

Harper's Ferry is in hill country and just about anywhere that you go you're going to be walking up hills and down. (It seemed to me that there were more ups than downs.) The Appalachian Trail also goes right through the town and it's well worth the short walk on this trail to get to Jefferson Rock. If you choose to hike up to this overlook and have a map you can then branch off the AT trail and descend to the Shenandoah for a quiet walk along the river's edge. This meandering but level trail weaves through what had once been a prosperous factory area, known as Virginus. The area was flooded repeatedly and now only foundations remain. If it's warm enough, there's the opportunity to wade in the river, although the park service frowns on it because the current can at times be very dangerous.

Other than the three spectacular hikes of varying lengths and elevations, there's also the Chesapeake & Ohio Trail that offers a level, hard-packed path that stretches for 184 miles. The trail winds along the Potomac and is ideal for either hiking or biking for whatever distance you choose. If you are heading north, it's a mere 15 miles to Antietam Battlefield, a carefully restored area that is more than worth the effort with a visitor center and extensive walking trails and historical stops throughout.

Harper's Ferry also has a national park with an easy three-mile hiking trail that describes different Civil War sites along the way that were significant. Mostly level, there are a couple of overlooks for photo ops.

This is an interesting and rustic area that has kept much of the charm intact of years gone by. It's worth the trip if for no more than a Sunday stroll along the river, but my choice has always been to spend at least two nights to be able to see and do it all. There couldn't be a better time than the fall for the spectacular display of the autumn colors.



Harper's Ferry Map  
[www.nps.gov/archive/hafe/maps/pdf/guide-ruins.pdf](http://www.nps.gov/archive/hafe/maps/pdf/guide-ruins.pdf)

Maryland Heights Trail  
[www.nps.gov/hafe/maps/maryland.htm](http://www.nps.gov/hafe/maps/maryland.htm)

Chesapeake and Ohio trail  
[www.nps.gov/choh](http://www.nps.gov/choh)

Virginus Island  
[www.nps.gov/archive/hafe/maps/virginus.htm](http://www.nps.gov/archive/hafe/maps/virginus.htm)

National Park Service Map  
[www.nps.gov/hafe](http://www.nps.gov/hafe)

# Ask the Undertaker

By Ryan Helfenbein



Several weeks ago while having dinner at my mother-in-law's, my wife and her mother began talking about the recent deaths of Farrah Fawcett and Ed McMahon. They were discussing how deaths always seem to happen in three's. As they were discussing this, we couldn't help but hear the television news broadcast that Michael Jackson had just died. What a coincidence! Over the next several days and weeks even more celebrity deaths occurred, Billy Mays, Steve McNair, Walter Cronkite and even "Gidget," the Taco Bell Chihuahua. Out of all the recent losses Hollywood experienced, the one that I feel we can learn the most from is that of Michael Jackson. From the loss of Michael Jackson a few areas became very apparent to me in the context of my business: they are the importance of planning ahead, the role of the funeral professionals and how to create a true "celebration of life."

During the days after Jackson's death, one couldn't help but notice how his family had to suffer from the lack of planning. As a matter of fact I am not even sure if they have agreed on a final place of rest to this day! His family seemed to be unsure as to who was to care for his remains, who would take charge of his arrangements and how services should be handled for his family and fans. This doesn't even begin to touch on the decisions that were necessary to pull off, what I would call one of the most remarkable celebrations of life services one could ever imagine. *Advance funeral planning*, offered by those in the funeral industry, provides the relief of knowing that all decisions are taken care of, services are in order to the greatest detail and the surviving relatives know exactly how everything is to be carried out well in advance. Not that it seems to be a problem with Jackson, but even the financial burden could have been completely eliminated in advance. I would imagine Mr. Jackson had the same feeling that many of us do: I need to make my funeral plans in advance, but I'll do it another day. Perhaps we should all take note of this experience and take care of our plans today.

On the positive side, the celebration of life that occurred for Michael Jackson was a perfect example of the importance of a funeral professional. Throughout history we

have seen many people in and out of the spotlight with some having very incredible end-of-life ceremonies -- kings and queens, Hollywood stars and even presidents. One of the most ostentatious funeral processions that our country has ever seen was that of President Abraham Lincoln. Each state that his procession went through had decorative hearses, amazing flower arrangements and uniformed staff from local funeral homes. Unlike the memorial tributes and capabilities available today, this was all that was obtainable by the industry at that time. My point is that Michael Jackson's ceremony could not have been done without the help of a licensed funeral professional. The funeral industry is there to help families heal. Providing a deceased family member the proper end-of-life ceremony is what the funeral industry should strive to offer all its families, and at the services for Michael Jackson, this was very apparent.

The last item that I feel we can all learn from is what a proper celebration of life should look like. Jackson had one of the most incredible celebrations of life ever held. With that being said, there is no reason that we cannot give our loved ones the same. OK, so maybe not at the Staples Center in Los Angeles or with songs sung by Jennifer Hudson among others. But the videos, a presentation of memorial photos, favorite songs playing and closest friends sharing memories about the deceased can be done for anyone today. We need to take the services that were done for Michael Jackson and make note that we can give our closest family members the same tribute that his family provided him. After all, millions of people across this planet took time to sit in front of their televisions to pay tribute to the man and the vast majority of them had never met him. Why wouldn't we give that same attention to the people who are closest to us and with whom we truly have a relationship?

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