

HOT POTATO

By Ryan Helfenbein

Remember playing hot potato as a kid? You'd pass an object (aka the 'potato') around the circle and hope you weren't holding it when the music stopped. No one wanted to be the last person to hold the spud. So, what does a silly kid's game have to do with death care? As it turns out, more than we think.

While many of us wisely take the time to make our end-of-life plans in advance, there is one piece of the puzzle that is often overlooked. When preplanning a ceremony down to the music to be played and the picture to be placed next to the urn, we can't forget about what is to happen to our cremated remains after the service. When this often occurs, family members are faced with a game of hot potato. For example, Mom passes away, dad gets her urn after the service. Dad then passes, and the eldest child is left with the urns of both mom and dad. Oldest son then downsizes, and the urns are passed to another family member and then another hence the 'hot potato' scenario. It's almost certain that no one wants to eternally spend their time moving from one family member to the next and it is almost guaranteed that the next generation in the family does not want to be left with multiple urns. This is why it is essential that the question of what to do with our cremated remains is answered and direction is provided in advance for the ones we love.

Options to consider for the placement of cremated remains are almost limitless and entirely personal preference. Yet another great reason to specify our choice in advance so family members don't have to debate what "seems right." For those who lean more traditional, cemeteries offer placement options much like that of casketed burial. Cemeteries today often allow one casketed remains or

two cremated remains, in an approved urn, to a single gravesite. It is important to understand that each cemetery reserves the right to set their own policy, so make sure to check with them in advance. Another option would be if the family plot is already occupied, cremated remains can be placed inside of a monument on top of the grave, acting as a headstone. Cemeteries often provide columbariums that have niches available to house cremated remains, think of the traditional mausoleum but for urns. Often times these niche spaces accommodate more than one urn. We are starting to see scattering options available in cemeteries that provide unique memorial benches, bricks and butterfly markers to memorialize the individual. In more progressive cemeteries, green burial options for environmentally friendly urns also exist. Churches are even providing "traditional placement" options such as in-ground urn burial and columbarium niches, as well as scattering gardens, on church property.

Outside of the more traditional methods, there are numerous unique and personalized tokens of remembrance evolving faster than we can imagine. While scattering cremated remains isn't a new concept, accommodating a dignified way to scatter is. Biodegradable urns made for scattering at a favorite beach, park or body of water are available today (please be sure to conform with local laws before public scattering). Some go as far to include nutrients to grow a tree or wildflowers. Cremated remains can be placed in jewelry or made into gemstones that look like diamonds. There are craftsmen that are spinning cremated remains into beautiful glass keepsakes, and others that cast remains into small stones for easy display, transport or private placement in a favorite stream or river. For those interested in galaxies far far away, there are companies that will send

cremated remains into outer space.

To bring things a bit closer to our community, there is a service that places cremated remains in the ocean called Atlantic Scattering. As many are aware, scattering of cremated remains in the Chesapeake Bay and the waters that lead to it is strictly prohibited by federal regulation. Fortunately for us, our state shares a coastline with the next best thing. Atlantic Scattering is one service available locally to scatter cremated remains privately in Coast Guard approved waters. The cremated remains are contained in a biodegradable receptacle which floats for a short period of time before sinking to the ocean floor where it fully dissolves. A certificate is provided to the family with a photo of the biodegradable 'urn' in the ocean, GPS coordinates of the placement and an image of the continental shelf where placement occurred.

There is no reason to make our family play 'hot potato' with an urn given the many options available today. Those seeking a nontraditional send-off can get extremely creative and those leaning more traditional have options available as well. It is important to talk with a local undertaker and navigate through the options for final placement in advance. Think about what would showcase a life the most, how to be remembered for future generations, and what will provide peace of mind for those immediately left behind. Most importantly, be sure that preference is noted ahead of time, so the ones left behind are not stuck when the music stops.

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