

Extreme embalming

By Ryan Helfenbein

In 1989 many of us moviegoers were introduced to Bernie. The boss of an insurance corporation who would have been labeled as a lively host of two young employees for a weekend getaway. Unfortunately, Bernie was dead. “Weekend at Bernie’s” is one of those classic 80s movies that even today brings a laugh to many of us. The antics of the two friends positioning Bernie in unique situations so that all the partygoers could enjoy his company made the movie an instant classic. At the conclusion of that film many of us began to wonder, what if this wasn’t a movie? What if the concept of having one last ‘natural’ interaction with someone after their passing was in fact an available option? Fellow readers, hold on tight, because it is.

It was reported that Drew Barrymore said “Weekend at Bernie’s” was in fact based on her grandfather, John Barrymore. According to Ms. Barrymore, two of her grandfather’s friends removed his body from the morgue and propped it up at a poker table after his death in 1942. She went on to say how she, too, hopes that her friends do the same for her. Perhaps a bit too “out of the box” for most, yes, but it’s captured the imagination of some creative morticians. It is called Extreme Embalming and originated in Puerto Rico. Dad riding his motorcycle, a young man standing in a Green Lantern costume and even a famous boxer upright in the ring

for one last fight are only a few of the many Extreme Embalmings we have found coming out of Puerto Rico. This unique positioning is made possible with the use of special chemicals as well as the use of physical supports during the embalming process. Overall, it has been reported that the process takes four times longer than standard embalming and involves a variety of creative techniques that many funeral homes specializing in keep close to the vest. When this procedure was introduced, several Puerto Rican regulatory agencies debated the legality of this unique method of embalming. Furthermore, the Puerto Rican Funeral Home Association even was quoted as saying these wakes are “sacrilegious.” Yet fast forward to today and we find this “el muerto parao” (dead man standing) is not only more common in Puerto Rico than in years past but now a practice available in areas of the United States.

In 2012, a funeral home in Louisiana held the wake of famous New Orleans jazz musician, “Uncle” Batiste. He was positioned standing up against a faux streetlamp, dressed in his signature sunglasses, hat and tasseled loafers. During the same year, holding a glass of Busch beer in one hand and a cigarette in the other, Mrs. Easterling attended one last party. She sat at a table, showcasing her New Orleans Saints manicure, with the glitter of a disco ball sparkling above her. That funeral home even accommodated the wake of a New Orleans socialite, having her positioned on a park bench, holding a glass of Champagne and wearing her

signature feathered boa. Since then, the Bayou State has showcased exotic wakes such as decedents playing video games, seated at poker tables and behind the wheel of their favorite automobile.

To bring things a bit closer to home, earlier this year we witnessed Extreme Embalming right here in Maryland. A funeral home bordering Washington, D.C. held a final farewell for the 24-year-old Mr. Morrow at the Bliss Nightclub. Mr. Marrow was positioned on stage wearing his shades, designer clothes and a crown. Mourners arriving at the club paid the cover for the privilege of dancing alongside their friend and family member one last time.

Once used only to preserve the most revered, or reviled, among us, such as Abraham Lincoln and Vladimir Lenin, Extreme Embalming is now available to everyone. I’ve told my wife that when it’s my time I want to be in shorts and shirt, not this dark undertaker suit, cremated and ultimately scattered in my favorite fishing spots along the Atlantic. After learning about Extreme Embalming, perhaps my plans will need to change to being seated on the boat, in a fighting chair, positioned as if I’m reeling in a monster catch. Sorry, but even for this undertaker, it’s a bit too ‘extreme.’

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