

## Cremation and All That Remains

One of my favorite topics is cremation. I am always amused by the reasons people give for wanting to be cremated and it is something that is being discussed more and more. Reasons I often hear, and ones I will address here, are that it is cheaper, it saves scarce land and it is easier.

Saving money is the one I hear the most. To answer this directly, yes, cremation can be cheaper than traditional burial. But it is also true that traditional burial can also be cheaper than cremation. Remember that the cost of the funeral provider's services and merchandise all depends on what the individual asks of the undertaker and what the customer selects. For example, I have made advance plans for individuals with a total cost of more than \$14,000 in cremation services and I have also made advance plans for individuals with less than \$5,000 in traditional burial costs. Two of the major factors in burial and cremation are the merchandise the family selects and where the person is to be laid to rest. With burial, a family would need to select two items of merchandise: a casket and an outer burial enclosure. With cremation, a family would need to select three items of merchandise: a cremation container, urn and outer burial urn enclosure. The location of the cemetery is a big factor in the cost of burial as well. There are cemetery lots on the Eastern Shore that only cost \$100 per grave, compared to burial lots outside Washington, D.C., that cost between \$2,000 and \$4,000. So as you can see, a lot of variables come into play when choosing whether you would like to be buried or cremated. It is best to meet with

an undertaker who specializes in planning ahead and let him work within a budget you provide.

The assertion that we are running out of land is one that I usually answer with a smile and a shake of the head. First, let me ask, who is "we?" If anyone should be concerned with running out of space it should be Arlington National Cemetery in Washington, D.C., and that could potentially happen. This one cemetery does nearly 20 burials per day and they, at some point in the next decade or two, could find the need to increase the available space. One alternative for individuals concerned with this topic is green burial. This is the use of a grave that is all natural and makes no use of concrete burial containers and other materials that will last forever. It is truly returning to the earth the natural way. Some varieties of green burial even offer the reusing of grave spaces after a certain time frame. With this, there would be no concern about running out of land.

Individuals who come to me when planning ahead and say that they want this to be as easy as possible on their survivors at the time of their own deaths commonly follow it up with, "That's why we want to be cremated." Actually, I would have to say that a traditional burial service would be easier. When someone meets with an undertaker to discuss cremation the customer should be asked questions such as: Do you want cremation to be done before or after services? Is there to be a visitation? If so, is cremation to be done before or after the visitation? Is the urn to be present at the service? Are we to use an urn ark? Is the body to be placed in a cremation casket or a



cremation container? You should also know that in some cases the signatures of all immediate family members are required to allow the undertaker to even move forward with cremation. When it comes to traditional burial, questions asked are: What time frame would you like for visiting hours? Where is the service to be held and where are the cemetery lots? Cremation can be easy, but it is all how you define easy. Whether a family selects cremation or burial, the services celebrating that individual's life is what is most important. I cannot tell you how many times I've had survivors of families who choose immediate cremation or burial with no services then come back and say they wish they would have done things differently.

Helping a family heal is what our industry should strive to offer everyone whether a family chooses burial or cremation. By educating yourself in advance on the options available when it comes to cremation, as well as the cremation process in general, you will find that there is much more to this method of disposition than what is portrayed in the media. Cremation can be a very memorable means of celebrating one's life, but please be sure to learn more about what is offered before making a hasty decision. All of the concerns mentioned are logical and allow an opportunity to discuss a topic that is typically not addressed.

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