

Have It Your Way

By Ryan Helfenbein

Think back to a time when you were meeting with a funeral professional to help organize a service for a family member or friend who recently died. Most of that time was spent concentrating on ways to help honor that person's life, and help the family through the process. However, while planning the specific details and services, it is only natural to think about what we might want our own funeral ceremony to be like. For a person who is not around the funeral industry much, this is a rare occasion to think these thoughts. But what about the individuals who are directly involved with organizing these ceremonies for multiple families day in and day out? Surely funeral directors, who live and breathe the organization of ceremonies and watch the reactions of visitors to the multitudes of ways to honor a life lived, must have some firm ideas about how they'd like to be remembered. Better yet, how similar would it be to what they do for others day in and day out?

A recent study was conducted of 22 funeral professionals asking them, "What would your funeral be like?" The results were rather eye-opening, and perhaps different than what you might imagine.

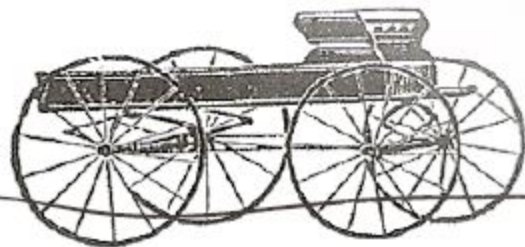
Out of the 22 individuals surveyed, more than three-fourths (17) wanted a nontraditional ceremony upon their passing. Some even went as far as saying they would not want any religious aspects involved in their ceremony, but rather a time of celebration and reminiscing of their life. Interesting, right? These are individuals who make a living performing services for our communities, and who go in and out of churches and funeral homes all around the country. What is even more interesting is that most wanted a visitation -- with a unique twist. It should include a time of laughter, fun, and "with a spark."

Dave Kennedy, one of those surveyed, puts it best: "First, I intend to make it fun. Fun and humor have always been a big part of my life and love of life. I intend to have visitations for family and friends at my funeral home to come see me one last time (if they desire), while offering refreshments and music of my choosing. Entertainment for the youths in attendance will be offered in another room in the facility. After the service, I'd like to take everyone to go to a ballgame while I rest in the parking lot in the hearse with the radio turned on to the game. But most of all, I want the theme to be live, love and remember me with a smile."

Dave could not have said it any better, "live love and remember me with a smile," is something all of us should incorporate into this difficult time. As a matter of fact, in most of these responses, this need for a celebration was apparent. For example, undertakers replied with "go to an Irish pub," the service should begin with "Let's Go Crazy" by Prince, "make it fun, it's a going away party" and "an event that's not sad."

The lesson we can all take from these interviews is that the funeral service today doesn't have to be a cookie-cutter affair. We have learned from another survey that 71 percent of consumers today do not want a typical funeral, but only 5 percent are getting exactly what they had in mind. If each of these funeral professionals can get one-of-a-kind tributes to their lives, then consumers should be able to as well. Take some time to consider what sort of unique celebration captures your personality, and begin to record your wants and desires. Sit down with your local undertaker and be sure your celebration will be what you want.

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Bay Bytes

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