Death Positive Movement Informs the Future of the Funeral Industry

Phaneuf Funeral Homes & Crematorium
Honoring Loss  Celebrating Life
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Introduction
What is the Death Positive Movement?

The Death Positive Movement encourages people to discuss and express their feelings and intentions about death and dying. More and more, people are doing this in casual settings including Death Cafés and Dinners with Death, which you’ll read more about in a later chapter.

The days of discussing death in hushed tones are coming to an end as more people share their wishes and plans with loved ones before a serious illness or crisis arises. As more people open up about their end-of-life wishes, we also see people exploring alternative ways to depart this world, ranging from green burials and celebrations of life to turning cremated remains into jewelry or ink for tattoos.

Phaneuf Funeral Homes and Crematorium in New England is a fourth-generation traditional funeral home that works with individuals and families to find the way they would like themselves or their loved ones to depart this world. This includes traditional options like burial and cremation along with more progressive options like green burials, home funerals and turning ashes into artwork. Talking about death and end-of-life is encouraged by the entire team at Phaneuf.

“In end-of-life work, our whole purpose is to bring light to the topic so people can explore it on their own terms and that includes inside the funeral industry,” said Lee Webster, president of the Green Burial Council. “There’s a new wave of funeral directors and Buddy Phaneuf is at the cutting edge. We’re in a more enlightened age.”
Chapter 1: 
The Cultural Shift from Burial to Cremation

A quarter century ago, burials accounted for 85% of industry business. As we arrive in a new
decade, nearly 80% of New Hampshire families and 70% percent of Vermont residents choose
a cremation option. Nationally, more than 50% of Americans now choose cremation over
burial, according to the National Funeral Directors Association. Phaneuf had the foresight to
grow that side of business in the 1990s, and now operates four crematoriums in New England.

The cultural shift from burial to cremation has negatively affected many in the funeral
industry – especially those who did not plan for this change and continue to offer only
traditional cemetery burials. To sustain business in the funeral industry, or any other, you
must provide the services your clients want. Even the best customer service doesn’t help
if you don’t offer the options clients are seeking. The increased interest in cremation has
opened many new avenues to honor and remember family members who have passed and
that trend has guided Phaneuf’s shift to more cremation offerings.

A sustainable business model
Phaneuf integrates best practices from within and outside the funeral industry, and has
always been open to change. For example, some people who choose burial instead of
cremation now look for “green burial” options. Some people prefer it for its environmental
benefits, and it can also be less expensive than traditional funerals. Phaneuf has been a proponent of the green funeral movement since its beginning.

Phaneuf also recognizes that cremation has a large carbon footprint, releasing a lot of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. Phaneuf counters this release by purchasing carbon offsets from NativeEnergy. We’re proud to operate a carbon-neutral facility.

Why cremation is the future
The cremation option has grown across the country and New England for a variety of reasons. Cost is a major factor. Nursing homes and other health services for the elderly are increasingly expensive. Money that would formerly be used for a traditional funeral and burial might already be spent, as even life insurance policies are sometimes sold to pay for senior housing and health care. Second, there is the comparative cost of cremation over a full funeral service and burial. In some cases, a casket alone can cost more than an entire cremation package. Families looking to honor their loved one’s last wishes by scattering ashes somewhere far away can use the savings from the lower-cost service to make that pilgrimage.

There are brokers online that claim: “We can get you a cremation for $300. We can get you a free cremation with a medical body donation company.” Cremation is cheaper than a burial and full funeral service, but not that cheap. A basic cremation package, without an urn, is about $2,500. Make sure to do your research so you know the remains you receive are truly those of your loved one and in the case of a medical body donation, you understand how the body will be used and are comfortable with it.

Because some people don’t like talking about the end-of-life process, there’s an existing lack of pre planning. This means that when a family member dies, there are not always resources available to cover funeral costs. This lack of planning, combined with an increase in opioid and other substance-related deaths, leads many families to rely on social services for funeral costs. Because cremations are less expensive, they are a good choice in those situations.

The funeral industry, like all industries, is also becoming more automated. This includes cremation, where machines can assist in the transportation of bodies. Phaneuf already utilizes a 10-step identification, control and security plan to ensure the cremation process runs smoothly and the remains you get are 100% those of your loved one.
Chapter 2: Planning is Evolving

How old are you today? 20s, 30s, 40s. Great! That is precisely the age you should begin end-of-life planning. “But I’m 42 and healthy as a horse!” people say. Wonderful! What if a piano falls on your head tomorrow? Healthy or not, it will kill you. If your family knows your end-of-life wishes today, you’ll save them a lot of stress and worry.

It may seem uncomfortable to talk about your end-of-life wishes, but imagine how distressing it will be for family members to guess at them while also mourning your loss. We’re in a new age of death positivity that grows daily. That means accepting death, talking about it and looking ahead (not forward) to it. Funeral pre-planning does not have to be sad or morbid. You tell people how you want to celebrate your birthday; why not tell them how you wish they bid you farewell.

Honestly, planning for a funeral (yours or a family member’s) is one of the most gracious gifts you can give your loved ones. Having a plan for the inevitable helps ease the burden your family will feel once you are gone. The decisions will be made, and perhaps the payment plan is already in motion. Folks of all ages begin to ponder planning, and often these plans account for death, just not funeral pre-planning:
• In your 20s and 30s, you might be newlyweds or have young kids. You are planning for the future of your family including savings for emergencies, medical power of attorney, custody for your children if both parents die in a freak car accident, and life insurance. Making some preliminary end-of-life plans also makes sense.

• In your 40s and 50s, your parents begin to show signs of aging and slow a little. Maybe someone you know develops an unexpected, yet serious illness. Or perhaps there’s a death of someone close to you. Death or dying is on your mind, and that of your parents. They may show you their list of most valuable possessions, or add you to their bank accounts in case something happens to them. These plans make them feel better. Think about how making sure your funeral or memorial is exactly how you want it would make others feel better.

• In your 60s, you may be meeting with a financial planner or making life insurance arrangements as part of retirement planning. You might also be designating charities as part of your estate plan. (Some folks may not think far ahead before they get close to retirement age, and others who are ahead of the game may make updates or refinements to existing life insurance plans.) Moving from retirement planning to retirement itself is another time when end-of-life planning makes sense.

A Financial Benefit to Planning
Planning for a funeral can eliminate the burden that funeral costs might pose on your family. Once your arrangements have been made and paid for, that price is locked in and does not change, even if you thrive for several more decades. You won’t—and your family won’t—owe any more money. (Your estate may be responsible for some third-party costs, such as cemetery fees or obituary placement.)
The services you arranged and paid for will be provided (or as comparable a service as exists at that time). At the time of your passing, neither your estate nor your family members will need to come up with the cost of a traditional funeral, cremation or burial ceremony.

Because your arrangements have been taken care of and the cost will not increase, this presents an opportunity to leave more assets to your family after you have passed or make donations to a favorite charity as part of your estate plan.

Any funds paid toward a funeral service are placed into an Irrevocable Mortuary Trust account, in accordance with state law. The Trust is insured and the funds gain interest, which is maintained in the account to offset future price increases. All taxes and administrative fees are paid each year for you. No one can access these funds or cancel the Trust. By law, the funds can only be used to perform the service you selected and withdrawn only at the time of death.

**Peace of Mind with Planning**

Once someone passes, there are only a few days to make final decisions. These are challenging times for those who have just lost a loved one. Making tough financial decisions while not knowing your exact wishes adds a lot of stress to an already-stressful time.

Many people consider pre-planning the final, gracious gift you can offer your family members. You are granting them time and headspace to focus on their grief and to celebrate your life. They are not left wondering—or arguing—about what each of them thinks you would have wanted.

Much can be said for knowing that everything has been taken care of to allow family members the time to grieve and comfort one another.

**Where to Begin? Cleaning?**

Having a conversation with those you love and trust the most is a great way to begin the planning process. If you want a baby step before talking about it, consider the Swedish practice of “dostadning”, or death cleaning, which is growing in popularity.

When someone dies, it generally falls to family members or close friends to go through their belongings. Some people leave a house full of belongings that must be sorted by what to donate, what to sell and what to give to whom. It is often a huge undertaking.

Alternatively, death cleaning, or decluttering your home before you die, could be viewed as a gift to your loved ones. Death cleaning could be a way to begin a death-positive mindset. It could also be the first step toward your own end-of-life planning.

Retirement age is as good a time as any to start dostadning. It could take a long time—years, even—to complete the decluttering process. If you aren’t ready to retire but are downsizing or looking to minimize, this practice fits right in. There are local organizations that would gladly take items your loved ones don’t want that are useful.
It’s important to take notes and write down which items you want left to specific people, which items are valuable (and why), and what may be in a home safe or bank vault. This will avoid any in-fighting over the beloved china or everyone’s favorite lamp. But why wait till death? If there are special items that would bring more happiness to loved ones today, why not pass them on now? For example, if you loved to crochet but your hands don’t cooperate like they used to, consider sharing your handiwork and supplies with a young grandchild who might take up the hobby.

People own a lot of things these days. But many of them are just that to the untrained eye, things. Going through mementos and photos takes time and thought, but your family will appreciate that you have already designated those precious items prior to your passing. Your loved ones will likely have a lengthy checklist to follow once you pass; performing a death cleaning eases some of that burden.
Chapter 3: Nontraditional Funerals

As the Death Positive conversation gets louder, people share opinions beyond a traditional funeral home visitation, service and cemetery burial. Phaneuf has always embraced and encouraged the wishes of our customers, which is why we educate families and offer services around some nontraditional options. Here are highlights on some of the growing nontraditional funeral options:

**Home Funerals**

People increasingly choose home funerals as they begin to embrace death as a natural element of life, and not something to fear or avoid discussing.

“These services involve expanded family participation, which usually includes a home vigil, where the family will bring or keep the body at home for a period of time,” said Lee Webster, who is also an author and president emeritus of National Home Funeral Alliance.

Blended funerals, where a funeral service or vigil happens in a family home with guidance and assistance from a funeral director, are also growing in popularity. Buddy Phaneuf and Phaneuf’s funeral directors offer guidance on the steps to take when considering a home funeral and how a funeral director can help with logistics, concerns and legal requirements.
Laws around transporting a body vary from state to state, and Phaneuf’s team helps families needing to have their loved one moved from a hospital, hospice or other location to the home.

“There are some aspects of planning that are easy to do yourself, but families might need help with filing paperwork and making burial arrangements,” Phaneuf said.

Prior to the Civil War, home funerals were commonplace. A much higher death count from those killed in battle prompted the need for outsourcing funeral services, which also led to the growth of embalming the body. Embalming is not required by law in many states, including New Hampshire and Vermont.

Home funerals can provide a feeling of safety and comfort for loved ones, and can add a positive and meaningful experience for attendees. Having a celebration of your life in a location where your friends and loved ones already feel comfortable could make the process of saying goodbye easier.

**Green Burial, Funeral and Cremation**

More Americans seek green funerals and green burial options. These more-natural end-of-life options typically involve the body placed in an eco-friendly container and there is no embalming. Instead, it gets wrapped in a biodegradable shroud and is placed in a shallow grave so the body can decompose naturally. The trend toward green funerals and green burials is growing for a couple of reasons: they are better for the environment and they can be less expensive than traditional funerals.

Phaneuf was the first funeral home in New Hampshire approved by the Green Burial Council (GBC) to offer a green burial package. It remains the only one. Green burials can occur in a green cemetery, conventional cemetery or on private property.

There are more than 22,000 traditional cemeteries scattered across the United States, but the GBC recognizes only 72 green cemeteries. This can pose a challenge for the green funeral movement as some state and local governments make green burials harder.

“What is important to people around burial is having a sense of place, right? We’re trying to encourage as many green spaces as we can around the country in order for people to have that, something close enough to them,” said Webster, president of the GBC.

The organization designates three types of grounds where green burials take place:

Certified Hybrid Cemeteries: This is a conventional cemetery that offers the essential aspects of natural burial, either throughout the cemetery or in a designated section. GBC-certified hybrid cemeteries don’t require vaults and must allow for any kind of eco-friendly biodegradable burial containers, such as shrouds and soft wood caskets. There are more than 42 certified hybrid locations in the U.S., including Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge, Mass.
Certified Natural Burial Grounds: These cemeteries are exclusively for sustainable practices/protocols that conserve energy and minimize waste. They do not allow the use of toxic chemicals, any part of a vault (lid, slab or partitioned liner), markers made of non-native stone, and burial containers not made from natural/plant derived materials. There are 23 in the United States, with six locations in New York.

Conservation Burial Grounds: Conservation burial goes a step further to commit burial fees to pay for land acquisition, protection, restoration and management. This is a type of natural cemetery that is established in partnership with a conservation organization. It includes a conservation management plan that upholds best practices and provides perpetual protection of the land according to a conservation easement or deed restriction. The GBC recognizes seven locations, none of them in New England.

Green burial proponents aim to lower the environmental impact of traditional funeral practices each year. These annual impacts include:

- Caskets: Made of over 30 million feet of hardwood, 90,272 tons of steel and 2,700 tons of copper/bronze.
- Vaults: Made of over 14,000 tons of steel and 1,636,000 tons of reinforced concrete.
- Embalming: Preparing the body for burial uses over 827,000 gallons of embalming fluid.

While getting buried in a GBC-certified cemetery can cost more than a traditional cemetery, there are also cost savings with green burials and green funerals, as you aren’t paying to be embalmed or buried in a traditional casket.
Body Donation Versus Organ Donation

Some people choose body donation as there are organizations that will provide a “free” cremation once the donated body is no longer of use. About 2% of Americans choose body donation as an end-of-life option. This is not the same as organ donation, where people state on their driver’s license that their organs will be donated to save other people’s lives. With organ donation, their body still goes to their family.

With body donation, you can still be cremated, still have a traditional funeral and still do all the things that you want to do. Body donation is donating your entire body to science. There are three types of organizations that will accept bodies for donation:

- Medical schools
- Medical research firms
- For-profit companies that resell your body to different organizations

It’s important to note that your body may not be accepted for donation, so having a backup plan is wise. No one wants to die in a tragic accident, but it happens. Medical schools aren’t always able to accept bodies that carry certain diseases.

The decision to donate your body to science can only be made by you in advance when you are of sound mind. Families cannot donate a loved one’s body to a medical school. In New Hampshire, about 70% of people that sign up to be a body donor get accepted. The primary reason for rejection is that the medical school doesn’t need any more bodies at that time.

After medical students are done with the examination of a body, which can take up to two years, the medical school will cremate the body and return the cremated remains to the family.

Another misnomer is that people think they’re going to get paid for the donation. This is not true. But medical schools will typically assist with some or all of the transportation costs to the medical school. What they don’t pay for is obituaries, death certificates, memorial services, and other aspects of funeral planning. That’s the responsibility of the family.

And yes, believe it or not, there are actually for-profit companies that accept body donations to dissect a body and send parts all over the world. For example, here are companies that use the deceased as crash test dummies for ballistic tests.

If you are considering this option for any reason, read the disclosures carefully as far as what companies are allowed to do with your body.
Chapter 4:
Out with the Urn, In with New Memorial Choices

Record Setting
Some people will think it’s fantastic. Others will find it freaky. Either way, placing cremated remains into a playable vinyl record is one of the most-unique ways to go out with the music playing. Jason Leach created the concept and founded Andvinyly, which produces records featuring a guest spot by a very special guest—think of it as the closest thing to time travel.

“I would love to have my great-great-great grandchildren experience me moving the air in the room,” Leach said.

Andvinyly covers all of the production elements associated with producing an album from cover and label artwork to pressing the vinyl. The one difference is the final step of sprinkling cremated remains on the vinyl and then pressing them in. By choosing clear vinyl or see-through colored vinyl, the remains are visible, and, most importantly, audible.

Anyone who has placed an old record onto a turntable has heard the pops and cracks that come with age. The pops and cracks heard on Andvinyly’s records are literally the turntable’s needle passing over the remains, causing audible sounds. It is literally hearing your departed loved one through the speakers.
Leach has decades of experience producing vinyl releases for himself and musical acts, and he stumbled upon this concept when thinking about what he would like of himself to remain after he dies. (This was after the frustration of experiencing more than one occasion of cremated remains blowing in the wrong direction during a ceremony.)

“The fact that I will die one day got me thinking and talking to people about dying. People tend to not talk about it. It’s very much a closed-off subject for a lot of people. That got me thinking, what do I want to leave?” Leach said.

**What will the Album Contain?**

Leach can produce a 7-inch album (generally used by record companies for two-sided single tracks) or a 12-inch (that can hold many different tracks). These can be one- or two-sided. You can provide audio recordings of yourself from a variety of sources. If you are making a record for a loved one who has already passed, you may be able to pull audio from a video, voicemail, an old VHS cassette tape or other device. These can be messages recorded specifically for the album or just vocal snippets, depending on what is available. You can include favorite songs, sounds, or even silence. “Silent tracks are very popular, because then all you are hearing are the pops and crackles of the remains,” Leach said.

**What are the Artwork Options?**

Just as there are basic releases in the world of music vinyl, there are deluxe options, too. As mentioned, color is one option. There is also artwork for the labels placed on the record. This can be track lists, drawings, photos or special messages. The record sleeve can also contain any imagery you would like. Then, there’s the cover. You can go with a front and back or go crazy with a gatefold cover, which opens and offers more opportunity for personalization. You can even have a folded poster printed and placed inside the sleeve.

Keep in mind, all this personalization can take time. Leach said the process takes several weeks even with all the various artwork and sound decisions finalized. Producing vinyl is not an inexpensive endeavor, even for established record labels. Leach said the cost of producing one of these records is about $2,600. You can have up to 30 copies produced for distribution to loved ones and friends, as Leach said the cost difference between making one to 30 is negligible, as much of the cost is pre-production.

Many of the records he produces are for people in the United States, and while this concept has been growing for those planning their own records, the majority produced thus far have been records for people who already died. “Some of these people have had the remains for a number of years,” Leach said. “People who have grasped this concept absolutely love it.”

**Cremation Jewelry**

The growth of cremation comes with a variety of options for cremated remains, the granular particles left after the cremation process. Is cremation jewelry creepy? Creepy is a personal feeling. Maybe you find it comforting to wear a tiny piece of your loved one to keep them close.
The concept of cremation jewelry is not new. Beginning in the 14th century and up to the early 1900s, mourning rings were very popular. The rings did not contain cremated remains, but in some cases strands of hair from the deceased person would be incorporated.

Nashua, New Hampshire artist Vangie Collins designs and creates one-of-a-kind glass beads that incorporate bits of cremated remains. Her customers choose the color, shape and special features of the beads, which are incorporated into rings, bracelets, or necklaces. More information is available via her website.

Memorial Art Therapy

One person who knows the ins and outs of “creepy” is actor and self-proclaimed “Scream Queen,” Dee Wallace, who starred in “E.T. The Extra Terrestrial”, “The Howling”, “Cujo” and many other horror flicks. Dee’s husband, actor Christopher Stone, passed in 1995, and until recently, his remains were stored in a closet in Dee’s home.

Artist Tay Ghazi incorporated some of Chris’ remains into two paintings, one for Dee and one for her daughter, Gabrielle. Tay calls these pieces Spirit Art.

“It’s hanging up and every day I look at it and say, ‘Hi, Chris.’ It’s a happier, lighter association for me, looking at a piece of art,” Dee said. “I love the idea of being able to carry a piece of someone with you or celebrate them.”

For Dee, artwork trumps a traditional cremation receptacle.
“The thought of me, who’s claustrophobic, living in a box the rest of my life—I can’t even go there! I’ve done too many horror films for that,” she said.

Diamonds
When DeBeers coined the phrase A Diamond is Forever, they were talking about love. Diamonds that include cremated remains give a physical space to that love. Scientists utilize the carbon taken from cremated remains to form an actual diamond that is available in a variety of sizes and colors. The larger the diamond, the higher the cost. Smaller diamonds run about $800. A rising trend is couples using cremated remains in engagement rings, and diamonds made from loved ones’ cremated remains as wedding rings.

Tattoos
Like diamonds, tattoos are forever. And yes, cremated remains can mix with ink used for skin tattooing. There is some online debate about the safety of this. Some say the high temperatures used to cremate a body destroys any bacteria or toxic particles from the remains. Others counter that. One company claims to solve the problem using “full-cycle sanitation” to create safe tattoo ink with your loved one’s cremated remains.

Engrave Ink’s website claims they use a filtering process to reduce the remains and superheat them in a medically sterile environment. “Mechanical agitation is then used to combine the extracted carbon pigment with our premium ink. The four-week process is given a unique number and tracked all the way through, each phase accompanied with thorough safety and control activities,” according to the website.

Memorial Reef
Some people want to be remembered forever by giving back. By becoming part of a coral reef in the ocean, people’s ashes become an active, producing part of the environment. Cremated remains are mixed with concrete and cemented inside a reef ball your family can drop into the ocean. The business providing the service claims the “reef” should last 500 years or more. You can even add a memorial plaque on the reef. Visit this link for more information.

Space Remains
Not everyone can go to space during their life, but it is an option at death. Once a body is cremated, the remains can be loaded onto a rocket and launched into space—sort of like hitching a ride to outer space and staying forever. Celestis offers this service on a rocket that also carries a payload for NASA.
Chapter 5: Cremation-Adjacent Options

The HBO documentary, “Alternate Endings: Six New Ways to Die in America,” profiles very unconventional end-of-life choices, which could become the new normal in the coming years. With that in mind, here are a few cremation-adjacent end-of-life options that you may not yet know about—though two of them actually have a long history.

Human composting

Washington state made history in 2020 by making human composting legal. The procedure entails the deceased being placed into a receptacle that also includes organic materials, such as straw or alfalfa, to speed the transformation of human remains into soil. Microbe-heated air of up to 150-degrees decomposes a body fully in about a month.

For decades, farmers have relied on a similar process to compost livestock corpses into soil that is used for planting crops. A composted human body produces about one cubic yard of soil. Instead of spreading ashes, families can use the soil to plant a tree or add to a garden. Recompose, a Seattle company that plans to offer the service, charges about $5,500.
Resomation (a.k.a. Aquamation)

Resomation, or wet cremation, uses a water-based solution to speed up the natural decomposition process the body goes through at the end of life. In Latin, resoma means rebirth of the human body. The body is placed into a silk bag within a metal frame, then lowered into a resomation chamber. The chamber is filled with a 160-degree mixture of water and potassium hydroxide, which is pressurized to prevent boiling. The process takes approximately three hours. As far as the remains, the bone ash is generally processed in a cremulator and can be scattered just like cremated remains. The liquid produced can be recycled back into the ecosystem.

The process was briefly legal in New Hampshire while under study in 2009. The closest states where resomation is currently legal are Maine, Maryland, and Minnesota. The basic cost is about $2,400, which is more expensive than direct cremation. The creators of the process, Resomation Limited, claim it is more ecologically friendly than cremation, though it still requires energy to heat and pressurize the water in the resomation chamber.

Funeral Pyres

Darth Vader-style funerals made the news last year when Missouri almost legalized outdoor cremations. Public, outdoor funerals where a body is set aflame atop a pyre were commonplace in ancient Europe and are sometimes referred to as Viking funerals.

While the legislation quickly passed the Missouri Senate, Governor Mike Parson vetoed the bill, dubbed the “Jedi Disposal Act.”

“Without more thorough vetting to ensure that outdoor cremations can be conducted in a manner that fully disposes of the entire remains while also addressing the health and safety concerns of individuals who may be impacted nearby, I am not comfortable with allowing these types of ceremonies to be conducted in our state,” Parson wrote.

The measure’s sponsor, former Sen. Jason Holsman, claims the bill will return at a later date with some adjustments.

Crestone, Colorado is the only legal location for outdoor cremation in the United States. The Crestone End-of-Life Project ceremonies are conducted with the deceased wrapped in a linen shroud, placed on a cremation pyre, surrounded by juniper logs and set aflame.
Chapter 6:
Death Cafés and Coffin Clubs

Casual and convention-style events around the Death Positive Movement grow across the globe. These events bring people together to talk about death and dying in a casual setting. New England health organizations host regular events, such as the Dying to Talk Café from the Concord, NH, Visiting Nurses Association.

At Death Cafés, folks who generally don’t know one another get together to have tea, coffee or pastries and discuss all aspects of death. The primary goal of the gathering is “to increase awareness of death with a view to helping people make the most of their (finite) lives,” according to the Death Café site. It’s a discussion group, not a grief support or counseling session.

Hospice professionals lead these conversations. Find one near you at this link. Death Cafés and The Conversation Project encourage people of all ages to talk about their end-of-life wishes. They’ve been effective in encouraging people to talk about what they would like to happen before they get to crisis mode or no longer have the ability to share their preferences.

Coffin clubs started popping up in the United Kingdom and New Zealand in recent years, with small groups of people getting together to build their own caskets. The trend made its way stateside in 2019 at a green cemetery in Verona, PA that organized a casket building class. More are planned for 2020. Penn Forest Natural Burial Park is the only green cemetery
in Pennsylvania that is certified by the Green Burial Council as a natural burial ground, so it makes sense they would support the DIY casket trend. Traditional caskets cannot typically be buried in natural burial grounds, as they will not fully decompose.

The coffin building workshop had a limit of eight participants and a cost of $480. At the end of the workshop, participants with minimal woodworking skills would leave with their own finished, wooden casket. The idea is to use the coffin as artwork or furniture in your home until its primary function is required. Pennsylvania funeral homes are hosting the workshops.

There are also several books available on Amazon on the subject, with catchy titles like, “Build Your Own Coffin for Under Ten Bucks.” Is a casket building workshop something you would be interested in seeing Phaneuf host? If so, please send an email here.
Chapter 7:  
The Museum of Death

Warning: you may faint.

That sign is one of the first things you see at the Museum of Death, a morbid curiosity seeker's dream getaway that now has two locations. For some vacationers, these unusual roadside attractions and out-of-the-ordinary menageries might be intriguing.

The mysteries of death and the bizarre circumstances of some deaths are a focus of the two Museums of Death, located in New Orleans and Hollywood. The museum’s operators are clearly proud of the macabre atmosphere, which revels in the bizarre and extreme nature of the subject matter.

For example, the head of French serial murderer Henri Landru (1869-1922) is on display in the Hollywood museum. Landru faced execution by guillotine after being found guilty for killing 11 women.

Also part of the museum is a recreation of the Heaven's Gate cult death scene, with real artifacts from the location of the mass suicide in 1997 near San Diego, Calif. There, 39 members of the group perished, believing they would be leaving on an extraterrestrial spacecraft.
James Dean Healy and Cathee Shultz founded the Museum of Death in Los Angeles in 1995 after amassing a huge collection of materials on the subject of serial killers. The “Musee de Mort Orleans” followed in 2014 and has triple the space of the California location, at about 12,000 square feet.

The operators insist the museums are not strictly attractions for fans of horror and gore.

“We're not about horror; we're about death. If I wanted to scare people, believe me, I could, but that’s not our main goal. We’re holding a mirror up to society, and we want to educate people about death – for you to scare yourself,” Healy told LA Weekly.

While displays and exhibits alter, visitors can expect to see expositions including graphic photos of death scenes and accidents, infant coffins, antique tools used by morticians, body bags, and skulls along with serial killer artwork, letters and artifacts. Oh, and the taxidermied cat of musician Liberace, named Candy, is also on display.

The museums have thousands of visitors each year. This is not surprising considering that the fascination with all aspects of death is as old as humanity itself. The popularity of the museum in California caused it to be moved to a new larger location despite the original spot being the first mortuary in San Diego. Interestingly, that building was formerly owned by legendary lawman Wyatt Earp.

“People want to be close to the action but without being close enough to get hurt–it’s the same as looky-loos going past a car crash,” Healy told LA Weekly about the appeal of the museums. “Society hides so much from us, and while we want to see the crash, we also want to know what's under the sheet.”

Children are not allowed inside without a parent or guardian, and as mentioned earlier, the museum warns there have been “falling down ovations” from visitors who were shocked at what they witnessed inside.

Of course, there’s a gift shop.
Chapter 8: Living Funerals and Celebrations of Life

A living funeral or a living wake is where the “guest of honor” attends as an opportunity to say farewell and offer closure to family and friends. This concept is on display in sitcoms like “Grace and Frankie” and was even part of Sophia’s scheme on “The Golden Girls.” Rather than a memorial held post-funeral, it’s an opportunity to say goodbye to friends and family and enjoy one last, great party.

A Celebration of Life isn’t a new concept, but it continues to grow. Rather than a post-funeral memorial (which can be a somber affair), people choose instead to have a party in their honor after they die. The goal is often laughter and fun as opposed to tears and the ceremony is an opportunity to celebrate the unique attributes of the dearly departed.
Conclusion:

Even as this e-book is assembled, there are new opportunities emerging for those planning their end-of-life services. They may seem bizarre today, but might become commonplace tomorrow:

• How about drive-thru viewings with a casket set up like it’s in a bank window, and people drive by to pay respects?

• Or, the Eternal Time Keeper, a full digital footprint of the dead person, which includes the deceased’s entire social media life for viewing? That fight you recorded between you and another person? It’s on there.

• How about recording your “life legacy” as a hologram where you say what was important to you in your life, in your own words—to be available for your loved ones forever?

The key takeaway from this book is that instead of being morbid or creepy, talking about end-of-life plans can actually be a chance to connect with family friends and make your wishes known when you are still able.

These are new things being tested by those in the end-of-life industry right now, adding evidence that the way we think about or approach death is evolving. In fact, we’ll likely update this e-book as the Death Positive movement expands. Stay tuned.
If you’d like to take the next step in planning, one of our experienced funeral planners can meet you for a free, no obligation consultation at one of our facilities or your residence.

REQUEST CONSULTATION

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