

Bring 'em Home

By Ryan Helfenbein

According to a recent article published by the American Automobile Association, 38 million people traveled this past Memorial Day weekend, the second highest travel volume since 2005. With all this traveling, one has to ask at some point, what if someone dear to you died when out of town? Who would the family call, what would be done, and how in the world would they get them back home? Yes, leave it to an undertaker to take the nervousness of travel and amplify it by mixing in the question of a death out of town. This is actually a commonly asked question and one for which we should all have the answer.

The quick answer is to always call your hometown undertaker. Yes, no matter if it is cruising the Mediterranean or simply visiting family in a neighboring state, the immediate phone call is to our hometown undertaker. A way of thinking of this is kind of like a club or fraternity. Undertakers have associates all over the world who assist each other – and no, they are not corporate, these are family-owned and operated firms. When you reach out to your hometown undertaker to let them know that a death occurred and you are out of town, they then reach out to the local contact in that area to act on their behalf. This not only minimizes potential communication issues, due to a family dealing with just one dark suit, but it actually eliminates the risk of being double-charged. In the land of an undertaker, there exists a fee called “Professional Service or Basic Services of Funeral Director and Staff.” This fee is a non-declinable fee that is incurred when contracting with a funeral home – per funeral home. So if one had contacted the funeral home where the passing occurred, and then called the hometown firm, they could incur two of these non-declinable fees. That could be to the tune of several thousand dollars! This can not only be a savings on the expense of contacting two firms, but eliminate a tremendous amount of confusion as to what exactly each firm is doing. The hometown undertaker orchestrates all the moving parts in seeing that the individual is brought back home, and the family only has one bill to be concerned with.

“OK, so I’ve got my home town “Digger O’Dell” to take care of things for me, but what about transportation?” When it comes to transporting the individual the undertaker will advise whether they will need to be flown via airplane or escorted on land. This all depends on the proximity of where the death occurred to

the hometown firm’s location. First let’s understand that if the family chooses cremation, then typically cremation is completed at the location where the death occurred and then the cremated remains are transported to the hometown undertaker – again, all orchestrated by the hometown undertaker.

The transportation situation is different if a traditional burial or visitation before cremation is planned. It would be highly recommended, if not required in some situations, that the necessary preparation (embalming) be completed. For ground transportation the only added expense is typically mileage to and from. But if the body is to be transported by air, there are some additional and a bit more costly expenses involved. First is the airfare and the next is the acceptable vessel permitted by the FAA to fly the individual back home. These two expenses together typically exceed the \$1,000 range.

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With airfares being all over the place today, and the varying expense of the FAA-permitted vessels used, modern day funeral firms are offering a program called MASA. This is a transportation insurance program

offered through progressive funeral homes that provide a cost savings when the situation of death away from home might arise. This program is a one-time \$425 flat rate fee paid in advance that provides the coverage to the individual for paying all, yes *all*, expenses associated with bringing that person home. This newly offered program provides exceptional coverage and can save on a tremendous expense, allowing a family to focus on the situation.

Family reunions, vacation weekends or simply a road trip away from home, no matter what it may be in our future, it helps to understand what must be done if something ever happens while traveling out of town. Simply pick up that phone and call your hometown undertaker.

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