymised and identifying information unidentified. Consequently, in the script, the interviewees are referred to as P1 through P11 (the 'p' refers to 'participant').

Prologue

MM: Kia ora Gareth,
Hope you're doing well

Just a quick message to let you know that I've now conducted 6 interviews. I'm waiting on one more person who has signed & returned the forms but has gone a bit quiet on setting up an interview time (and I don't want to double message them and put on any pressure).

Let me know if you want to touch base on who to approach next or where we go from here.

I do have a few funeral industry contacts who might have some observations etc., (if that's a perspective you might be interested in).

best,
Missy

GS: Kia ora Missy

I was just thinking about you and an email popped up!

Six is amazing, thank you!

I think you should follow up on your contacts as they sound really interesting, and maybe get to 8, then we can go over the responses and see who else we want and what we want to ask.

Does that sound like a plan????

G

MM: Sounds primo Gareth.

I'll reach out to my people and see how I get on.

I must admit, going through the transcripts has got my documentary theatre brain going...I'm very tempted to collate some of the responses into a script for you! Think there could be something really interesting in the multiple layers/dynamics of talking to people in real life (yet mediated over Zoom) about virtual online interactions with the

deceased and the type of data those conversations then become - how they might be represented/re-presented...yet realise this is beyond the scope of the project (and I will stay on task! 😊)

M

GS: If you can see that as a different form of outcome which can be published as a reflection on process, go for it!

Sounds fascinating. I would love to see something like that come out of a project like this. Honestly.

G

Moment 1

MM enters and sits down at her desk/computer/laptop workstation and types the following message which is perhaps projected in real-time. MM speaks the message aloud as she types.

MM: Kia ora,
Hope this message finds you well (*backspaces/deletes this*)
(*re-typing*) Hope you're doing ok.
I know it's a bit random to get a message from me, but it's actually prompted by FB [Facebook].

I'm currently working on a research project with Professor Gareth Schott at the University of Waikato. The project is titled Digital Afterlives and Memorialisation: A study into emergent online remembrance practices.

Our research aims to develop a better understanding of the role played by social media in the grieving process.

I'm approaching you because I know that you sometimes use Facebook to commemorate the deceased. So, I thought I'd send you a message because I'd value any thoughts, observations, and insights about online grieving that you may have.

However, I don't want to probe or revisit any painful memories of loss for you. So, if you're not in the right space to think about this, or it's just not for you, feel free to ignore this message or respond with "no thanks" and I'd fully respect and support that.

If this research is something that you think you would or could consider contributing to, I can send you some more information via email outlining what participation would involve (a recorded interview/conversation via Zoom).

Noho ora mai
M

Moment 2

- P10: Hi Missy, Thanks for the email. The project sounds intriguing, and I would very much like to participate. Please do send me the information sheet.
- P4: Is lovely to hear from you, dead random but lovely. Yes, count me in for sure. Just let me know what you need.
- P5: Kia ora Missy, would be awesome to share some experiences and findings about Tangihanga and Tikanga. Let's make this happen.
- P11: Sure thing! I'd be happy to contribute in any way I can. Feel free to flick me an email at-
- P8: Kia ora Missy, sounds amazing and happy to be part of it. I believe death needs to be destigmatized and research like yours helps.
- P6: I'd be happy to help in any way I can 😊👍 Send me the guff and I'll have a squiz. Talk soon.
- P2: Kia orana Missy, really stoked to be able to help out with this. I've attached the signed info sheet and consent form.
- P11: Apologies for the delay. Forms attached here.
- P10: Hi Missy, find the attached forms.
- MM: Perfect. Thanks very much. I've sent out the calendar invite.
- P11: That's great, thanks Missy.
- P4: Perfect, see you then.
- P3: Ka pai! Sounds good.
- P9: Awesome, it's in the calendar 👍
- P2: Looking forward to the kōrero.

Perhaps a sound effect of the Zoom audio recording announcement: "Recording in Progress" plays.

MM: *(referring to the Zoom announcement)* Scary robot voice.

GS: There we go. Yeah. Excellent. And that will give us an MP3 file that we can just throw into Microsoft Word. It will transcribe it and then we just clean it up. It will get mixed up with the odd word, particularly if you use te reo or any other language - it gets a bit confused. But yeah, we can just go through and clean that up. So, thank you for that. I guess we should probably dive in if there's no sort of questions or queries. I'll hand over to you Missy and we'll treat it like a conversation if we can.

MM: Awesome. Cool. Thanks, Gareth.

Nice to meet you. So, as Gareth said, my name is Missy. Yeah, so I'll go through the questions that we've drafted for this pilot interview. There's quite a few but just feel completely free to answer them however you wanna answer them.

We're really keen on opening up a kind of conversation, channel of communication, about all of this kind of stuff. So, we're just interested to hear what you have to say basically.

Sound effect of the Zoom audio recording announcement: "Recording in Progress" plays.

MM: Cool.

Well, if that's a little introduction done Gareth we can probably, we can get into it. Yeah, just echoing Gareth, thanks for giving us your time today to go through these questions.

Sound effect of the Zoom audio recording announcement: "Recording in Progress" plays.

MM: Okey-doke, we must listen to robot woman *(referring to the Zoom announcement)*. So, basically the research - what we're really interested in is having a chat to people, getting a range of perspectives on social media and its use in the kind of contemporary griefscape and how we use it in response or in relation to death and dying and memorialization and all of these kinds of things.

Sound effect of the Zoom audio recording announcement: "Recording in Progress" Plays.

MM: Ok. Cool bananas. We're ready to go.

P8: Do I need to hit OK? Or is that just fine?

MM: It says we're recording so I think we're all good. I guess, to start us off-

Sound effect of the Zoom audio recording announcement: "Recording in Progress" Plays.

MM: Thank you, robot lady *(referring to the Zoom announcement)*. So, I sent you like a little list of some of the kind of themes or areas that we're interested in exploring that can guide our discussion. Briefly, these themes are:

- Updates & notification of death on social media

- Observations on the nature and use of social media in grief and for expressions of condolence
- How memories are shared and collated in the platform vernacular of social media
- Function and use of legacy accounts / digital inheritance
- Thanatechnologies / emerging AI technologies in the contemporary griefscape

MM: Also, in terms of answering the questions, you're in control of that. So, it's - you can share as much, you know, be as personal or as general as you want. Just however you wanna play it is 100% fine.

P4: That's absolutely fine. I'm not worried. I mean I think it's a great subject to, to do. I really do. I don't think we talk about death enough.

Moment 3

P10: To state the obvious, I mean death is, is the bottom line. It's the, it's the fundamental that we all share. So, you know, we've got shared mortality and sadly the loss of loved ones, it's an experience that, that most people go through.

P1: It's just part of life for me. It's just a natural part of life and it happens to us all.

P6: We're ephemeral beasts, you know. We come and go. That's how it is.

P8: We're not supposed to live forever.

P4: Yeah. I think people forget we've got no choice.

MM: It's the one thing that's certain for all of us. It's a uniting kind of factor.

P4: And we just don't know when it's going to happen. So, I mean, we could be 99 like your Nana and we could be 53 like my Dad. You know?

P1: Well look, I'm, I'm 63 and I'm aware that I'm on borrowed time now. I've lived most of my life and this is something that's very important to me and I talk about it a lot, and I've had this conversation with many people. It's important to contemplate your death. And it's not a bad thing. People go, they, they shut down the conversation. I've even had a couple of people start crying, you know? And they don't want to do this, but I think it's a very healthy thing to contemplate, that there will be a day when you're not here. It helps you appreciate your life.

P4: I think a lot of people think it's a frightening thing.

MM: Yeah, there's a lot of fear around it and I understand that.

- P4: I think it should be a comforting thing rather than a scary thing.
- P5: Knowing that death is death and that's closure and that's allowing people to rest.
- MM: Yeah. I think acceptance and acknowledgement, you know, it's not saying - just by saying it's not bad doesn't mean by default you're saying it's good or it's great. You know, it sucks.
- P11: My family are - we, we talk about it, but I know that like, for example my Mum's husband's family, they're like, "oh no. You don't talk about that" kind of thing. It really is, I have seen the evidence of how it's not really that great for people. Like it's really good to actually talk about it and acknowledge it and get it out there. And if you're uncomfortable with it, just kind of do it and you'll get more comfortable with that. You just kind of have to.
- MM: Yeah, I was just thinking is part of it that it's quite difficult - it's hard for us to think about ourselves not being here? Maybe that's the hurdle? And I think it adds another layer because it's like, not only am I not here, but what traces of me are going to... it's hard to think of yourself as a memory or as a legacy.
And I think you make a good point, in the sense that it's not about trying to imagine myself being dead or whatever, it's about imagining or thinking about the people around me.
- P4: Yeah, that's exactly what it is. It's not about us being dead, it's about thinking about the people that we love.
- MM: And that sucks and it's hard. And I guess that's what we're interested in is, you know, the internet, social media, all of that is so much a part of our everyday lives that it's now kind of part of our everyday deaths. And whether or not social media kind of helps us in that space, with this kind of acceptance or acknowledgement of its inevitability.

Moment 4

- P10: So, we're talking about, you know, the discussion of, of death. But what we've really been talking about, I think, is the discussion of the deceased really.
- P11: You know I've got, I'm actually friends with quite a few people who have passed away and they're, they're still there on Facebook, from years ago.
- P1: His birthday is coming up actually and I've been meaning to post, go to his Facebook page and just, just to post something nice just to say I'm still thinking about him and he's still a part of my life, even though he's gone. I did that last year on his birthday, and I often actually just go to his page and just, just to go through his old thoughts about movies and things - interests that we shared. So, in some ways it's, it's a living memorial and he, it keeps his memory very much alive.

- P11: Yeah, there's a lot of like, "Happy heavenly birthday" - that kind of thing... Which, I mean, I don't tend to do. And I have noticed that they - I mean it's probably quite natural that they get less and less as time goes on because not as fresh in everybody's mind. The grief isn't quite so strong. And I think maybe you start to realise, actually it doesn't really matter whether you post on the wall. It's more like if you actually think about them and keep them with you.
- P7: There's other ways to memorialize without doing it on Facebook, you know? Like I'm doing it just a good old way of just having a moment to think about that. But I think people think that that's how we do things now. I think that's the thing, "this is how we remember someone."
- P2: I kind of did one for my little brother's anniversary and then one for his birthday last year. And this year, because it was his birthday yesterday, I put something on my story. That was like, "Hey, miss you, kid."
- MM: I think you do see, with social media, you see people where they might go and write on someone's page or send them a message as if they're talking to them. And I'm, you know, I'm pretty sure most of the time these people aren't expecting a reply. They know that this person cannot and is not. But I think that the ritual of that routine, of connecting with someone that way, especially if that's a way that you have kind of connected with them while you're both alive, I think is a way that people kind of foster, or cultivate, or nurture that kind of connection or that continuing bond.
- P6: You can almost go into quite an ethereal conversation here too because I have, I've written one message to him since he passed on his personal, you know, to his-
- MM: Yeah, like a direct message?
- P6: Yeah. Yeah. And you know, the idea that, that there are these sort of floating entities that are behind the profiles, and in a way that is akin to the spirit still floating around you know? I think that, I think, at the risk of getting too deep, I kind of, in my head, thought that maybe he was still floating out there somewhere in cyberspace and could read my message you know? And so, Facebook in a way, gave me that platform to, to reach out to that space where he might be.

Moment 5

- P8: I lost a really dear friend who was just a, a year or so older than me to cancer and I found it really weird, like still now, because it will come up on my phone saying she wants to be my Snapchat friend. I think it's because like her kids, who I'm also friends with, they've kept her

Snapchat open. I think one of them uses it or whatever. There's still stuff on her, on her Facebook and things like that.

MM: Yeah, the little green dot pops up and it's-

P11: A little bit, kind of like a ghost-

MM: Kind of uncanny feeling because "well hold up, you're here, but you're-"

P11: They're sort of still there, but they're not because –

MM: "It's not you."

P11: It can't be them.

MM: It's kind of the Wizard of Oz-y, you know, like behind-the-curtain situation.

P8: I think you have to be really careful with stuff like Facebook and Instagram, Snapchat, things like that because grief is - it doesn't ever end. You know, it's, it's constant and, and there's no... It's not finite. It just goes on and on and on. It changes over time. It's like waves. So, people will go through all sorts of different waves of grief, and you never get over it. No one ever gets over somebody. They just go through it. You just go through all sorts of different phases. So, things will hit you again and again. And when you get hit with the reality of someone being on Facebook or something it, it'll just bring up all sorts of other stuff. It can be really confronting.

Moment 6

P5: Oh definitely. Just to get a reaction from a page of someone that's passed. You know, that makes you go "ay? What's happening? Is it a sign, is it a message from the other side?" Only to understand that someone logged into their page, forgot they were on there, and, and is engaging and interacting with people. So, that is, it is a tough space.

P9: That just reminded me. After my auntie-, she passed away and her Facebook account, I think it just remained how it was or whatever but then she got hacked. And I got a message from my auntie. She had passed away a year before and I got a message from her saying, you know, that was a scam essentially but that rattled me to the core. That was really traumatic.

P2: Yeah, it was my cousin, and it popped up and it was like, "Ohh but he can't be online. This is really weird." And it was his brother using his account to post updates and whatnot. Which was also wild because they're twins and identical as well. So, it was just this kind of weird disconnect.

- P11: Definitely it's a bit weird. And I mean I don't wanna say like a violation but it kind of feels like, like no one really has the right to do that. But you don't know because they might have left that account with somebody.
- P6: I guess it's to do with the ownership of that account and how, you know, even though it's a, it's a completely virtual world, you always, your head always goes, "oh, there's Julie putting a post about cows. Oh, that must be Julie." And so, you just, you make that assumption. We've got this sort of ingrained sort of thing that, "that's Missy doing that post now and that's her behind the thing" and that's a really cemented notion that we have. We don't really stop to think. But then if that person's deceased it would create like a disruption in your thought path and you go, "Oh no, hang on. That can't be them because they're not around anymore." So, yeah, I guess it's tied in with, with how much association we put between the computer screen and the person behind it isn't it.
- P9: And you know a lot of our sort of extended relationships are so Facebook-based and you're used to communicating like that so it's almost like your digital personality.
- P2: And it's funny because, I mean I've got on my legacy settings on Facebook. I've got my sister and my best friend, my two, my two best friends. So, I know that if... Parts of my account will still be active. It'll come with that little "remembering name here". But it was, it was weird to see my cousin still active but not active.

Moment 7

- MM: I don't know if you're aware, but Facebook has, I think it was 2015? I've probably got that incorrect, but Facebook introduced a legacy feature.
- P10: Ok. I didn't know that no.
- P3: Yeah. I think one of your questions is like about honorary pages?
- P11: I know you can, like, you can make them in memoriam.
- P4: Yeah, that's been there, that's been there for a long time, cos I've put mine in.
- P3: What do you call that?
- MM: A legacy page.
- P3: Yeah, a legacy page.

- P11: Which I haven't chosen to do cos I don't really know what it entails, and I would be too worried about losing stuff. I would rather just leave it as it is. I actually don't know many other accounts of people who have chosen to do that. I don't know how common it is.
- MM: Basically it's, you know, before you die you nominate someone who's gonna be your legacy contact. Then - I mean, I would assume you maybe check with that person first and say, "Hey, I'm gonna put you as my contact"- then when you do die that person kind of becomes the custodian of your account and your account gets memorialised. It gets changed to, it comes up with the like 'remembering Missy Mooney' and I think it stops, stops sending out like birthday notifications. It doesn't suggest, you know how - I've had this before - but where you get a friend suggestion, "you should add so-and-so as a friend." It stops that as well.
- P6: Wow. Yeah, that's an interesting concept. I mean it would work well I imagine, as that sort of, that virtual tombstone kind of thing, yeah. It's quite, it's quite fascinating really... and why not I suppose.
- P5: Even the fact that when you see your friends list and people that have passed, do you unfriend? You know, knowing that their data won't come up again, but that's something there to consider. And many, many Māori won't let go. We, we struggle with - the line, the common line, which is: āpiti hono tātai hono which is "to cut the ties." Cut the ties from those that have passed. You know, unfriending is too hard. Although, I like that legacy option.
- P7: Yeah, one of my little cousin's friends died in a car crash and that's what kids do; they make a memorial page for that person. Which is, that's their way of staying connected and keeping the memory digitally alive because you know that's their place. I suppose a safe place that, well, that they feel is a safe place for them.

Moment 8

- MM: You're the first person I've talked to who's actually kind of done the legacy account or contact preparation and, if you don't mind me asking, like what, was there a specific thing that prompted you to do that? Or kind of when did you decide that "Oh, I'm gonna do this?"
- P2: It was a few years ago actually.
- P4: That's been there for a few years now.
- P2: It was a means of, "well, If I'm going to be remembered. I'd rather these people be in charge of how I'm remembered."

MM: So, with the legacy contact thing that you've set up, did you talk to the people before you like nominated your contact?

P4: No.

P2: I let them all know as well, so it's not a surprise.

MM: But they know they are?

P4: No, but they'll get a, a message, an email.

P2: Just was like, "Hey, just so you know" - because there's a function I think where you can send a message. Yeah, and say, "Hey, you're, you're now in charge of my legacy. Don't, don't screw it up."

P4: But the thing is, like with this person, they will, they'll get an e-mail, a Facebook message to say -because this person's going to know that I'm deceased and then they are going to decide what to do with my Facebook.

P2: And, for all intents and purposes, they're all OK with it. I just thought it would be easier as opposed to having it be just this digital ghost, this spectre hanging around online.

P4: And then that's entirely up to them then.

MM: And again, you don't have to answer my questions if it's getting too much here but what was kind of like your criteria for the person that you picked? Like what, was it an easy decision?

P4: Yeah, it was. It's, it's a person who, it's not my husband because he's rubbish at Facebook. It's a person who knows me extremely well.

P2: I think the people that I've put in charge of my account, I trust their view of me. I have full trust in them being able to operate it in whatever way they see fit.

P4: Knows all of my friends and family and when I say all of my friends, they know all of my friends. They won't miss anybody out and will know what to do with the photos that are on the page and will know what to do with the page at the end.

Moment 9

P1: I actually have, sitting right next to me at my desk, I have a notebook with my wife's name on the front and I've got all my social media passwords and everything there. And I've said to her, "If I go out tomorrow and get in a car crash and I'm gone, here's everything you need to do, and you make all the decisions. You can access all my accounts and, and you can

decide what to do." And she knows what I'd like. I'd just like to keep my pages active and for her to be in charge of it and make sure everything keeps on flowing. So, I think that's something that we do need to think about.

P11: I do quite like at this stage that they just leave it and that there's no - well I guess there's no programme or algorithm to pick up that, "Oh, this person's obviously deceased. So, we're going to delete their account." So, I do like that they're kind of, at the moment, leaving it up to people's choice. I think that's quite good. I do like, you mentioned some of the features-

MM: From Facebook 'About Memorialised Accounts' (accessed 13/3/24).

- "Memorialised accounts are a place for friends and family to gather and share memories after a person has passed away."
- "The word Remembering will be shown next to the person's name on their profile"
- "Memorialised profiles don't appear in public spaces such as in suggestions for People you may know, ads or birthday reminders."

P11: -you know, not having it as a friend suggestion. That's great because that could be quite like not very nice for someone to go, "Oh there's that person who's actually not around anymore. I would love to be friends with them, but I can't". And yeah, I, I think if [Facebook] were going to say, "Right. We have to have a plan for when people are deceased" - cos I mean, it might get to the stage where there's so many billions of us that servers are just not big enough. How do you decide who then gets control? Does the, I mean, it could be something where when you first sign up you say, "This is going to be my like next of kin person." It would be quite good if you had some say over who that was before you were gone. Because, you know, once you're gone you have no choice, and it doesn't mean that it just disappears or goes by the wayside.

P6: I guess it's sort of better than stacking up bodies under the ground... But I mean it's filling out the cyber space. It'll be a problem at some point, won't it?

P8: I think it will be your generation that will probably be the ones that are going to forge the path because you know for us, we're like "what?" You know, so, you're the ones that are having to navigate it, like you have all the way along.

I mean, my daughter, she's great with technology. I would probably just go, "Sweetheart, do what you like."

MM: Yeah, it's tricky. I've had, some people have kind of just said, "Oh, you know, I don't care. It can just get deleted. It can be gone." But then some other people have said, in instances where accounts of the deceased have been deleted, they're kind of like, it's almost a bit of a second death for them because they're like, "Oh, now I can't go and visit their page." You're treating it almost as, like a gravesite in a way.

P7: And I think that's another layer that you have to consider. It's another process because it's another part of that person that's still alive, literally, you know? And so how do you deal with it? Social media and Facebook, it's its own world. When you pass physically and then your digital footprint, it's also gonna have its own death and it needs to be managed in a particular way as well. So, I think ideally you should plan, have some kind of plan in place.

Moment 10

P4: I mean the thing is, I think, I think everybody needs to plan. I think everybody should be - I'm a planner. I'm a planner from way back. I mean, I do like a bit of excitement on the odd occasion but I'm a planner.

P11: And I get that some people might find that quite morbid, like when you're signing up for Facebook and you're a 20-year-old, "I'm not going to die for 60 years. Why should I choose someone who's going to be my legacy person?" But actually, it's just like, you know, you should make a will, no matter how old you are, but we don't tend to until we have to kind of thing.

P4: When it comes to death, I think everybody needs a plan. I don't just mean a will. Like, I don't, I don't care about a coffin. I think coffins are shit. They're too expensive. Nobody needs to pay freaking 5000 quid for a coffin because it's just fucking outrageous. Everybody gets ripped off. It's just stupid. Cardboard or I don't know a fucking plastic bag. Who cares? It doesn't matter. Funerals are ridiculous. They really are. They're just a rip off. But you should plan. If people want a massive funeral, fucking plan for it you know? If you don't want a funeral, plan for it. I mean everybody knows that I don't want one but what I do want is a party.

P8: This was something that we did with my friend. And I've done it with another, someone else as well. They've had their own, they've hosted their own funeral before they died. Basically, it's a goodbye party. So, they were, they were dying of cancer and -you know it's really hard to say, as Kiwis, we don't do a lot of, you know, telling each other how we feel. We do that once on our wedding day. Just stand there and say, "I really love you." We are very closed, you know quite stoic and so we don't tend to do that unless it's at the funeral, and then it's too late because the person doesn't hear it all. So, these two people that were dying of cancer, they decided, look, let's have a party and so, we had a party. We had a little corner where my friend sat and it was just, come and spend 10/15 minutes with her and then move on and let someone else. We had the photo show going and it was really lovely. Everyone had to come dressed as their favourite dead celebrity, so that was-

MM: Oh, your friend is awesome. That's amazing.

P8: She was amazing.

MM: I think you're absolutely right with kind of, in our culture we don't, we don't tell each other I think enough how much we mean to one another or even that, "Hey, I'm thinking of you" or "I thought about you." I think we can be a bit elusive about the presence of others in our own lives. Yeah, I think it's definitely this weird Kiwi stoicism and I think that leaks a little bit into the way we think about death or our attitude about it. We just don't want to think about it.

But am I going to go and make a will tomorrow? Probably not.

P4: Wills are easy. Wills are dead easy.

MM: Yeah, especially for me because I don't have anything so...

P4: Exactly. I mean you don't have anything but if you popped your clogs tomorrow what would it say? "I'm gonna leave everything to my sister."

MM: Mmm yeah, probably.

P4: So, you could write that down on a bloody bit of paper right now and that would be legal.

MM: Boom. Legal advice. I'm getting it all.

P4: You're welcome. That's going to cost you \$200. No, I'm joking.

Moment 11

P1: A slightly more interesting story, I guess. She was an artist, a young mother, she had a four-year-old child. Uh, she was a friend of mine. She was an incredibly talented woman. She had a gut pain, and she went to her doctor and her doctor said it was nothing. So, over the next six months she kept on going back and saying "It's getting worse. I need you to do something." And he said, "Well, you're just being, you're being a hypochondriac." When she finally went to get a second opinion that bowel cancer had gotten to stage 4 and that was the end of her. What was interesting, after she died somebody hijacked her Facebook page. It was a brand of sunglasses, a very well-known brand of fashionable sunglasses, and they were using her page to promote specials and sales.

I got in touch with the head office, and I said, "This is entirely inappropriate." And they said, "Oh, it's not us. We-we're not doing this." And I said, "Well, it all links you back to your website so it is you" and they denied it. I got in touch with her husband, and I said, "Are you aware that her Facebook page has been hijacked and being used in this way?" And he

hadn't been. He was, you know, he was grappling with looking after a young child and taking care of all the business that comes with death, and he hadn't been onto social media. So, he took her page down, which was kind of sad because you lose that experience that you've - you know you can actually physically reengage with somebody in a particular kind of way. It's something more tactile. It's something that you participate in. And it's not really for them, it's really to say to their family that, you know, that I admired and respected them. And I think that's important. But with her, that was lost completely.

Moment 12

MM: There is something quite nice about the sense of community that it brings. Although, it can be quite confronting and it is a lot, I think, if you are the person that it's all kind of coming at. But I think there is a sense of unity when a whole bunch of people kind of rise up and I think there was definitely that with the person I'm thinking of. The, the theatre community really kind of, you know, came together there and that was, that was nice. It's just a shame that it took her not being here for that to happen you know.

P11: Yes, yeah. It was also really good for her family, that are sort of spread around the country, just to see how many people she had actually, how many lives she touched and how much she'd done. They sort of had a vague idea but didn't really know. And it's all in one place, that's good as well.

I know that a lot of them really got a lot out of seeing what other people wrote or, you know, commented and that kind of thing.

P6: And the other good thing about Facebook, is just occurring to me as we talk, is when you have someone who's such a sort of a key figure and a person that sort of has this... -community forms around them you know? They are sort of, I guess, OK Facebook friends but I know we have this connection. Facebook has allowed us to keep that connection going.

Moment 13

MM: Just thinking about, you know, there's all these memories, right? There's all these photos. There's all these things that are kind of housed on Facebook. You can go and visit them. You can participate in it. And I just wondered if you'd ever thought about, you know, the fact that these are owned by Facebook. And should we be putting, you know, our trust, our data, our memories in these kinds of corporations? There could be a future where that platform doesn't exist and what happens to all of that data?

- P7: Yeah, well that's my thing too. Because it's on Facebook, as soon as you put anything on Facebook they own it, and anything could fricken happen to it. You know AI could do anything to it.
- P5: That's become a consideration, allowing it to be on a private page becomes highly considered as opposed to just having an open Facebook page that, that can allow the world to capture the data. That's been a part of a discussion with the kaumātua around when do you shut the page down. Whānau are, whānau are not deep into thinking about where does their data get stored. Is it in the cloud or whatnot, but what I do know is, from experience of myself mourning and helping others through it, it's such a wonderful space to be able to reflect on the tangi because during that time you're not really present. So, they're able to identify people who were there, they're able to look back on words that were shared and they're able to release little bit each time they watch it. But yeah, when does it end and who ends it?
- P2: Yeah, I think it's, it's all at risk of being lost. A friend of mine who was banned, like lost her account on Instagram. And she was gutted because she'd lost access to her friend's account who had passed a few years ago. And because her account settings were on private, she couldn't send a request to follow her content and she was like, "I just lost years and years and years of memories of this person because Instagram shadow banned me and I can't get those memories back. Ever." And that was rough. That was hard to hear, that like in an instant, lost all of these memories. So, I think we do have to be careful about using social media as the only way to remember this person.
- P5: I think the most painful thing that could happen in terms of Facebook, the social media, if they cut it. You know, I think that'll do more damage for whānau (as opposed to whānau having that discussion to close it). I think there, we need to identify our tikanga practice that, that allows for closure. A similar, similar action that's happening now is when you get your ashes back from cremation, you know whānau are asking for burial. Whānau are asking if they can take their ashes to another tangi. And one of our practices is if the remains of someone goes to another tangi, they must get buried with them. So, similar conversations are around when do they get to rest?
- P2: I have all of his photos that I've shared online, like in my, on my phone or in the cloud. So, I'm not wholly dependent on this social media company for my memories. I already have these memories. They might not be physical. They might still just be data, but I wasn't dependent on a Silicon Valley corporation to remember him by.
- P1: I've actually gone a step further. I've got some hard drives, and I've put all my art, all my writing, all the, all the journalism work I do, all the radio shows I've done, everything is there, the whole lot - and there's a lot of stuff. So, I've just sort of saved all that stuff and I'm thinking of my friend who died, there's so much I really didn't know about him, and there's

no way to ever know that again. So, that's sort of driven this impulse to put everything into, into an archive.

And I don't know if anybody will ever be interested in it, but it's there if somebody ever does. And of course, you know the, the digital world has really expanded and perhaps you're right. Perhaps we haven't given anywhere near enough thought to the value of the digital world, the value it will have for future generations.

Moment 14

P5: As you were talking, I was thinking of Archives New Zealand. You know, many, many of the reasons we hold on to that information is to hold stories and whakapapa that is mentioned in it as well. You know, a lot of people record their pō mihimihi nights, the, the last night of celebration. In there are narratives that, they come out about the person that people didn't know until that time of that milestone of their life and so that's part of the reason we hold on. And whether we turn that into an archival whatnot, you know that's a discussion that needs to be had.

P6: Well, the other conversation I guess that needs to be raised is, you know from an historian's point of view, the fact that everything's getting digitised and like we're not, we're no longer going to have archives full of letters that I can kind of wade through and smell and touch and feel.

P10: People don't write letters anymore do they and so these interactions are going to be social media interactions. How do you access all that stuff? I don't know. You know, I'm not going to be a historian in the future.

P6: The historians of tomorrow are going to be going through emails and digitalised whatnot. So, the use of it being a resource in the future, it's definitely a conversation that needs to happen.

Moment 15

MM: There's two things that what you've just said make me think about, and one of them is the sense of, whether or not a sense of our 'self' or like the essence of our personality, is a part of that preserved or accurately captured in our digital legacy or the bits we leave behind on the internet?

P4: Well, sometimes it is.

- P11: I think it can if they put a lot of themselves into it.
- P9: I don't think it scratches the surface, to be honest. It's so curated.
- P3: It's completely curated. It's the version of your life that you're willing to share, or others are willing to share. So, I don't think it is a true representation of someone's life.
- P11: I think if you're one of these people who posts five times a day and puts photographs of all your meals and updates every time you do something new then you can get a pretty good sense of what that person is like, or what they like, what they do, what their personality is.
- P5: As a recording tool that'll be amazing. In terms of how factual that will be? I think we'll never find it because people - you know depression, anxiety. We put out into the world this beautiful picture that we want but once the, once the screen of the computer is turned off, we go back to the reality of where we are and that ain't the same image. So, what you're able to display online may not be exactly a reflection of that person.
It will be a, an aspiration of what that person wanted but in terms of the reality of them -you know like when we hear about suicide. We recently lost a young girl, 19-year-old, and all the pictures, there's all this, the girl being happy, smiling, "Life is good, love, love to all." Never would you assume that suicide is the way she left. So, I love the fact that there may be a tool that can be created, a timeline of someone's life. Uh, but whether or not that's a true reflection depends on what data and information we put out into the world.
- P9: Yeah 100% I agree with that. It's just sort of made me think, it's funny because humans are so complex, right? Like, you know the person I knew can be so different to the person someone else knows and Facebook or whatever can be this weird mishmash of this person that all comes together. Like, I know with my auntie, she, she took her own life, and she was a very complex character. She had bipolar as well and you could see that reflected with the, the posts that sort of came through and I know it was really hard for her family, her immediate family, kind of digesting all the I guess facets of her life in a really public forum. And there's no weighting of like, "Oh, you know, this is her husband's post. So, this sits at the top. Actually, this was only a colleague she met a year ago. So, kind of sits-"
There's no weighting of it. It's just all there. It's very flattened.
- P8: You can only capture moments. There's no way you can put this, you know, a whole person, a whole person's life into a eulogy because there's just too much. The whole of a person can never be captured, ever, in anything because it's just too much. We are too much. We're whole human beings. All of us are. So, a funeral and a eulogy capture moments and just gives us a glimpse. We pick moments for a funeral, and we pick moments for a eulogy that gives whoever's there just glimpses and moments to celebrate or to remember, and that's all we can do. I don't think social media can ever capture the whole person either.

- P9: This is actually a thought I've had before, you know you're prompting these thoughts, but when we, when I sat at her funeral and listened to the sort of life she led and the person she was, it all fit together really nicely. There was this beautiful narrative, and a lot of time and energy goes into taking you through that journey, whether it's a few hours or whatever. But Facebook is like a dumping ground. Anyone can contribute. It's like what Wikipedia or whatever, you know? It, it can be a mess. And that can be really hard I think for a family. To navigate that.
- P1: I mean, it's an evolving process. Your social media profile is kind of like having a gravestone. You know it's, when I went to visit Dad's grave recently, I was looking at the gravestones around it and there's a brief description of them.
- P8: Memory isn't good. I mean, I think one of the first things you lose is, you know the, the, -someone's face. You know, it's hard to picture them and their voice goes. So, it is wonderful to have that, that memory there. I think it's a good thing, if it can be used well.
- P1: It's amazing how, how quickly after somebody dies the wholeness of that person, how, how much of that disappears very quickly. Just down to lines of 'they liked cars', as one gravestone next to Dad says or 'He was a good farmer'. A social media presence is a much fuller picture of who a person was.

Moment 16

- P2: Speaking in relation to everything that was kind of posted about my brother, it was like - Everyone kept calling him a 'gentle giant'. And it was, by the time I read the 70 thousandth post about him being a gentle giant, I was like, "Oh my God, have some like dynamics. Like is this all you remember of him? Do you remember him because he was tall and big?"
- P3: It's quite funny, some of the things that would pop up.
- P6: I like the opportunity that it gives to remember that person and celebrate that person. But I guess there's also a part of me that thinks it's a little bit tacky.
- P9: It used to make me very uncomfortable, and I also did not really understand it. I always sort of had this feeling of it's a bit...I don't know... A bit self-indulgent maybe? And I always found it quite a strange position to be in because Facebook is so... I mean you're friends with everyone, like colleagues and people you went to school with, and I always found it a weird like look inside someone's very intimate life. I'll even find myself - like I click on their page and then click on the person and be like "I don't know who you are. You've got no connection to me, why am I here?" That's kind of weird.

- P5: The only parts I do get uncomfortable with is the competing needs for people to be recognised and reactions to their post. That it's like an exclusive. They're looking for that exclusive headline.
- P11: Part of it too, for me, is whether - like who are you doing it for? Are you doing it for yourself to be seen by everybody so that everybody knows that you've said it? Or are you doing it for the person?
- P7: The celebratory ones where your family would normally come together and celebrate that person can get quite heavy. It can almost be like a you know trauma drop.
- P9: Just the audience, like it's such a wide-scoping audience.
- MM: I think even the fact that you just used the word 'audience' is really interesting. You know, to me, the word audience kind of evokes performative connotations. Whereas you probably wouldn't say -if you went to a funeral, you wouldn't say 'the audience.'
- P11: For me in the earlier stages, like in the first probably 6 months, I found that quite difficult. Like seeing - even like memories that come up with both of us or people posting on her page, I found that quite difficult because it brought up a lot of stuff. I did think at one stage, "I'm just going to totally go off Facebook and not..." but then I sort of thought that's a little bit like trying to block out and not think of her at all. And I could never do that so...
- P9: But I think after going through a few deaths that were close to me I realised how important it is. I think I see it differently now, having been through it.

Moment 17

- P6: I guess the other interesting conversation too would be how much grief is acceptable to display via social media?
- P5: I do see loved ones after, days after the tangi continuously use their page to upload photos of their loved one and you can see their mourning process happening live.
- P10: The other thing I was going to say is around posting about death and all the rest of it. After, after the period where there's been a funeral and after there's been that obvious first wave of kind of discussion and back and forth. I was always aware or have always been aware not to, to find a balance between, perhaps when certain anniversaries roll around, acknowledging but not, not sort of playing what could almost be, in terms of social media, thought of as a trump card. Because, you know, if you're going to be potentially getting the violin out and, and referencing, you know, in this case, a tragic premature death of someone who had an immense array of friends, you don't wanna either be or look cynical about that.

I try and do it judiciously and to find that kind of balance between remembering your friend and sharing those memories but not in any way exploiting it.

- P1: I find, of all the things that you post, when you're posting about personal things and emotional things, memories of people you've lost. That's the one that gets the most response. That's the one that brings the community together. Those are the things that really unite a social media community.
- P7: When sharing like a post of grief myself, it's, it does feel like it's a burden lifted rather than kind of wanting a response. It is just kind of having somewhere to put the grief, which I think a lot of people struggle with.
- P5: It does a little bit of healing there. It's a reflection of a person being able to put their grief somewhere.
- P2: Sorry, my battery is about to die. I'm just gonna plug in my charger.
- P10: Sorry, could we just hold on? Got a, got a customer. *(To offstage customer)* "Sorry, can I help you?"
- P4: Hold on. Two secs. Hang on, hang on. I think I've just heard somebody at the door. "No, it's not our door you big egg" *[P4 is talking to the dog, Reg]* Cos the dog thinks- "Come on. Reg. Reg, come. Come on. *[Reg woofs]* Reg. Reg!"
- MM: What was I going to say? I was thinking of something, but I've forgotten it. Oh, I'll remember in a minute.

Act Break / Intermission

Moment 18

P10: Sorry are you there, Missy?

MM: I am here. I am here. No worries.

P2: Okey-dokey

Okey-dokey artichoke-y

And let's...

There we go. Yeah, got it (*has successfully located & connected charger*).

P4: Sorry, carry on.

MM: All good. No worries.

P2: Sweet, that works.

MM: Cool, cool. Good on ya.

P2: Sorry, what was the question?

MM: The question was around kind of whether platforms like Facebook provide a space for people to kind of mourn, or grieve, or remember in their own way?

P10: Well, a couple of things I could say. One in terms of the concept of rituals around death and this is not, certainly in no way an original observation. Many other people have made it, but you know pākehā New Zealand society, western rituals around death are often found lacking.

P5: Oh, it's the stock standard template ay.

P8: We don't have, we don't have great rituals to honour our dead. A lot of it is just kind of made up. People just go, "Oh let's do this" or whatever. There are no kind of rules you know. In lots of different cultures, there are specific things that happen when someone dies and there are specific rules to follow. In Western culture, there are none. I mean there used to be even a three-day rule but that doesn't apply anymore because we have embalming. We absolutely need ritual. That's how we cope with, with anything and it's the same with death. We've got to have something. And the reason we have rituals is to, to give us that respect for our dead and it's one of the things that, you know, that's how we show, that's sort of like the maturity of a country, is its respect for the dead.

P1: I understand why death ritual is important and why it's important to some people. For me and my wife, she finds all that stuff meaningless, and I feel very much the same. When you're physically present, you're, you have to conform to a certain degree and if you don't conform to the rituals that are, that are being practised, you can upset a lot of people. So,

social media sort of frees you from that. It allows you to participate in other people's grief and loss but in a way that's comfortable.

- P5: I'm fortunate because of the amount of time I've been able to do tangihanga and the livestreams there. I'm very aware that once we come off the mountain or come out of the cemetery and we're recording, I'm conscious to let people know, "Go and have a kai. Go and do the whakanoa process." And as much as, you know you don't know if they're doing it or not, there's the conscious fact that you've, you know, made them aware of it. And then, and then also there's a great opportunity to explain tikanga practices and why we do it. Why do we go to the urupa. Why do we go back to the marae and, and have a kai. So, you know, just talking about the transition of state. I think if people are not mindful of it and just shut it down the closure's tough.
- P10: I'm not sure our, our rituals in a kind of post-Christian era are kind of keeping pace and sometimes I feel funerals are very poor. And I would extend that, you know particularly if you know someone really well and you have a sense of their life achievements, those funerals which don't get to grips with the personality or those achievements I think can be very frustrating.
So, I don't know, maybe, maybe if social media improves some of those rituals that can only be a positive thing.

Moment 19

- MM: It's interesting, like thinking about ritual. I mean is the concept of ritual something that can be applied to social media, like has that become a ritualised practice now?
- P1: It's better for me because you know, when I, - I was quite a bit younger when I lost my sister and then, then this friend of mine, who was the best friend I've ever had. You know I lost them in, within a couple of years of each other and I was still quite young, and the grief was overwhelming. It was frightening, frighteningly overwhelming. I never wanted to, I remember saying to myself, "I never want to feel that way again. I don't want to go through that experience again."
So, one of the ways I've done that is I've never physically attended a funeral since then, with the exception of my father which I had to. Given a choice, I wouldn't. I, I was at his bedside when he died, I'd said my goodbyes and that was good enough for me.
But the family wanted me to do the eulogy, so I had to go. So, actually I just turned up, I did the eulogy, and I left.
I, I didn't feel the need to participate in all the rituals. That's, that's not for the dead, that's for the living and I, I prefer to honour people's lives in my own way. So, for me, social media really fits that mindset. It's a way that I can, I can talk about what I feel but in a way that's

comfortable for me. It also gives me a little bit of distance so that I can process the grief in a way that I didn't when I was younger, when it was overwhelming. I don't know if that makes any sense but yeah, it's a way, it's a way that works for me and it's a personal thing.

MM: I think it's just Facebook is relatively new compared to a you know, kind of grieving rituals and mourning rituals that have been around for hundreds and hundreds of years. And I mean how different is it to go to a cemetery and talk to a gravestone as it is to kind of log on and send a message? I think we might think about them as being very different things because one is really ritualised and I think, I think we're not quite at a place where we can kind of acknowledge ritual in a digital sense.

Moment 20

P6: I guess with the grieving the only thing is that, you know, when you see people upset, it's the physical contact. All you want to do is give them a hug. If there was something missing it would be that part, wouldn't it? That you just can't reach through the screen and give them a big hug and make them feel better. It's - you know the distance. Yeah. When people pass you feel very far away from people at times, don't you?

MM: Yeah. Yeah, there is something in that. For me, a huge part of the magic of theatre is you know a collection of bodies in space and time focusing on one thing. That's like magic. And I think, makes me sound old, but like nowadays we don't have that as much. And I think that is part of what a funeral is to me, is us being in that. It's a feeling. You know, it's a palpable feeling and whether or not you get that the same way...

P6: It's like meditating in a room by yourself as opposed to meditating in a hall full of people.

MM: Yeah 100%. 100%. And yeah, definitely hugs are necessary as well.

Moment 21

P4: My family are predominantly Welsh and Irish, and they had big funerals and big wakes and the, the bodies came home, and they spent - it was a lot like tangi. So, they came home, and they spent time at home with the family and the family stayed at home with them, and they celebrated their life. They had lots of visitors.

When I went to my first tangi it kind of reminded me of that.

The community came together to celebrate the life and be there for the family and be there for that person and that just doesn't happen anymore. So, this kind of social media celebration of life is kind of a bit like that but not in real life, do you know what I mean?

MM: Mmm, and do you feel that we can participate in these at a distance? And does it feel different to if you're there in person, if you're online?

P4: It does feel different, but it also still means something. It still means that you can participate, it still does mean that. You know you're able to, I was going to say pay your respects, but show, you show the love and respect that you had for that person. That you were there, not in person but it doesn't matter that you weren't there in person.

MM: I think that's something we get with social media a lot, just like the medium itself. The whole premise of it, you know, is you're there without being there. And I think that it's, that's definitely a, a strength of the medium itself.

Moment 22

P5: Livestream has become a must at tangihanga as a space and a place for whānau to be able to reflect on the tangihanga.

P8: Most funerals I do now are livestreamed. I'd say most of them, good, a good 60 to 70%. And, you know, livestream can be very special. You can set up the circumstances. I mean you make yourself comfortable, you know it's going to be half an hour to 40 minutes, maybe an hour. You can set up and have your cup of coffee or whatever. You can make a nice little area and just make it really quiet and just enjoy it in the comfort of your own home. Sit down, lower the lights, light a candle or something.

MM: I think that's a really nice way to think about it, that there can be an intimacy to it. For me, like I think about a live stream as being removed. You know, is it harder to feel ritual over live stream? But I think the way you've just kind of talked about it is that it can be an intimate thing. In some ways it could be a more kind of personal engagement with it because you're not necessarily having to be in this kind of formalised proceeding.

P2: I think just the virtue of being able to be online and being able to involve my family from the Cook Islands.

MM: Mmm, and do you think enough consideration is given to the way that death is understood and approached differently in different cultures?

P9: I don't know. I think probably not, just given the fact that I haven't considered it maybe not.

P2: I'm, I'm not entirely sure. I think we are using the platforms that we have in the ways that we need to, to be able to communicate what we need for those who can't. I don't think it's necessarily specifically 'us' as sort of, especially as kind of Pasifika people because it's... Hmmm what am I trying to say?

P3: I think it has the capacity to. Like how you record that process and how you maybe share that tangihanga or whatever. But I think the difference is, is when you're posting on a social media platform, you're fitting within that, the regulations of that platform, how it works and how you engage with people is a specific way. What you're actually doing is having to adapt your cultural practices and your tikanga into that platform. I think social media allows for people to engage in and access tangihanga or grieving processes in ways that before, you know there's a lot more exposure to it. It's less hidden. People are able to articulate whatever feelings they're having and it's direct, you know, that communication. But in terms of, yeah, cultural practices I do think we have to kind of fit this other model that was not clearly created for that. So, there's no kind of rules and protocols.

Moment 23

P5: COVID did force us into some changes. People being at home and the restrictions on the number of, amount of people that were able to attend the tangihanga really highlighted the need for us to provide a, a platform for people to be involved with the tangi.

P7: I think COVID - we became more organised because it forced us to actually use all these digital tools available to us to do things online. That's where that big shift happened for especially te ao Māori.

P5: In the past, we'd never ever consider anyone taking photos or videos of the tūpāpaku itself, of the deceased one. But with COVID in play and knowing that this will be the final time anyone would see this person we, it opened up. It opened it up to be flexible, families to allow it to happen. Recording on urupa. In the past that would never be ok. Which then allowed certain urupa to sit down and decide on tikanga practices, on what would be allowed to do and what wouldn't be allowed to do.

P7: Yeah, I think that's just how tikanga has evolved, and it will continue. Pre-COVID everything was sort of like, you know, tapu or had a rāhui, you know, sacred and there was restrictions around those things. But now, Waikato Tainui, Tainui has their own, what do you call it? Broadcasting channel and team that go to tangi.

P2: I think it's a more modern way to do it rather than supplanting the traditional ways.

P5: I wouldn't want them [Facebook] to be able to contribute to the cultural practices. The fact that we're able to utilize the platforms to connect people, to socialise and to 'network' is, is more than enough, that we need from them in terms of tikanga practices.

P3: And also, maybe it's not about do you think it's good or bad, it's about what is. So, it's what kind of practices do you do, or do you not do, or have you seen. Not feeling like you need to judge it.

Moment 24

P10: Social media played a, you know, central role in facilitating streamed access to the funeral service and I don't, I see no downside to that at all. I guess the only downside in, in terms of what we're talking about would be if someone who's privy to information, you know, broke that information in a manner that the, the family wasn't comfortable with - when they wanted to take a lead.

P8: Yeah, good point. I mean social media etiquette is that you do not post unless you are directly involved. So, basically that's the family or you are the funeral director and you've been asked to.

P10: And you know, I can, I can see ethically some problems with that and hopefully I've, you know, I haven't done it myself.

P5: One discussion we're having a lot now is who informs people on social media about a loved one passing. And so, there's thoughts that go into that. There's thoughts around the mihi that goes onto that social media post or a certain photo that will be used. There's requests that are made that no one else puts photos up for the time that someone is grieving for their loved one.

P11: Yeah, so, because it was an illness and we knew that it was coming up there was a little element of like planning, and she did actually say that she would rather it wasn't sort of posted on Facebook straight away. She was worried about the fact that once you post something you don't know when people see it and she didn't want like the, the people who she really wanted to know to find out through the grapevine, having not seen it. So, she actually kind of said, "Wait, wait a while" and I, at the time I found that quite good because I think it would have been a bit too much for me to have to try and kind of deal with. And then the outcomes with posting something like that is quite a lot as well.

P10: I mean if we go back to the instance of this friend of mine. You know, that was different again in that, in that I had, I'd socialised with him only a handful of hours before his death and, and so whilst I wasn't there at the moment he died, I felt a, you know, a connection to it.

It seemed quite an incredible thing that someone, a handful of hours earlier, who I'd been sharing a beer with and, you know, breaking bread with and, and been in a, in a pub quiz team together was no longer with us. I probably, probably lead fairly quickly on social media

about that because I felt a need to express that and, and my own feelings towards him. But whether I took the lead in breaking the news to people I don't know.

P9: I remember when we put up our post for Dad to, you know, let everyone know he had passed, I sat there like - Because it was during COVID, so we had no one physically there. It was just my stepmum, my brother and I and I sat there like, "Refresh, refresh, refresh" and the comments were just coming in. It was like - you could literally feel the little hit you'd get of like, "Oh look, this person loved Dad. Oh look, this person agrees that dad was like this" or "Oh look-" And it was so short lived, the feeling, but I, I couldn't walk away. I couldn't - like all night I just watched the comments come in and then like, "Oh look, so-and-so shared it." But as quick as that sort of, I don't even know, 'hit' came in, it was gone. Whereas, you know, when my auntie passed and I was sitting in the living room surrounded by family and friends and talking about her memory and had them physically there, it was so much more lasting and, and just hit in a way deeper level. It kind of soothed a bit more. But I was sort of looking for this soothing in this really short little snippets of, "Oh yeah. Like they also thought dad was, you know, kind" or whatever, whatever it was.

Moment 25

- P1: Yeah, that's how we learn about people's death these days, is through social media.
- P4: Yeah, I agree. I mean, you don't, people don't come and knock on your door and say, you know, John's died or, you know, Auntie Flora's died or, you know, something like that. They send you a text message or they send you a Facebook message or - it, it gets round quicker, people find out quicker. It's all done by social media.
- MM: And I think as well, you know, it's not a fault, but it's just a mechanism of the medium, I think. It can be quite - 'jarring' is not the right word - but like one minute you can be literally like, "Oh, look at that meme. Look at that cat video"- depending on how your algorithm works, right? And then you get hit with something like that and I think... Yeah, it's interesting, and I guess it's, I don't know, is that reflective of real life? Cause I guess if you get a phone call or you get a text, it's a similar kind of disruption.
- P2: Yeah, yeah, I understand that. There was like, "Oh my God, fuck", that sort of taken aback. For me, it's just like being taken aback for a moment.
- P9: I think it's our way of keeping up with how fast life goes these days. Every aspect of life now has its virtual format, or pretty much every aspect, and I think this is just, yeah, death's part in it all. And I do think, yeah, I do think it adds something. I don't know to what quality, and I don't know what we might lose out on with this.

Moment 26

- P7: It seems to be a trend now with a lot of tangihanga in te ao Māori, you know, in the Māori world, funerals and passings, they're always on Facebook. It's not like, in the past you put them in the, I can't even remember what you called them. You know, the newspaper ones.
- P1: Traditional channels is putting a memorial notice in the paper and stuff like that.
- P8: Back in the old days, everybody used to look in the paper for the, it was called hatches, matches, and dispatches, and my parents still do. They always go to the back of the paper to see who died.
- P1: But people just don't read the paper so much anymore.
- P8: These days, someone announces it on Facebook.
- P6: Gone are the days where everyone's reading the death notices. So, yeah, in terms of being that rapid-fire public announcement, it is a very handy tool.
- P1: I can't speak for anybody else except myself but I'm very comfortable with it [learning of or sharing the passing of someone via social media]. I think it's entirely appropriate and it works really well. Especially when Dad died. It was really nice to, on my own social media pages, just do a tribute to him. I was able to tell a story about him and tell people what he was like and, and, and the life that he lived. Otherwise, people wouldn't have known about it, and that got spread far and wide. You know, it's, it's amazing how that filters through and all kinds of people from the past who hadn't seen Dad for decades got in touch just through one simple posting. So, it was very useful.
- P7: It's quite amazing because we will get people who end up becoming our friends who are friends of our fathers or our grandmother, you know my grandmothers, and they just share their memories with us as well and it's beautiful.

Moment 27

- P5: I think we're starting to adapt the process of preparation too. Facebook Group pages will go up. Just to talk about a Karakia space for a certain person. When those posts and those pages go up that's indicating to the wider whānau time is coming close. And so, the, the name of that page will change from colloquial uplifting to 'in loving memory of' and usually that's the, that's become the assumed process that whānau have in terms of the discussion around who lets the pānui out and whānau have certain people they'll go to. And I think the, the real point of that discussion is around who's going to write the Māori words.

ay? Who's going to write the mihi to make it uplifting, to make it empowering. We created a Facebook page for the funerals within the Tainui boundary lines. So, it covers from Te Kuiti all the way to Auckland. Hauraki right out to Kawhia. A wide, a wide network. But it was enough for people to understand that that was a source of where you could get information about people that have passed.

P7: We also get a lot of those in our marae pages for certain members of our marae whānau that pass. A lot of that comes through.

P5: So, Facebook being a, a network platform for socializing with people, that's all we needed and so we benefit from that platform.

MM: Yeah. And I think that's, you know, having a kind of official page like that means you can trust the information or the accuracy because, you know, the last thing you want is kind of inaccurate information around that kind of stuff. That would just be awful.

P5: Oh, it happened on the weekend. Someone rang me because they got told I passed.

MM: What?!

P5: So, they rang me and oh jeez.

MM: Far out.

P5: Social media!

MM: Far out. That's insane. That's hard case.

Moment 28

P10: What was I just going to say?

P2: What were we talking about?

MM: I guess just, we've covered quite a lot of ground already and some quite interesting things to think about, but I guess just any, any more observations or comments about Facebook or social media or anything before we move on?

P9: So, I don't know if you've heard of ACP's: Advance Care Plans? It's quite cool. It goes alongside your will and your power of attorney document but it's more about you as a person and your wishes. It's about, you know, if you lose the ability to speak for yourself and then also after your death and how you want everything to go. It asks very specific questions about you know, say you're in a coma, what music do you want to be listening to or do you not want music or, like it's very detailed. Because a will and power of attorney it's

like, you know, it's very legal and it doesn't really go into any sort of personal detail. But yeah, it's quite a cool document that a lot of older people work through with their GP's. Maybe in today's day and age, maybe that should be a, a question added in there, you know, who handles that.

MM: Yeah, that digital element. I think as we have these platforms for longer and longer, they do become kind of like an archive. There is a kind of digital inheritance. I'm gonna look up that ACP stuff because that's pretty cool.

Moment 29

P8: I guess the only thing that I was thinking about that I had thought about when you were talking right at the start was the AI.

MM: Yeah, yeah and I guess moving on to the thanatechnologies, have you ever heard that word before?

P11: No.

P2: When I read, saw 'thanatechnology' I was like, "I've never seen this word before." I only kind of surmised what it meant because I'm a classics nerd and know thano / death. I sort of knew what it was.

P11: But is, Thanatos is like, it means death, doesn't it? Like Greek word for?

MM: Yeah. A+.

So, thana (meaning death) and technology (meaning technology) but there's been kind of a bit of an influx of new technologies to, for want of a better term, immortalise.

With the development of generative AI technology there's now kind of various options where AI is entering this kind of death space.

So, while you're still alive you like record videos of yourself and when you're gone your whānau and family can ask questions and talk to it and it kind of responds in your voice, using that data.

P6: In what way Missy? Not just like eulogies, but like?

P3: I've heard you can put in like chat texts and then they can start to work out their voice for texting and like responding.

MM: Yeah. I didn't know that much about it before starting on this research project with Gareth. But now there's a market for stuff like ChatGPT, you can kind of train and teach, feed it data and then it learns. There's these different platforms that specifically target, you know are designed with legacy in mind or kind of digital posthumous reincarnation.

- P10: Are you talking about AI somehow sustaining some kind of artificial sense of that person?
- P11: I don't know how comfortable I'd be with that.
- P1: It doesn't appeal at all.
- P6: My immediate thinking is just no.
- P5: Ooh, very, very touchy that one.
- P6: We are living, breathing vessels, you know?
- P5: You're trying to keep someone alive?
- P6: Think if we separate too much of ourselves we're going to end up in this dualism that takes away the essence of being human.
- P9: I think, at first, it frightens me a little bit.
- P8: Yeah, that scares me.
- P4: I think that would, that would be quite cool. Scary, but cool.

Moment 30

- P10: I mean I see variations of the idea on say on something like *Black Mirror* where, where you, you reconstitute the person and he ends up in the, in the attic and you go up there and shag him if you feel like it. Or, you know, otherwise he's just hanging around.
- P11: Really interesting you say that, cos last night I watched an episode of *Star Trek Discovery* where they had like a, like it was a physical replica of the character's mother and the computer had done what, exactly what you just said, knew how the mother would react and her speech patterns and what she would say, could predict her answers to like questions and stuff.
- P10: Yeah, I, I would seriously doubt that, that technology will ever be able to, no matter what you feed into it, replicate. But you know this is stuff of science. I guess my response is this seems so wacky and sci-fi that I, I find it difficult to take it seriously. And I guess perhaps at the moment the world is divided into those who think like myself and those forward thinkers who perhaps know a little bit more, who, who are taking it seriously and sounding the alarm bell.
- P11: And I thought, as I was watching it, it's a little unnerving. Like I found it a little creepy because, you know, your logical brain knows that it's not them, but our senses get tricked really easily. It's like that uncanny valley. Like it's real but it's not. It's not quite real enough.

- P1: I can see how that would be of comfort to some people. I can see that they would like that but me personally, absolutely not. I wouldn't even think about it because it's not the person. It's facsimile.
- P8: It's an impersonation. It's not me. Like what makes me, me, is gone and I don't want - it's like someone wearing my skin.
- P7: The thing that automatically comes to mind is the guy that dressed his deceased wife up as a doll.
- MM: Yeah, it is a little bit digital Norman Bates. That's not a fair comparison though because he was obviously not a stellar dude.

Moment 31

- P5: I, I do recall where we could see a photo of someone and their eyes moving and their mouth moving. You know, to try and bring it to life and it got to a point where someone used the second Māori King's and that was very... Well, it was very highly frowned upon.
- P7: Yeah, I've seen a lot of that, and people really, yeah, not very happy, quite disgusted.
- MM: There's other platforms that are less kind of *Ex Machina* and less kind of robot sci-fi that are a bit more kind of legacy planning. So, it's, you join up while you're alive and you might get like e-mail prompts with questions and it facilitates you recording video responses and stuff like that.
Services that will, after your death, will send videos or messages to people on like milestones. So, you might be like, "OK, I'm going to record a 21st video" or "A video for my grandchildren"
- P11: Yeah, I sort of like that. I think that's quite a cool idea because it's still being done when the person is alive and it's still from them.
- P2: I think if I were to do anything it would be the milestones. All of my nephews and nieces, for my family. It's the easiest way to be able to guarantee that they know that I'm remembering them. I want them to know that they have always been thought of and their uncle is always thinking about them, has always thought about them.
- P8: Yeah, that's different. It's like a video of me saying it not a weird hybrid creation. I did a funeral once where, as a celebrant, where the person who had died had recorded themselves and they did a whole recording of themselves speaking to everybody at their funeral.

- P10: I've long harboured a, an ambition to, if, if I had a terminal condition and, and had sufficient energy and, and creative juice to, to record something, to be played at my memorial. I'd rather be a, I'd rather be some kind of presence at my funeral or memorial than not.
- P8: It sounds confronting, but it was amazing. So, they recorded themselves with a message basically saying, you know, how much they loved everybody there and they wanted to have the last word.
- P10: Well, here's a story from my father's funeral. We, we decided, as a celebrant, we chose someone who had a degree of experience in the matter and also had known my father for at least 40 years. But I don't know how recently he had, he'd been a celebrant, and he was clearly a little bit nervous, you could see it, and he, and he mispronounced our last name in the first sentence.
Yeah. I mean he did apologise.
But maybe the next level is getting the deceased to do it themselves.
- MM: Yeah, you better get onto it.
- P10: Of course you want a physical improvement on you. I've already gotta look younger than I look at the moment let alone when I actually do cark it.
- MM: Yeah, yeah, you get like the airbrushed version, yeah?
- P10: Yeah. Yeah.

Moment 32

- P11: It comes back to the whole, "What am I leaving behind when I go" type thing. There's all the concrete stuff like your possessions and, you know, your, the, the actual stuff and like memories. But so, so Facebook's a little bit of both because it's a concrete thing and there's photos and, you know, conversations but it's an abstract thing in that it's, you know, it's not even really here.
- P5: Well, you know, burial, burial forces you to have closure of some sort. Closing off the lid process forces you to have some closure but when the action comes to online and because it's unlimited, you know unlimited time, unlimited information, unlimited sources, you think and you assume that that relationship has no time constraints on it. So, there's no limit of when you sever the ties online.
- P7: I feel like when someone's gone, let them rest in peace. It's hard. It's hard and, you know, those waves of emotion come over you. But that's what it's about, knowing that they were important to you and that they were here.

- P3: There is something very natural and holistic with the grieving process. The longer time goes by, it doesn't go away, but it, it reshapes, and it changes, and I think messing with that process is something that I would be very wary of. There's something about needing to really live within the reality and repeat it and keep going and slowly it becomes more real. The acceptance of that person not being there anymore allows you to get a bit of space from the loss. I would be wary of having content in which you can continue to engage with them, making it really difficult to move forward. I know that, especially in the early years, wanting to completely absorb yourself in that would be so easy to do. To want to just message them every day or see these photos or engage with whatever you can to feel closer to that person, but I think it would just delay the, the process of grieving and really make it difficult to move beyond that, that stage of things.
- P9: I think it just feels so unnatural... for someone to live on artificially. It's quite complex, isn't it? Because if it helps someone grieve, then, you know, well power to them. But I'm concerned that it would stunt your grief journey in a way because all the information you're feeding it, it's limited, right? Like it's stuck in time. It's only, it only exists up until the day they died. So, even though they're gonna live on, they still - it's not like life because life is ever changing. I could see an initial benefit when coming to terms with the fact that they're not here, but it depends on the person and depends on what grief means to them.
- P8: Yeah, I'm not sure how it helps with your grief.
- MM: I think it depends kind of on where each individual stands on what closure is, if that's something that we're seeking. Or, you know, grief. Is it moving on? Or is it like learning to live with it? And kind of how that manifests, and I guess whether or not this kind of new technology can participate, should participate, or could be helpful in that respect.
- P8: I mean, yeah. Is it any different from sleeping with a picture of them? Is it? I don't know. Who's to say? Everybody's grief journey is different.
- MM: Yeah, you know, I was initially like, "No, we don't need an AI version of Missy around the place. I don't - that's not for me." But then I was thinking, well, what if I had young children?
- P11: Yeah, yeah, totally. Possibly if I, if I had kids I would think differently.
- P8: The other thing is, is that it doesn't affect me, does it? I won't be here. It's not for me and that's the thing, I'm gone so...
- MM: Yeah, whether you do it for the other person.
- P9: That's interesting ay. That reminds me, like, cos Dad was diagnosed and he had three months to live but he had time to, to leave things or write things and he didn't. And I didn't ask that of him. But I, a part of me wondered, "Oh, you know, will he write me a letter or will he-", you know, do cheesy stuff like that or write me a letter for, to read on my wedding

day or something cheesy like that. But I don't think, I don't think it would go with his philosophy and it - so much will change in the future that I don't know if he would stand by his words in 10 years' time. The person I am then, hopefully, is different to the person I was back then. So, yeah, I don't think I would know - I wouldn't have the words for someone in the future because I don't know what world they'll be living in. Does that make sense?

Moment 33

P6: It still comes down to the skill of the person collecting the information and feeding it into the machine, doesn't it? And then also it's - I mean you know these interviews are a prime example of how multifaceted our opinions and, and answers can be. I, I meet very few people who go, black and white, "This is what I think about this, and this never changes throughout my life." You're capturing one version of a person, that one snapshot at the time and, and having that representation be, you know, the eternal representation and that's, to me, not cool.

MM: But like isn't that what a biography is?

P6: Good question.

MM: Yeah, I'm being facetious now.

P6: No, no, it's, it's a good question, Missy, it is. I think the difference is the biography I give to the person to read, and they go, "Yep, that's what I would say" and then they can confirm that's what they've said. Whereas, with the AI generation, you're giving away your right to provide an answer. OK, it comes from you, but does it? It comes from a combination of what you've provided at this single point in time.

P8: When you talk to me, Missy, about, you know, what could happen, I think it's the fact that if you allow these images to be brought back of the dead, next minute they're in a meme. You know, going down a slide, on a see saw. You know what I mean? And it's just, you know, there needs to be some kind of respect. And even if you're like, "Oh yeah, Mum would have loved that. That's funny. She was a real character!" You know, it's just, I don't know if it's the same. They're not there to ask. Their permission is gone, you know?

P6: And I do believe that if someone asked me a question today and if they asked the same question in 20 years' time my answer would be completely different.

MM: So, you don't foresee yourself ending up as a kind of perpetual digital presence in the form of AI when you meet your demise?

P6: No, no, I don't think so. No. When I'm gone, I'm gone. I mean yeah if people wanna watch me they can watch a film I've been in or a play I've been in. There is footage of me... If they want to.

MM: Yeah, there is evidence of your existence in the world.

P11: Because I make music and art that's kind of like a - when you make a piece of art or you record a piece of music that's kind of the same thing, like it's kind of staying out there. If you write a piece of music and you give someone the sheet music and they can then go away and play it, then you're sort of being remembered in that.

MM: Mmm. There's sort of trace of you in that.

P10: Well, who knows? I mean maybe the social rituals and the technology will interface and we'll get more meaningful, you know, kind of rituals out of it.

P8: I'm just trying not to be an old fogey.
You know, every generation goes, "Oh, you know it's going too far" but that's what every generation does, and it moves on doesn't it? I mean that's the point. We've got to move forward.

Moment 34

MM: Last kind of question really, but do you think that the potential for these kind of AI or extensions of life, do you think they could help us accept death or kind of acknowledge that, or maybe alter the way we think about death and deal with grief?

P2: I think it's altered the way we think about death. Like the idea that we still have a presence, even though we're gone we'll still be present, somewhat. It doesn't make things easier, but it does make things nicer. It doesn't make the passing any easier, but it makes the understanding easier. The idea that I'm still able to access a memory digitally that complements the memory I already have of them. Complementing not replacing.

P11: We could go to counselling beforehand and, you know, make plans. Whereas, if someone's just taken away from you quite quickly, I think in that sense it could be really helpful for people to say, have that last conversation with the person that they never got to have. Or see them that one last time that they never got to. Whereas, for me, I, I made a point of doing all those things because we knew that it was coming.
And even people who still know that it's coming up might, might actually quite benefit from having, you know, just another conversation with that person, even if they know that it's AI generated. It's still, like I said we, our senses get tricked. So, you know, you hear the voice and part of you does still believe it. Yeah. And it depends how sort of logically you want to

think about it or whether you want to just actually shut that off and to go, "I don't care if it's logical or not. I just want to get what I can from the experience."

- P5: I think it'll take time to, for people to really accept it so to speak. But I think we're, we're at a time now where we're evolving. You know, putting a, a video of a loved one in their casket, 10 years ago, highly frowned upon. You know, you're tapu, your whati, you're, you're all these names under the sun in terms of a lack of understanding. But if someone died next week and we recorded their face nobody will have a problem.
I think it'll just take time, courage, and someone that's understanding of the benefits of how that will help others. I think the main thing will be around healing. How does it help to heal?
- P9: Yeah, I do think they could be used as a tool. I'm sure there's a part of the population, that would, you know, that would be huge for them and would help them in a big way. I think it just depends on so much. Like you say, different cultures and what death means to different people. I know for me, my philosophy around it is, you know, I'm Dad's daughter. I'm a part of him. He's contributed to the person I am. He will live on through me and through my brother and through everyone he's touched. So, to me, he's very much alive and very much around and every time I make a decision, certain decisions, he's there with me.

Moment 35

- P1: You don't realise how many incredibly talented and amazing people live among us. They're not famous, they're not celebrities, they're not lauded. They're just talented people who are living their lives in their own way and you don't realise they're there.
- P8: Ordinary people do the most extraordinary things with their lives and it's just fascinating to me. I've been so privileged to learn about people's lives. It's just amazing. And the love that you feel from people, it's just... It's incredible.
- MM: Yeah, it really is.
That is humanity, I think. Or what I hope we are.
- P4: There's this thing I heard once, and it's always stuck with me. It's like until nobody says your name, you're still there.
So, if people keep talking about you, people keep saying your name, if people keep telling stories about you, you're still there. You're still alive. You're still alive to your kids, your grandkids, your great grandkids, your great-great grandkids. They see your photos, they see your cards, they see all of those things.
- P1: They do live in your memory, and they are at present all the time, and you do think about them all the time.

P4: I've got photos of my Dad right there. Got photos of my Nan and Grandad right there. And we talk about them all the time.
They're not - they're dead people but they're not dead memories.

Moment 36

MM: So, I mean, that's kind of the end of all my like official chat and I'm so grateful to have the opportunity to talk to you. I feel like I've learned a lot and it's really, really great to have your perspective on this kind of stuff. It's also just great to talk to you, you know, cos a lot of people find this hard to talk about. It's really nice to be able to have this conversation with someone. Also, I can tell that the mahi that you do in this space is really important and helpful to people. So, thank you for giving me some of your precious time to talk about it. And if you don't have any more kind of questions, concerns, comments, I'll let you go. Yeah, and just let me know if you would like a copy of the transcript of our conversation to review or anything like that. I'm happy to send that to you.

P3: I feel comfortable with what we spoke about today, so no stress about it.

P9: Nah, I'm all good. I'll cringe reading it back.

P2: Yeah, actually that would be awesome. I'm just really interested to sort of hear what I said, or to read what I said. But no, thank you so much for allowing me space. I really appreciate that.

P5: I'm more than happy for you to utilize whatever, whatever you find in our discussion. I'm grateful for the opportunity. So mihi kei aku ringa.

MM: It was really great to meet you. I don't know if we'll ever see one another again, but if we do, good times.
Right, ka kite.

MM: I'll see you maybe in person one of these days, in real life.

P4: That would be awesome. That would be awesome.

MM: Okey dokey. Goodbye for now.

P4 & P6: Take care

P8: Well, I'm glad it was helpful. I'm sorry I kept you waiting at the start. I do apologise because your time is important.

MM: No, you know what? You were worth the wait. No, that's great. Thank you very much for your time and have a good rest of your day. Keep doing the good mahi.

P8: No, I enjoyed it.

P11: It's been really good.

P7: Good luck with the rest of it. Ka pai, ka kite.

MM: Righto, ka kite.

P10: I'm not sure I contributed much but it hasn't been arduous. So, yeah, thank you for your time.

P1: Now that you've fired up the neurons, I'll be thinking about this for days and I'm going to be coming up with all kinds of things I hadn't thought of before.

MM: Right, I will end the meeting for all.

Ok. Bye.

Thank you. Thank you.