

And All That Remains

By Ryan Helfenbein

How many times have you heard the saying, “Perception is reality?” It unfortunately holds true in many aspects of our lives. For example, if we see someone in a nice car we immediately believe they are wealthy and if the date on a gallon of milk is expired, it’s got to be sour. We are all guilty of creating our own perception from false illusions. This stands true, especially in the funeral industry when it comes to cremation.

Undertakers will admit that if they had a nickel for every time someone said, “I just want cremation,” they’d all be retired on a beach somewhere! Nonetheless, people repeatedly say that merely because one of their perceptions is that cremation is a single step. In reality, that statement is the same as saying, “I’d like fries with that” before even ordering a cheeseburger. When we state we want cremation we are simply providing the answer to one question: what to do with the body, and not what is to be done upon passing. We are forgetting about the steps necessary to get to that end point.

In order to analyze cremation, we need to divide things into four important questions: When to do cremation, how will life be honored, what will the cremated remains need to go into and where are the cremated remains to go. These four areas will provide any undertaker the clarity necessary to the statement, “I just want cremation.” Let’s explore each of them.

When to do cremation is something often not even considered. Upon the receipt of legal documentation from the doctor and state of Maryland, only then can an undertaker begin to schedule cremation. Unfortunately, not many funeral homes own a crematory, so scheduling this depends on when a crematory may be available. But for those who do own a crematory and oversee the entire cremation process, we can offer this process at any time the family chooses. We see this often when families

request holding a visitation for family and friends, much like a traditional funeral, and afterward, rather than going to a cemetery, the individual is cremated. Other delays could be caused by a family member wanting to see the individual one final time, religious customs or perhaps it is simply a personal request of a particular day that cremation should be carried out. Whatever the reason may be, when to do the cremation process is a major question that determines the final plan.

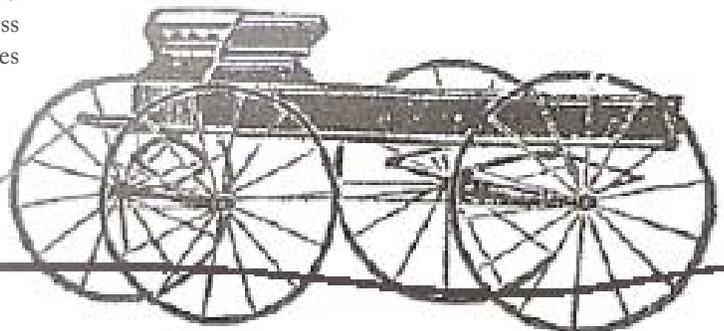
When cremation is selected, a wide variety of options for honoring the life of a loved one is something that is often explored. This life celebration could be held at the local pub, a backyard, event center and now, even at the good old-fashioned funeral home. Yes, modern day undertakers have transformed their offerings to include food, drinks, music, bands, custom tokens of remembrance and all the inner workings of a true celebration, much like that of a wedding reception, anniversary party or milestone birthday.

What to place the cremated remains into depends on where the final placement is to be – covering the last two considerations. If a family is thinking of scattering the ashes in water, the urn for the cremated remains should be biodegradable when placed in the water. There are urns meant specifically to be placed in a columbarium, to be buried in a cemetery or to be displayed in a family’s home. Or perhaps it is to grow back slowly in the form of a plant in your backyard. Yes, a tree urn is even available today!

The perception of almost anything can easily become reality for all of us. With this simple breakdown of options, we can all now see that there is a bit more to the idea of cremation. So, next time you have a nice car behind you, maybe spot them money for their toll, and the next time you’re at the drive-through, be sure to request the sandwich before stating fries are to go with it.

Ryan, who is owner, supervising mortician and preplanning counselor at Lasting Tributes on Bestgate Road in Annapolis, offers area residents solutions to high-cost funerals. He can be reached at 410.897.4852 or Ryan@LastingTributesFuneralCare.com

Modern day undertakers have transformed their offerings to now include food, drinks, music, bands and even custom tokens of remembrance.



For kids, fitting in is as simple as carrying the right lunchbox. What’s your secret way of fitting in?