

## FRONT UP

# From change can come a new identity

**M**Y FRIEND Mat and I were heading to a house party when a most peculiar situation arose. We came by a woman, probably in her early 50s, wandering around her front garden, watering her plants with her nightie on.

Now most people would let her be, supposing it to be some crazy woman with a watering fetish. But not Mat — he stops and talks to the woman.

It turned out that this woman's neighbour had just died. She was quite rattled by the whole ordeal and had even called Life Line. She explained how the death of her neighbour, although the two were not terribly close, had brought back memories of the deaths of all her loved ones.

I have to say I felt a little out of my element but Mat knew exactly what to do. If there was an Academy Award for counselling, Mat would have knocked the socks off Dr Phil. By the end of it she thought Mat was nothing less than an angel.

This event got me thinking about death. Not in the sense of mortality or its tragedy, but more in the sense of identity. The identity of those left behind.

I realised the people around us are what make us who we are. If you were the richest person alive or you broke a world record, what would it matter if there was nobody to notice? The way we are perceived by others is often more important than who we actually are.

For this reason death can be pretty rattling for your identity. The closer the person you know, the more you have to change and adapt yourself afterwards.

It seems to me that loss in any circumstance — be it death, moving, the end of a relationship — always results in a change of identity.



ADAM BRODIE-McKENZIE

I have moved into a new share-house this year and now hang out regularly with different people than I did last year. I know that I have changed, albeit minimally, since coming back to Canberra because my environment has changed.

My friend has just ended a long relationship and he grieves as though he has lost a close relative. His girlfriend was such a significant part of his life that now she is gone, he has to try and make himself a world where she no longer exists, as though she has died. His identity lies in shattered remains of what it once was.

Still, unless you're the person that's dead, we all come around, don't we? The woman whose neighbour had died was clearly at her wits end. She had suffered so much death in her life that even her neighbour, whom she didn't even know very well, had left her feeling lost, literally wandering aimlessly, with no identity.

I guess the important thing to remember is that she will get new neighbours. They will relate to her in their own way and a new person will evolve from their relationship. Nevertheless, sometimes when it's hard you just can't help watering your plants in your nightie at 1am. Hey, at least there are plants to water.

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■ *Front Up* is a column written by anyone born after December 31, 1974. All you have to do is write 500 words and send them to [jenna\\_p@bigpond.net.au](mailto:jenna_p@bigpond.net.au)