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Tuesday, March 6, 2007

??!! Press Release of the Day

posted by [Brendan Kiley](#) on March 6 at 18:24 PM

Funerals go “Outside the Box”

Seattle — A growing number of families are thinking “Outside the Box” when it comes to funeral arrangements. Instead of sending the body of their loved one to a funeral home to be cared for by strangers and spending thousands of dollars on a casket, an increasing number of families are choosing keep the body at home—forgoing expensive funeral home merchandise and services.

The pun’s the thing, but if you’re curious about at-home funerals (Heloise says to use dry ice, not embalming fluid!), you can read the rest after the jump.

Seattle — A growing number of families are thinking “Outside the Box” when it comes to funeral arrangements. Instead of sending the body of their loved one to a funeral home to be cared for by strangers and spending thousands of dollars on a casket, an increasing number of families are choosing keep the body at home—forgoing expensive funeral home merchandise and services.

For most of human history, families and religious groups have cared for their own dead. It is a fairly recent development for families to contract with a third party to care for their deceased outside the home. A generation ago, the baby boomers brought back home births. Recent decades have seen a resurgence in families providing end-of-life care to other family members through home hospice. As a natural extension, more and more families are choosing to care for the body of their beloved in the home after death has occurred.

A typical home funeral involves keeping the body in the home for up to three days, using dry ice rather than embalming. While home funerals will likely never be the predominant choice, those families who decide to bathe and dress a loved one themselves and keep their body in the home, find that the process is invaluable to them in their grieving. Final disposition of the body may be by either cremation or burial.

To educate the public about this option, the PMA Education Fund is sponsoring a workshop entitled “Outside the Box” on home funerals on March 29th from 6:30 to 8:30 pm at the Shoreline Conference Center. Presenters will be Char Barrett, a licensed funeral director who specializes in home funerals; De Ann Elliott a hospice nurse who is trained in home funerals and John Eric Rolfstad, a hospice social worker and Executive Director at People’s Memorial Association. The PMA Education Fund is a 501(c)(3) Educational Foundation affiliated with People’s Memorial Association, the nation’s oldest and largest non-profit funeral consumer organization, located in Seattle.

Char Barrett is one of only two licensed funeral directors on the West Coast to specialize in home funerals. She recently opened a home funeral service in Seattle named, A Sacred Moment, to assist families in caring for their own dead.

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 **Comments**

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My 30-ish neighbor recently said she would like to have an at-home funeral.

My parents were from the depression era, and from a town that didn't have a "Catholic" mortuary until the 1940's. Because of the lack of money and facilities, bodies were routinely laid out at home. Their recollections of that practice do not look kindly upon the it, and have certainly dissuaded me from considering it. Dealing with death is bad enough when it's done at a mortuary - who wants to host it in their home?

But to each his own, as Mrs. Murphy said as she kissed the cow.

Posted by **catalina vel-duray** | March 6, 2007 6:58 PM

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If you really want to be an iconoclast you must think "Outside the Bun."

Posted by **Paulus** | March 6, 2007 9:11 PM

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If period movies and books are any indication, this is just a resurgence of an old tradition. Wasn't the personality split in the *Three Faces of Eve* caused by an incident at an at-home funeral?

Posted by **keshmeshi** | March 7, 2007 12:14 AM

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I have mixed feelings.

In some ways we live lives insulated from the human experiences that have defined our race for centuries - what good is convenience, mechanics, and all the things American up scale culture pushes people to strive for if they are no longer part of basics? Such as death.

I was very close to my father, he died of cancer many years ago. Truth, having him at home a day or two would have allowed all his kids and wife to pour all that love/grief into something better than the classic canned funeral.

Mourning together, family, friends, and neighbors, with all the weeping and grief would have been a better ending to a fine man's life.

Also remember burial at sea. I like the thought of crabs and misters octopuses and assorted sharks getting a bite or two. Organic as well.

Posted by **erice** | March 7, 2007 2:10 AM

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Fun Trivia: Home viewings or watches of the body came to be called "wakes" because the family and friends wanted to make absolutely certain that the loved one was dead and would not wake up later after being accidentally buried alive.

Posted by **Creek** | March 7, 2007 4:37 AM

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The wakes were necessary back in the day, because there wasn't the monitoring equipment available now and some people who were in a coma would "wake" from being dead after a few days.

Posted by **more trivia** | March 7, 2007 5:00 AM

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@more trivia, it would suck if you "woke" from your coma a day too late....

Still, the last thing I would want hanging around the house is a "stiff" that does not pull their weight. You die, it is out the door with ya!!

Posted by **Andrew** | March 7, 2007 6:01 AM

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I just finished reading a book called *Grave Matters* about all the options open to people in the modern funeral industry (besides the traditional funeral-home funeral). After reading about the embalming process, I'd certainly rather have a home wake/funeral/whatever. I'd much rather people I love deal with me in the end than some random undertaker vacuum my insides out and replace them with chemicals which will eventually leech into the soil and possibly groundwater. Ick, scary.

Posted by **Jessica** | March 7, 2007 6:56 AM

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Oh, don't get me wrong - I am totally for the part about skipping the embalming. That's a stupid, wasteful practice, as is the concrete vault (although that may have something to do with soil stabilization), and the cemetery itself.

But the smell, and all the people coming round to pay respects, etc - That would get on my nerves.

When I go, I want to be laid out at the Bonney-Watson on Broadway, with an open casket, so my huge fan base can come see me. I imagine it will be something akin to Norman Maine's funeral in "A Star is Born" (The Judy Garland version, of course)

Or, just spritz me with some Lysol, buy me an "All Aboard America" pass and sneak me on an Amtrak train. They'll know what to do with me.

Posted by **catalina vel-duray** | March 7, 2007 7:31 AM

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Hunter S Thompson had the right idea. Shoot me out of a cannon.

Posted by **Colin** | March 7, 2007 8:28 AM

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I've been wanting to compile a collection of favorite photos and get them onto slides. And eventually put together a CD of songs. Then whenever I pass, my loved ones can watch the slide show and listen to the music I chose...all fun, not depressing and celebrate my life. I don't plan on being buried, I'll probably go with cremation. Although, this always seemed interesting to me: [LifeGem](#)

except it'd suck if whomever chose to keep my "gem" was robbed and had it taken. blech

Posted by **Faux Show** | March 7, 2007 9:47 AM

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