



## Thought For The Day

### Transcript

Gillian Stewart 17<sup>th</sup> February 2007

I'm not telling you anything new when I say that religion has been around for a long, long time and, historically, one of its roles has been to mark the various rites of passage that humans experience in their lifetimes.

So why now, at this time in our history, do we need a secular alternative? The answer is quite simple really, in this day and age people expect and indeed demand choice. It's no longer acceptable just to say 'That's the way it's always been done', because as humans we are constantly striving to find better, more suitable alternatives to pretty much everything in life, and that includes living!

And humanism offers a real way of being in the 21st Century, because it's basic philosophy is about treating each other and the world we live in with respect – issues that have certainly always been relevant, but I would suggest never more so than at this point in our history.

Amazingly there are still a great many people out there who haven't even heard of humanism, let alone know what it means, so as a celebrant who conducts a variety of non-religious ceremonies I consider myself to be on the front line of offering people a positive experience of humanism.

So what's so different about a humanist ceremony you might ask? Well many people comment that our ceremonies are extremely enjoyable and this applies to our funerals in particular, which you might find a strange thing to say! I think what is meant by that is that what we offer is a very real and very personal tribute of the person who has died and those close to the deceased find great comfort in that.

When conducting a funeral ceremony I always meet with members of the family and hopefully friends of the deceased too. The more people I can speak to, the more honest a picture I can build up of the person who is being remembered, warts and all! Understandably there are often tears, but there can often be laughter too, because I'm focusing on the life of that person, not just their death.

Hilary Stanton Zunin once said "The risk of love is loss, and the price of loss is grief", and of course it is deeply sad when someone that we love has died, but the fact that they lived and enriched the lives of those around them deserves to be celebrated too. Each and every one of us has a unique part to play in this world, and our ceremonies focus on that uniqueness. And whether I'm welcoming a new life into the world, celebrating the joining of two lives in marriage, or remembering with joy and compassion the life of a loved one, I do so with the utmost respect because we are all the same and basically that's what humanism means to me...being human. I wonder what it means to you?