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JOURNAL OF FUNERAL SERVICE EDUCATION

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Remarks Delivered by
Daniel E. Buchanan, Chairman
American Board of Funeral Service Education

at the 93rd Annual Convention
of the
Conference of Funeral Service Examining Boards

Regal Cincinnati Hotel
Cincinnati, Ohio

It is my pleasure to bring greetings to this, the 93rd Annual Convention of the Conference of Funeral Service Examining Boards. In behalf of the forty two accredited colleges and programs of funeral service education, and six candidates for accreditation which comprise the American Board of Funeral Service Education, we bring you our highest hopes that this will be the best and most productive convention in the history of this organization. The Conference is an organization in whose success and in whose mission we all have common interest.

What an awesome and exciting time it is to be in a position of leadership in funeral service. As we face the dawn of a new century, there are many issues, challenges, and at the same time, opportunities which we face in our profession. We have seen more radical changes in the past fifteen years than our profession experienced in the fifty years prior to that. There is every indication that these changes are surely to continue into the Twenty-first Century. In our roles of leadership, as we stay on the cutting edge of change and adaptation, we must encourage all under our influence not to abandon the basics in funeral service which have made our profession great. Whether you find yourself here in this place on this occasion because of your role as a funeral service practitioner, as a funeral service regulator, or as a funeral service educator, we all have one common goal. That goal is to assure that funeral service consumers are well served and that they receive value beyond the money they spend on funeral service. To achieve this goal, the profession, through N.F.D.A. and the National Funeral Directors and Morticians Association, must do and practice and keep focused on the basics; funeral service educators must teach the basics; and state boards must enforce the basics as they pertain to quality embalming and funeral directing skills.

I am frequently asked about my view concerning the future of funeral service in these changing times. My response is really simple. "It is up to you and those of us in funeral service." What input to you as individuals have in shaping the future of funeral service? First, assume positions of leadership in funeral service--be an aggressive leader and shaper of change rather than a victim of it.

Second, In all that you do, demand excellence of yourself and expect no less from others under your influence in funeral service. There is no room--I repeat--no room for mediocrity in this great profession. Third, To be successful in funeral service today requires that we serve smarter, that we serve sharper than ever before in our history. If our profession fails, it will not be because of outside influences such as government regulations, media slurs attacking our profession like last years 20/20 program on ABC network. It will not fail because of the emergence of casket stores and memorial societies. We as funeral service professionals will not even fail because of the "Jessica Mitfords's" of this world. If we as a profession are to fail, it will be for the same reason the dinosaur ceased to exist. Our failure will be due to our own inability to adapt, to adjust, to grow and discover opportunity amidst the turbulence of change and transition.

What can the Conference, N.F.D.A. and the American Board do together. In addition to greeting you, I also challenge us all to support the process of enabling funeral service personnel to be the very best they can be; to give them the tools they need to adapt to an ever changing climate by promoting high educational standards and certainly continuing education for the licensed professional.

We can work together by working hard in support of license reciprocity. Folks, the Cold War is over. Many places in the world responded affirmatively to Ronald Regan's plea to tear down the walls of mortar and stone which restrict the freedom of people. I would say to those who do not have provisions for license reciprocity, tear those wall around your state down. They are not in the best interest of the consumer or the profession at large.

Ours is a profession of service. It is service which created us, and it is only service which shall sustain us. Ours is a profession of ministry to others. It is a calling which offers help and comfort at a most difficulty time to God's people. If we keep focused on that theme central to all of us, we cannot fail. We will not fail.

It has been a pleasure for me to share this time with you this afternoon. Let us commit to be examples to others in our profession as we lead, as we work smarter and sharper than ever before journeying together into the Twenty-first Century.

History of the ABFSE
For Presentation to CFSEB - October 1996
by Gordon Bigelow, Exec. Dir, ABFSE

The ABFSE serves as the accrediting agency for all of the campus based college and university academic programs in the United State which teach funeral service or mortuary science education. As the evaluator of quality, the ABFSE is recognized in this capacity by the US Department of Education and the Council on Recongnition of Postsecondary Accreditation.

The forerunner of the ABFSE as we know it today was known as the Joint Committee for Mortuary Education which was founded shortly after the second World War, in 1946. It was founded through joint resolutions from the NFDA and the CFSEB. The group was composed of 3 representatives from the then existing mortuary colleges, about a dozen in number at that time, and 3 each from the NFDA and CFSEB, and adminstratively housed within the Conference. It's purpose was to formulate and enforce standards for colleges teaching mortuary science. It gave to the Conference the power to actually do the accrediting of these colleges and set up, at the same time, an appellate procedure.

In 1959 the name of the Joint Committee was changed to the American Board of Funeral Service Education, still an entity within the Conference.

However, in 1962 authority for accreditation was transferred from the Conference to the ABFSE which continues today as the sole accrediting agency for funeral service education. This separation of accrediting from testing functions was mandated by the US Department of Education as a condition of recognition by the USDE of the ABFSE. By 1972, the ABFSE received such recognition and continues as the sole agency recognized in this capacity today.

The ABFSE was later accepted into the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation (1988) the major non-governmental agency in the United States.

In 1996, the ABFSE accredits 42 college and university based programs with 4 others in pre-accreditation status and and additional few in preparation to submit preaccreditation documentation. By 2000 there will be about 50 college and university programs in funeral service education accredited by the ABFSE. These programs serve an enrollment of about 3000 students nationally. Each year about 2200 students graduate from funeral service education programs and are eligible to take the National Board Examination as they move toward licensure.

The ABFSE has 5 major divisions in which it conducts its operations in addition to central office functions:

1. Scholarship: A national scholarship programs is available to both undergraduate students and to graduate faculty members. Each year about \$30,000 is distributed among about 150 applicants. Funds are donated to the program by many funeral service organizations, including NFDA, UMSEA, NACMS, Dodge, Pierce and Champion Chemical companies, Clark Grave Vault, The Loewen Group, The Hilgenfeld Foundation and the Richard Poindexter memorial fund. Awards are made by a scholarship committee composed of educators and representatives from CFSEB and NFDA, twice each year.
2. Curriculum: This committee of the ABFSE is responsible for insuring that the common curriculum taught in each of the accredited programs is current, relevant, and accurate. The committee maintains routine liaison with the CFSEB to make certain that areas included on the National Board Exam are included in the teaching curriculum. Courses are reviewed and updated at least every 5 years with help from a grant from the Hilgenfeld Foundation.
3. National Board Exam Liaison: This committee is composed of educators and CFSEB representatives and is responsible for communication between the ABFSE and the Conference Exam Committee. It discusses concerns registered by educators with the National Board Exam, relays information from the Conference about the exam to educators, and makes recommendations to the CFSEB in this regard.
4. Accreditation: This committee is responsible for accrediting all academic programs in funeral service. Each such program must undergo a comprehensive evaluation at least once each 7 years to ascertain its compliance with the 16 Standards of Accreditation of the ABFSE. Contrary to common perception, there is no ranking of programs. All are required to meet all standards and accreditation serves to assure the consumer that students will receive adequate, fair, and relevant insruction in their programs. Programs must be accredited in order for students to receive federal financial aid funds. All decisions of this committee are autonomous and it maintains its own budget and selects its own members, this according to federal requirements.

Beginning this fall, the ABFSE requires that programs have the Associate Degree or its credit hour equivalent to be accredited. Took 10 years to implement this level which had been discussed for 70 years.

5. College and University Council: This is the organization which encompasses all of the academic programs accredited by the ABFSE. This organization reviews recommended motions for new or altered policies and procedures and also serves as the only single, national, voice for funeral service educators in the United States.
6. The ABFSE office itself, in addition to facilitating the work of all ABFSE committees and planning all ABFSE meetings, serves as a national clearing house for a variety of inquiries about funeral service as a profession, responding to over 1000 letters and phone calls each year in this regard. Additionally, The office is the repository for annual statistics on funeral service education. Finally, it works directly with numerous print and video media personnel involved with articles on funeral service and funeral service education.

This is the ABFSE today. It was not always thus and to prepare these remarks I went back through archival records to identify some of the salient benchmarks in our development. Much of what I discovered came through the kindness of Meg Dunn, AAMI, who sent along old records last summer from her office to add to our archives, records which go back to the beginning of the evaluation of funeral service education in the 1920's.

I discovered several very interesting things in my search:

1. Our history has been pockmarked by periods of intents acrimony and discord. In fact, more of our past has been thus described than not. Educators joining this group in the past 10 years would have no idea of its past struggles.
2. There have been several recurring themes over the past 70 years of our development which continue today:
 - a. Academic requirements
 - b. Single versus dual licensing
 - c. National versus state board examinations
 - d. Things to be included in the curriculum
 - e. academic policies including admissions requirements.
 - f. Recognition from the federal government
 - g. Public versus private educational programs.

For the last few minutes of my time, let me take you back through the years for a look at where we came from, our heritage in funeral service.

1928: The CFSEB begins to accredit programs in funeral service. They called it "grading" and assigned grades of A,B, C to programs

"A" was granted to programs which required high school graduation and lasted 24 weeks at least.

"B" to programs which required 8th grade and lasted 24 weeks.

"C" to programs which required 8th grade and lasted 12 weeks

The curriculum consisted of Embalming, Anatomy, Microbiology, Pathology, Chemistry, Hygiene, RA, FS Law, Accounting, and Ethics.

A number of states resisted the length of the course, opting for no more than 6 weeks to train our folks.

15 schools were listed, including 7 which continue today: NEI, AAMI, Simmons, CCMS, JA Gupton, Worsham, U.Mn.

Big issues that year were:

1. Whether night school should be creditworthy
2. Whether raising academic requirements was only meant to keep people out of FS
3. Whether any public institution could effectively teach funeral service.

The Univ of Minnesota's continuing education division put in an embalming school at this time, causing great consternation among the private programs.

Fear of loss of market and fear of what this could mean if others followed suit.

Quote from 1928 meeting of educators:

"I do not believe we should issue accreditation to a university or college to teach embalming. They may be equipped to teach chemistry, hygiene and maybe anatomy, but there are some things they cannot teach.

"I don't believe a student could be a finished product when he graduates from a university and I believe we are lowering our profession every time we grant accreditation to a college or university embalming school."

Colleges were described as a "Menace"

Here were the seeds of the acrimony and distrust which would divide the private and public educators for many years. It started a theme which still exists today for some.

1935: Great discussion of the Conference's plan to adjust their scores to make sure that 30% do not pass the National exam. Also, source of questions for the exam was a major concern for educators and need for standard textbooks from which questions would be taken was debated long and hard.

A long letter on academic freedom from the Univ of MN in 1937 to the CFSEB was interesting. It charged that the emphasis on textbooks was linking the test to a book rather than to a subject. Again, here are seeds of the attitude which grew into a full blown belief that the public programs taughts subject while the privates taught only enough to pass the exam.

1938: Univ of MN refuses to charges students \$15 each to be paid to the CFSEB to fund accreditation activities. As a result they are given a grade of "AA" by CFSEB which stimulates a threatened lawsuit challenging CFSEB's right to give them a second-rate academic rating over a financial fee which has nothing to do with quality of education.

Again, more ammunity for the later acrimony.

1944: Wayne State Univ now has applied for accreditation, having taken over the former Michigan Sch of Embalming. A lawsuit was filed to prevent this from happening. Lawsuit failed to prevent Wayne States' program.

1946: Joint Committee on Mortuary Education founded with reps from NFDA, CFSEB, and colleges (3 each). They established the accreditation policies but actual accreditation done by Conference.
(1) accreditation every three years (2) programs must be either 9 or 12 months in clock hours (3) standards of accreditation were written, many portions of which exist today.

1950: NACMS sets a goal of bachelor's degree.
Joint Committee recommends 2 years of education be required.

1954: Joint Committee seeks to have CFSEB do an item analysis on exam questions.
Establishes no more than one entrance date per year for colleges (between Sept and Oct)

1958: The CFSEB position statement referred to earlier was published.
(1) Standard license (2) 3 leading to 4 years of education
(3) urge sch associations to merge into one entity to offer national leadership (4) standard national Exam

1958: Joint Committee name changed to ABFSE. Accreditation still by CFSEB

1958-1962: turned down by both USDE and Nat'l Council on Accred. for recognition due to organization with accrediting and testing under same roof.

1962: ABFSE made autonomous organization and process for USDE recognition began which finally was successful in 1972. Other problems delayed its approval:

1962-1970: The ABFSE put in a new admissions requirement of 30 hours of liberal arts prior to admission to mortuary college.
NACMS withdrew from ABFSE and set itself up as separate accreditation agency for its colleges. Applied to USDE for recognition.

ABFSE and NACMS both denied. Only one agency can be recognized in a profession.

1965: There were 21 programs accredited by ABFSE:

7 public and 14 private.

Still in existence:

5 public (Wayne, U.MN, SIU, San Ant, Cen OK)

9 private (Simmons, Dallas, Gupton, NEI, Worsham
AAMI, CCMS, PIMS, Common)

1970: NACMS withdrew its application to USDE and ABFSE became sole accrediting agency once more. Recognized in 1972.

1971: 21 accredited programs (13 private and 7 public)

1972-1980: 19 new programs accredited. ABFSE creates committee to investigate proliferation of schools with concern for enrollments.

1980: 40 programs now accredited: 13 private and 27 public.

1980-1995: 1 program dropped (McNeese St Univ) and 3 added
total 42 programs

1995-1996: 4 new programs apply for Candidacy with at least 4 others in process. Could bring total to 50 if all are successful. Another burst in growth.

Now have 11 private, single purpose, with potential for 39 public. 2 privates have merged into public programs (NEI into Mt Ida College, and California into Cypress)

1985-1996: Decade marked by relative harmony in which tremendous progress has been made on:

1. Improved relationship with CFSEB and exam
2. Improved accreditation standards and policies
3. Improved curriculum review process
4. Improved academic standards
5. Improved scholarship process

We still see some vestiges of the old days, however:

1. We still have two separate educational organizations NACMS and UMSEA and the old attitudes still are passed down to new members (NACMS schools are charged with lower academic stature and teaching to the test by UMSEA even though the evidence is complete that this is patently wrong.)

NACMS has offered to cease to exist if UMSEA will merge with it into a new entity

NACMS has 12 members and UMSEA has 18. There are 12 programs not members of either.

ABFSE has created the College and University Council to cover all programs for one national voice.

2. We still find folks quick to criticize CFSEB on its exam policies. This is rapidly disappearing, however, and especially in last year in which CFSEB has shown itself willing to listen and to consider concerns of educators in delaying the new exam. Relationships here are best ever.
3. And the issues which have plagued the educators and examiners for the past 70 years continue:
 1. Standard licensure and reciprocity
 2. Single versus dual license
 3. Length of academic program
 4. Content of National Exam
 5. Liaison between curriculum and exam

THE DE-RITUALIZATION OF CONTEMPORARY FUNERAL
PRACTICES IN AMERICAN SOCIETY

James M. Dorn

The Cincinnati College of Mortuary Science

A Paper presented to the Journal of Funeral Service Education

November, 1996

THE DE-RITUALIZATION OF CONTEMPORARY FUNERAL PRACTICES
IN AMERICAN SOCIETY

INTRODUCTION

One of the most significant changes in twentieth century American society has been a shift from an agricultural through an industrial, to a service economy. (Toffler, p. 14-15). This has resulted in a change from the extended family, first to the nuclear family, and more recently to the non-nuclear family. (Kanter, p. 1). The increasing mobility of American society coupled with a significant increase in the number of institutional deaths over the last century has resulted in a gradual abandonment of the funeral ritual. (Rando, p.176) Traditional funerary rituals have been severely criticized by some people in recent years. (Rando, p.175). Cremations and other methods of "direct disposal" are increasing on an annual basis. (Marks and Calder, p.145). "The last major change influencing contemporary funeral practices is the deritualization of American society." (Rando, p.176).

Irion (p.161) has an interesting explanation for this deritualization.

In our culture consideration of the importance of ritual has had to contend with two inhibiting factors. First there is the American ambivalence toward ritual. Ritual, in the sense of ceremonial formality, has often been associated with a class structure against which American egalitarianism was set. The puritanical and frontier desire for plainness and simplicity has produced a negative response to ritual, which is seen as empty pretension, yet

we raptly watch royal weddings and funerals and openings of parliament on television. At the same time we must recognize that there is a great deal of unrecognized ritual behavior in our life style. Sporting events are highly ritualized, graduations are ceremonial, even the pre-take-off activity on an airplane is a ritual.

A second feature that inhibits our appreciation of ritual is the bad reputation ritual has received in psychiatry, where ritual is often seen as pathological. It is the hallmark of obsessive-compulsive behavior at worst and is the pattern of outdated responses resulting from repetition-compulsion at best. These factors have not prevented a renewed appreciation for ritual in recent decades, but they have complicated that appreciation.

Funeral service is faced with the decision of either acceding to the current trend or attempting to reverse the trend by educating its clientele to the value of the funeral (Pine & Fulton, 1976). This education must begin while the potential practitioner is still in mortuary college, because if funeral directors do not believe in the value of the funeral, they will be unable to convey this value to the people that they serve (Margolis et al., 1975).

THE ANATOMY OF THE TRADITIONAL AMERICAN FUNERAL

In order to better understand deritualization, the ritual itself must first be examined. Rando (1984) states: "The funeral consists of five parts, as outlined by Raether and Slater (1977):"

- * The removal of the body. This symbolizes the separation of the dead from the living. It was a more integral part of the funeral process in the past, when the body was removed directly from the family home. Currently most deaths occur in institutions, and this action is not usually witnessed by the family.
- * The visitation period. This is when the community comes to the mourners and expresses its empathy, sympathy, and support for them.

- * The funeral rite. During this time a ritual is invoked to meet the needs of the mourners. For 75% of the people this will have a religious orientation. Others will have an alternate form of humanist or secular funeral service. A third form is available, the memorial service, which is a funeral without the body present.
- * The procession. This conveys a symbolic message about both the deceased and the mourners. In terms of the deceased, it acknowledges the finality of what has occurred through the movement of the deceased from the place of death and/or the final service to the place of final disposition. In terms of the mourners, the procession away from the place of final disposition without the deceased illustrates the movement back into the mainstream of society. "Psychologically, the procession adds to the impact of the movement which occurs as the person moves from the place of death to taking those firm steps of resolution and living a life without the presence of the deceased" (p. 241).
- * The committal. This is the conclusive phase of the process and it entails the act of committing the body to its place of final disposition. It may be an interment, in which the body is buried in the dedicated ground of a cemetery or memorial park; entombment, in which the body is entombed in an above-ground mausoleum; or cremation.

BENEFITS OF THE FUNERAL

In a synthesis of the analyses of Cassem, 1976; Fulton, 1976a; Irion, 1966, 1976; and Pine, 1976 a, 1976 b, Rando (1984) extensively discusses the psychological, spiritual, and social benefits of the funeral, first to the mourner, and then to the social group. The following is a list of Rando's main topics:

How Funerals benefit the Mourner.

Psychological Benefits

Funerals confirm and reinforce the reality of the death.

Funerals assist in the acknowledgement and expression of feelings of loss.

Funerals offer the survivors a vehicle for expressing their feelings.

Funerals stimulate the recollection of the deceased, a necessary aspect of decathexis. Funerals assist mourners in beginning to accommodate to the changed relationship between themselves and the deceased loved one. Funerals allow for input from the community that serves as a living memorial to the deceased and helps mourners form an integrated image of the deceased. Funerals in and of themselves contain the specific properties of rituals employed in therapy.

Social Benefits

Funerals allow the community to provide social support to the mourners. Funerals provide meaningful, structured activities to counter the loss of predictability and order frequently accompanying the death of a loved one. Funerals begin the process of reintegrating the bereaved back into the community.

Spiritual Benefits

Funerals with a religious orientation give mourners a context of meaning as they attempt to fit the death of their loved one, and ultimately of themselves, into their religious/philosophical framework.

How Funerals Benefit the Social Group

Funerals help the group adjust to the loss of one of its members. Funerals affirm the social order by offering testimony that despite the death that has occurred, the community lives on. Funerals bind the social group together through present experience and collective memory. Funerals demonstrate to members of society that they themselves will someday die, and serve as vehicles of anticipatory grief promoted by the rehearsal of their own mortality. Funerals are a way in which the community conveys its values and beliefs regarding the meaning of life and death. Funerals are means by which the community may maintain symbolic connection with the dead and reap therapeutic opportunities to complete unfinished mourning. Funerals provide for the final disposition of the body or the remains of the deceased.

ALTERNATIVES TO TRADITIONAL FUNERALS

Deritualization has generated a number of alternatives to the traditional funeral service largely as of the result of the fact that we live in a death denying society (Despelder and Strickland p.28). All of these options may eliminate one or more of the five parts of the traditional funeral that were previously mentioned, if not avoiding them altogether. Some of these alternatives include cremation, memorial societies, medical donation, and cryogenic preservation.

Cremation

"Sanitation appears to be one of the major reasons for the cremation movement that began in North America in the latter part of the 19th century" (Vernon, p. 237) However, Vernon also states that Malinowski (1948) describes the denial aspect of cremation as, "the desire to be done with it, (the body) to put it out of the way, to annihilate it completely." Nonetheless, this method of disposition of the body is growing in acceptance in the United States (Despelder and Strickland, 1983; Marks and Calder, 1982; Vernon, 1970), especially since cremation alone can be substantially less expensive than the traditional funeral service with burial (Lino, 1990).

According to Rando (1984), Irion (1974) stated that, "there are psychological advantages and disadvantages to cremation," and it is important to look at both, "as well as

the symbolic meanings cremation may have for those involved, before making a final decision:"

Simply put, the following are the conditions that should be met before the decision to cremate is made:

One should be sufficiently secure to be willing to follow practices that may not have total acceptance in the community, to innovate.

One should be convinced of the necessity for facing the reality of death and loss and be alert to tempting easy ways of avoidance and escape.

One should not feel the need of a tangible focus for remembering the deceased.

One should be willing to be cremated himself, although it is not essential that he actually plan to do so.

One should freely acknowledge that the relationship with the deceased has ended as it has been known, and that life must go on without the presence of he deceased. (Irion, 1974, p. 252)

Memorial Societies

"Memorial societies make funeral services available to its members at a lower rate by contracting with a mortuary to provide services based on a volume purchase" (Despelder and Strickland, p.185). Rando (1984) adds that these societies, "charge modest fees and provide information and counsel." She then goes on to point out that even though anyone can arrange their own low-cost funeral, "membership in a memorial society assures that decisions and plans have been made beforehand and expenses are reduced by membership in the organization."

Vernon (1970) states that the philosophy of a memorial society, "avoids the ritual and ceremony of the funeral." Huntington and Metcalf (1979), observed that, "Nonprofit funeral and memorial societies have had some success, and

certainly provide much cheaper funerals, but their membership remains small". Critics of memorial societies are more outspoken. "Summarily, according to the memorial-society literature, death presents one basic need: to dispose of the body swiftly, simply, and economically. The memorial societies do that and virtually no more" (Nichols, p. 34 in Margolis et al 1975).

Medical Donation

A third alternative to the traditional funeral is donation of the body or body organs to science. "The person who chooses this method may gain satisfaction from the notion that a contribution is being made to the advancement of knowledge" (Despelder and Strickland, p.182). Fulton, in a 1963 study determined that those, "who belonged to a memorial society were more favorable to offering their bodies for scientific research than was the general public" (Vernon, p. 270).

Another interesting tie-in is the relationship between organ donation and cremation. Shanteau and Harris (1990) found that potential donors, "were slightly more likely to approve of donation if cremation (47%), rather than an open-casket funeral (39%), were planned.

Cryogenic Preservation

This last alternative to the traditional funeral may be considered to be the ultimate in death denial. (Teitge, 1984) "Cryonics is a method of subjecting a corpse to

extremely low temperatures - in effect, keeping the body frozen - until some time in the future when it is envisioned that medical science will have advanced to a point where the body could be resuscitated" (Despelder and Strickland, p.182).

Although this prospect for "immortality" may be appealing to some, the response has been less than enthusiastic (Huntington and Metcalf, p.196), and has led to the conclusion, "that cryogenics as presently practiced merely produces a state of suspended reality for survivors of the deceased" (Teitge, p.177).

The Role of the Funeral Director

In light of the nascent trends in contemporary American society toward depersonalization and deritualization, what is the role of the funeral director? Rando (1984) provides an excellent summary.

- * Understand the customs and socioeconomic, religious/philosophical, and cultural values, norms, and mores in the community from which your clients come. Otherwise you will not be able to adequately address their needs.

- * Recognize that you are part of a community and attempt to integrate into that community. You can symbolize the continuity of the life-death cycle. The very same limousines that carry the families of the deceased to the cemetery are also those that carry families to weddings.

- * Do not become a "surrogate sufferer" (Nichols, 1983). In order to overcome your feelings of helplessness in the face of intense grief responses, do not try to suffer in the place of the sufferers or reduce their pain. In the long run this makes them feel more helpless, passive, and out of control. Work to help the grievors help themselves.

- * Realize that you may be one of the few people who will have the opportunity to deal with the whole

family and the support system together. While you should recognize individual differences, the family and support systems themselves form a system, and should be responded to as such.

* You must show respect at all times for the deceased and for her survivors. While you may have buried numbers of mothers before, it is a first-time occurrence for the mother's survivors and sensitivity about this must be maintained at all times.

* Recognize that mourners may be hostile towards you because of some negative publicity that has been received by the funeral industry. They may resent that you are making your living off the death of their loved one. This is a professional issue that you must deal with in a manner that will not interfere with your effective servicing of the bereaved. If this is not possible, you should seek professional advice.

Conclusion

In the final analysis, then, has a trend been identified? Consider the following conclusions reached by Marks and Calder in their 1982 survey:

1. There are two segments in the funerary market: those who desire "no frills" services and those who prefer more "typical" services. (p. 185)
2. The No Frills Segment, comprising about two-thirds of all those surveyed, is interested in putting less money, energy and time into funeral experiences, not because they are more casual about funerals, but because they have definite preferences for certain funeral practices, and are defensive in their contacts with the funeral industry. (p. 186)
3. The Typical Services Segment, comprising a minority of only one-third of the funerary market, wants to keep funeral experiences traditional because they want to do what is correct, and are willing to depend on funeral personnel to help them do so. (p. 189)

On the other side of the coin, consider the following observation made by Specter (1989).

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Future Trends in Mortuary Education - Where are We Going?

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Introduction

Educational modalities in mortuary science are undergoing changes in a world poised for change. Present and future effects associated with corporate downsizing, mergers, time-shared limited employment and buy-outs as seen in other sectors require that the modern day mortuary service professional be prepared to effectively position themselves for possible career restructuring or other potentialities not witnessed in the history of this profession. The purpose of this paper is to discuss educational enhancements that are occurring within our curriculum at Wayne State University with focus on current and long range perspectives in student education.

Curricular Structure - An Overview of Current System

The present curriculum of the professional program in mortuary science leading to a bachelors of science degree is multifaceted. While programs vary institutionally in terms of courses offered, present programs are taught from a perspective of core mortuary subjects with incorporation of additional subjects used to fortify these

subjects. Our program is robust and essentially comprises five major didactic groups (sciences, embalming and restorative art, management, law and psychology). Special topic courses, directed study and senior seminar in mortuary science add depth of study to this curriculum.

The science group consists of *Human Anatomy and Physiology*, *Chemistry* (general/inorganic, organic, biochemistry and thantochemistry), *Medical Microbiology* and *Embalming*. Subject material in these areas are developed through lecture and laboratory. To increase student awareness of disease processes, aspects of pathology and pathophysiology including elements of epidemiology are addressed in an introductory level course in the *Study of Disease*. In the presentation of these subjects, students are encouraged to interrelate subject matter learned either as part of prior educational experiences or as part of our program as they pass from one subject to another. In this manner, student deficiencies are addressed, prerequisite subject material reviewed and newly learned material used to build on a foundation of information acquired previously. It is our objective to philosophically link information obtained in our science group one to another. In this manner, knowledge learned is not compartmentalized but rather retained by recognizing and emphasizing any existing similarities in subject matter. Effectiveness in presentation is realized through the use of lecturing tools including but not limited to Socratic dialogue, practical applications and case presentations.

Embalming, Restorative Art and Modeling are multi-semester offerings allowing students the opportunity to initiate and develop restorative skills. Theory, methodology and techniques of biologic preservation and disinfection of human remains through

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embalming are presented through lecture and laboratory. Developmental skills of restorative art allow students to recreate what is visually perceived in all aspects of spatial relationships; anatomical modeling, sensitivity to color tones and hues are emphasized with actual restorations performed on human remains. In structure these closely related courses are analogous to their science counterparts in that both lecture and laboratory are fundamental to the presentation of facts, application of theory and interpretation of results.

Management in the funeral service profession is addressed in two separate formal course offerings. *Mortuary Management* serves the operational needs of future funeral directors by stressing fundamentals for effective funeral service administration and management. Topics are discussed by faculty and invited lecturers while practices and protocols are illustrated by field trips to funeral homes and industry suppliers. This approach allow students the opportunity to witness concepts, practices and ethics in both professional management and industrial settings.

Unique to our program is the integration of a formalized computer course with business management which allow students the option to learn, improve or gain new computer skills and insight in advance of their future employment as funeral service professionals. This addition develops in students an appreciation for computer hardware and how it is configured to function effectively with contemporary software programs and operation environments applicable to the mortuary profession. Students will be able to enter the field with a real sense of how computers and software work to meet the specific needs of future employers. To achieve proficiency, students are encouraged to use their computer skills to solve profession related problems and

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evaluate new profession related programs; the more experienced students are encouraged to expand their knowledge of computer architecture, software, computer security and electronic communication modalities (*E-mail, Inter- and Intranets*) by creating operational models for business implementation in the field.

Small Business Financial Management is a second component of our mortuary management offering. It focuses on special topics concerned with creating and maintaining a financially secure operational basis for the small business owner. Students are required to have taken at least one course in accounting which introduced them to managerial accounting, cash flow analysis, and aspects of business data processing protocols.

Mortuary Law focuses student insight on current basic understanding and application of legal terminology as applied to the disposition of human remains. This course emphasizes how laws specific to the practice of this profession are interpreted and apply by case situations. In a litigious society, the incorporation of a law course into mortuary education is a major component of survival as litigation involving funeral service professionals and the industry are reality. As new environmental requirements, regulations and changes in practice pose additional constraints on this profession, new dimensions in law become prominent in professional curricula.

Psychology plays an increasingly important role in our curriculum. While not fully recognized as an option in mortuary curricula more than a decade ago, the psychology of grief associated with death and dying processes is fully appreciated and exists as a viable educational dimension necessary in the training of funeral service professionals. Previously, this specialized area was reserved for specialists functioning

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as separate professional resources apart from the formal domain of funeral service establishments. Current programs incorporate aspects of this important area to assist the funeral professional on how to effectively interact with clients in bereavement at the time of death. The psychology of death, dying and grief is approached by classroom interactions, field study and interactive projects with actual life dramatization. Topics for study include the psychology of death and dying, psychosocial aspects of grief and applied grief counseling in aftercare.

Mortuary history is interesting, fascinating and important in that it is fundamental to projected roles this profession will assume in future society. To foster an appreciation for potential future roles including the impact of ethical and legal issues, a course in *Past and Future Trends in Funeral Service Practices* is offered. Additional course offerings such as *Religion, Values and Death Studies* increases student sensitivity awareness by exploring group, religious and ethnic perspectives on death and *die Weltanschauung (philosophy and world outlook)* from both early and contemporary views. Directed studies and senior level seminars allow students in mortuary science to expand their horizons by allowing them to interact more closely with faculty members on research problems related to current developments and future trends in the mortuary profession.

While facts and theory are foundations established in the classroom, experience is gained only through hands on practical interaction in the field. *Practicum* in mortuary science allow students to acquire practical skills in basic funeral service as experienced under the direction of a licensed affiliate funeral home. As the actual field of death studies broadens, this direction of professional education will become an essential

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component supportive of the employability of perspective program graduates, encouraging open dialogue between professionals on environmental laws applying to the profession and a nucleus for continuing education among peers. Practicum underlines the importance of ethics in the funeral service profession by unifying classroom and actual professional values.

Questions challenging the educational direction of contemporary students in this profession need discussion. Will present day graduates of mortuary science remain in their chosen profession for the long term? What aspects of this dynamic profession will attract others to invest time to become a professional in this area? Will the professional in this area need to become more broad based? Most importantly, how can we as educators enhance the educational process of individuals to be more responsive to periods of change which may on the one hand be only superficial but on the other more deeply entrenched? While specific answers to these questions are not easily ascertained, it is apparent that approaches which attract and retain students are strongly influenced on how we improve our effectiveness as educators and in turn how flexible we are to enhance our educational efforts to not only make our students proficient in their chosen professions but broad based enough to allow them the latitude for future career options.

Contemporary Enhancements and Future Trends

Educational Enhancements - Internal. While core mortuary courses can be taught to a high degree of competency using traditional teaching techniques, electronic and digital informational technology enhance and promote the depth of present knowledge and allow for adoptions of related subjects into the scope of mortuary

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science. In our department, incorporation of computer technology with laser digital interface allow our students to visualize aspects of anatomy, microbiology, chemistry and pathology in a readily accessible and direct format. Use of video monitors and laser digital technology in the anatomy laboratory, for instance, allow students in mortuary science and allied programs in our department to visualize high resolution structures on digital disc and compare them with actual human anatomical structures at dissection. The advantage is improved detail and in-depth learning with retention of subject matter. By augmenting the use of graphical format and visual instructional tools, better synthetic thought and non-compartmentalization of course information on the part of the student is promoted. Future directives will expand on these initial attempts. Our educational delivery capabilities will incorporate micro digital camera technology to record demonstrations in the embalming / anatomy / pathology and restorative art laboratories. Both static presentations and dynamic events recorded will be of value for student review or as didactic tools for future classes. By expanding our authoring multimedia capabilities, subject materials both written and digitized will become more fully realized as important learning tools for standardized, special topics and continuing education at this institution.

However, to be truly effective, it is quite apparent from our experience that future educational efforts in mortuary science will need to additionally embrace other academic, community and global environments. Closer communication links between our institution and other institutions located regionally and globally will access and reinforce the quality and effectiveness of learning protocols. Preliminary feedback information generated from a community educational outreach program, initiated at our

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institution recently, noted the presence of public misconceptions and a lack of accurate basic information concerning the study of mortuary science and the funeral service profession. To address these shortcomings, a component of our overall continuing education program will be presented as a community forum structured to supply information and answer questions relating to the mortuary profession.

Educational Enhancements - External. The near future will herald an explosive expansion of our present educational endeavor from within the hub of mortuary science as a discipline. Faculty supported education will include basic or core degree requirements, graduate level degree work, new related disciplines and continuing education for professionals. To address present and future needs and requirements of students in this discipline, we must create an environment which directly impacts both local and distant student bodies on the short and long term. It is observed that accessibility, more poignantly, ensuring student accessibility to educational and informational resource technology is a major focus and concern. Accessibility to quality education is sometimes compromised by financial resource limitations, family and career conflicts, lack of or variations in standardized educational preparedness and distance constraints. To overcome certain aspects of these problems, future efforts will involve the telenet structure of the Internet in addition to present in-house initiatives. This "Edunet" type approach will primarily target students or professionals who are unable to take advantages of our programs by traditional learning protocols; it will allow the purchase of education time and materials including sessions of "Ask the Prof" as part of our in-house electronic classroom. Inter-institutional collaboration will

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benefit by exchange of materials as part of an "eduweb" network of member institutional sites. Meritorious is the option of visitation of "mort" sites world wide which increases student understanding of mortuary service operations first hand as they are practiced regionally and around the world. This will be of tremendous benefit to all of our faculty and students by allowing them true bi-directional exchange of ideas, concepts and professional views. The effective and productive use of web teleconferencing is a powerful resource accepted widely for conducting simultaneous meetings and presentations at multiple sites.

Apart from its educational dimension, the Internet is powerful as both a publication and research tool. In an age characterized by proliferation of information, a major problem that exists in academic, industrial and business communities is the rapid acquisition and dissemination of information. The ability to deliver and receive quality, accurate information free from defect in a timely manner is of primary importance to those about to launch an education protocol involving Internet publication. Current factors compromising this endeavor center about security surrounding intellectual property as produced for distribution as part of electronic curricula. Advancements in the future areas of firewalls, encryption's and other improved modes of security will foster a more universal acceptance and implementation of this mode of information transmission. For our students, Internet will allow them the opportunity to publish student level research findings, create a student directed *Mort Sci Newsgroup* on the Net, respond directly to professional and educational advertisement, avail themselves of resource projects, take advantage of inter-library

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documentation of published works and promote their personal careers by listing their resumes electronically, thus targeting a larger audience.

The affiliation of our mortuary department with a major *Carnegie Research I* university encourages fundamental and applied research efforts on the part of both our faculty and students¹. Effective research strategies leading to important solutions to projects is strongly dependent on one's ability to access dependable scientific literature from reliable sources in a comprehensive manner. While immense databases exist on the global network, the presence of quality library web sites reduce the frustration associated with questionable authenticity. The future presence of our departmental web site here at Wayne State in addition to other quality sites dedicated to mortuary science will improve quality availability of hyper-linked information and decrease the complexities associated with obtaining broad based information retrieval. These multiple site links will allow us and our colleagues at other academic and industrial sites to collaborate directly on joint research ventures lending a greater degree of productivity and effectiveness to our collective missions.

Preparedness is the solution to long range planning in any profession today. Student education is dynamic. It is driven primarily by availability of quality informational resources and open dialogue between student and faculty. Confidence in the future is nurtured by educational ideals and faculty who are dynamic, flexible and visionary. Certain educators in this profession are of the opinion that traditionally students attracted to the mortuary science profession were those of family owned establishments or others possessing unique perspectives as to their professional objectives. Today we see students attracted to mortuary science from diverse

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disciplines. Applicants to our program as well as to others come from backgrounds spanning from those already in the funeral profession whose primary objective is to broaden business perspectives to those wishing to expand on medical or forensic interests. Still others seek formal training in this area to establish a background in psychosocial aspects of grief and loss or simply want to be of assistance to others. Mortuary science is a discipline with longevity based on deep historical roots. It is a profession with a future poised to attract students with educational objectives and expectations requiring educators to challenge them with creative vision.

Footnote

¹In 1994, Wayne State University received the distinction of being selected a *Carnegie Research I* university by the Carnegie Foundation in recognition of Wayne's broad range of undergraduate programs, commitment to graduate education, and strong emphasis on research as evidenced by grant support received. This distinction is reserved to 88 out of 3600 accredited colleges and universities nationwide and evaluated on an annual basis.

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Towards A "Total" Model of Funeral Service Competencies Relative to the Psychology of Funeral Service Education.

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Recently I was engaged in an insightful conversation with a rather progressive funeral service director of a very prosperous funeral service business. As a mortuary psychology educator with a keen interest in teaching material that is transferable to the "real world", I was curious to know what this individual looked for when hiring aspiring mortuary science students. His reply was so comprehensive, I asked him to put it in writing for the purpose of sharing with my students and colleagues. The following is his anonymous response:

"We have very high expectations of all of our employees. Their character and level of compassion, their desire for perfection are very important to our firm. We look for individuals who at their very core are honest and compassionate...who are articulate and well educated - professionally and academically.."

For me this description of competency seems to encompass the "total funeral service professional", an individual who is as developed in matters of the heart as he/she is in matters of the mind. It is this standard I invite you to hold on to as I embark upon the proposal of a model of student competencies which I believe to be related to the goals of mortuary school's psychology curriculum.

The total development of funeral service professionals encompasses a multi-faceted process of fostering personal and professional knowledge, capabilities, and skills demonstrated as professional competencies. The psychology curriculum plays a dominant role in the development of the interpersonal skills needed

to be a comprehensive funeral service professional who has the capacity to be effective, empathic, healthy, and helpful. As a psychology of funeral service educator, I realize that a model which captures the essence of the total funeral service professional is in need. Therefore, the aim of this essay is to facilitate a theoretical base to describe the characteristics of such a funeral service professional, while highlighting academic experiences which might foster the related psychological competencies.

Drawing upon ideas promoted in Arthur Chickering's vectorial model of developmental themes for young adults, the following five dimensions will be utilized to explore mastery of the psychology-based skills that reflect total funeral service care: competence, emotional awareness, identity, respect for individual differences, personal motivation and professional ethics.

1. Issues of Competence - Contained in this dimension is the mortuary science student's ability to translate his or her intellectual knowledge about the psychology of death and dying, grief and loss, and aftercare programs into empathic responses which will promote effective coping among the individuals they service, whether in a pre-need, at-need, or aftercare capacity. This is evidenced in students who feel they have acquired an integrated understanding of a number of helping skills and can adequately relate these skills to the unique situations of the people they serve. This can be especially vital in socially difficult deaths such as suicide, homicide, and A.I.D.S., whereby

the response of the funeral director can offset the shame which is often associated with such stigmatized deaths.

2. Issues of Emotional Awareness - This dimension refers to the student's ability to be aware of his or her feelings within the funeral service environment. Funeral service providers can be exposed excessively to "death stress". I define death stress as the unique, chronic, occupational stressors experienced by death-care professionals which is compounded by a myriad of variables such as; 1) chronic exposure to the intensity of grief, anger, guilt, and pain experienced and expressed by the dying and/or bereaved, 2) the effect of witnessing and mediating family conflicts and disputes that often surface during the service components (planning conference and funeral), and 3) the occasional misfortune of having to bear the brunt of displaced rage, anger, and helplessness directed at the funeral service professional. Regardless of intellectual knowledge and academic ability, these experiences can take their toll on the physical and emotional health of the helpful funeral professional. Being equipped to emotionally acknowledge, accept, and channel one's reactions to "death stress" is critical to self-care and professional well-being. Therefore, emotional literacy includes learning about how the individual, as a proactive, self-preserving funeral service professional, experiences and expresses negative feelings such as anger, frustration, inadequacy, pity, and powerlessness, as well as the positive feelings of warmth, caring, altruism, and helpfulness - which are all critical to professional competency,

stress management, and the prevention of diseases associated with chronic stress. Furthermore, these capacities are consistent with Daniel Goleman's research on Emotional Intelligence and the benefits of being self-aware, in control of personal impulses, empathic, and socially deft (1995).

3. Issues of Identity - A true sense of one's self as a helping professional, equipped with the tools and resources to make a difference in the psychological functioning of the individuals they serve, is imperative to the identity of the total funeral service provider. This is witnessed when students come to realize their ability to significantly impact the lives of others while enhancing the community's perceptions of the funeral service industry as a helping resource. Field studies with hospice organizations, aftercare providers, and community-based bereavement support services, can be instrumental in helping students develop their thoughts and ideas about being an integral part of the death-care team of professionals.

4. Issues of Respect for Individual Differences - This theme involves the ability to appreciate differences in background, culture, values, and appearances. This requires a conscious effort to understand another person's perspective in a respectful, non-biased manner. Often, this entails a willingness to be honest about one's limitations, particularly with certain sub-cultures, as well as the courage to overcome one's biases whether they are consciously known or unknown, direct or inadvertent.

5. Issues of Personal Motivation and Professional Ethics - Alan Wolfelt notes that the majority of students enter the funeral service profession because they "want to help people" (1992). I find that students, and professionals, who keep this desire in mind are more likely to keep the needs of the bereaved ahead of potentially unethical practices that promote monetary gain over interpersonal support. Williams and Tetrick, in a preliminary study on occupational stress in funeral service, revealed that respondents listed "being accepted and valued" as one of the biggest challenges to the profession, and the "bad image of the profession" as one of the most stressful aspects of their work (1996). Helping students to stay cognizant of their personal motivations relative to being a helping professional, can be a source of strength for overcoming this professional barrier while maximizing their potential for job satisfaction.

In summarizing these five issues of competency relative to the psychology of funeral service curriculum and the development of the total funeral service professional, I find the following simple equation effectively guides my instruction efforts:

Self-Awareness + Death Education + Skill-Building = Total Competency

Aside from defining competencies and exploring educational efforts to cultivate these five competencies, the challenge to the mortuary science psychology educator is to measure the behavioral manifestation of these characteristics in student skills and

abilities. Specifically, our challenge as the "soft science" of mortuary school is to define outcome measures which adequately reflect our efforts to 1) foster self-awareness, 2) instill knowledge of the many theories on death, dying, grief, and aftercare, and 3) effectively build interpersonal skills. Some of the teaching methods which can be instrumental in cultivating the competencies of the total funeral service professional include:

1. Didactic coursework
2. Skill Training
3. Fostering Personal Awareness
4. Auxiliary Methods

Didactic Coursework - fostering the knowledge of psychological theory of funeral service as it relates to the basic principles of human behavior is standard practice in preparing mortuary students. Methods of accomplishing this include coursework, lectures, assigned readings, and examinations.

Skill Training - incorporating an experiential component to education is critical to assisting students in developing the interpersonal skills to be totally effective. Critical to this component of teaching is individualized practice in helping coupled with the benefit of both instructor and peer feedback. In addition to basic attending skills, mortuary schools do well when they foster skills in crisis intervention, conflict resolution, stress management, wellness and self-care.

Fostering Personal Awareness- there is a principle of death education which promotes the belief that personal and professional comfort working within the fields of death-care is dependent upon personal awareness and the development of attitudes which are positive towards death, (Brent et. al, 1991). Education efforts which foster personal death-awareness relative to attitudes, emotions, and behaviors provide a valuable service to the developing death-care professional. Furthermore, an introspective nature can result in the maturity and personal depth needed to be helpful to others (Loganbill et al, 1982). Journaling and personal reflection assignments can be instrumental in establishing an avenue for self-awareness which can be both meaningful and self-preserving.

Auxiliary Methods - encompassing a wide variety of teaching methods to assimilate the functioning of the total funeral service professional is valuable practice for mortuary students. Simulation techniques, videotaping, role playing and peer reviews are just some of the ways funeral service educators can enhance the development of the total funeral service professional.

The challenge of preparing mortuary students who can meet the standards of the total funeral service professional is benefitted by having a model of competencies to strive for. Holding true to the vision which guides the efforts of educators can be supported by comprehensive and varied methods of teaching. The value of exercises in preparation for "real world" application is critical

to raising the awareness of students as to the challenges and rewards of integrating psychological theory into the actual experience of helping. Inherent in the adoption of a model and style of teaching which will develop well-rounded, compassionate and knowledgeable students is the challenge to establish concrete measures of competency and ability. Thus, suggesting a concerted need for communication and a focused-effort among funeral service educators to define the standards of professional competency which will produce students who are as endowed in character as they are in academic theory. I believe this is our challenge going into the 21st century. To this challenge, I would welcome your comments relative to what your school is doing, especially as it relates to outcome measures of competency.

Please send your comments to:

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WHY NOT LET THEM DECIDE?

by

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After returning from the NFDA's annual convention this year, several thoughts occurred to me:

- Not many students have the opportunity to attend the NFDA convention
- Lots of new products are previewed at national conventions
- Students only learn what they are exposed to

If students don't attend conventions, they don't have the opportunity to see for themselves what's new in the funeral service market. I'm sure there are students who don't attend conventions at all. Others attend may attend only state conventions that may be small in scope. When confronted with the choice of attending either a state or national convention, the supplier may opt for a national convention which will give them more visibility.

The number of funeral homes that a student works in during their intern days will hopefully be few. While this will give the intern the opportunity to learn funeral service from a reputable professional on a long term basis, it in some ways limits the student. For example a student may learn only one way to complete a specific task or learn about only one product for a task at hand. Seeing new products will allow the new funeral service professional the opportunity to choose among many products and decide for themselves which one they may prefer. Perhaps the student will have the chance to see something they have never seen before or never had the opportunity to use before.

Taking all of the above into consideration, I decided to try student reviews of new

products. I simply picked up product information from suppliers at the convention. I then broke my class down into small groups and provided them with the product information. Their job then was to decide if they would use the product, how it would be used in their day to day funeral home operations. If they panned the product they had to tell why. The small group then introduced the product to the rest of the class and gave their product review.

The results of the experiment worked well. Students were excited to see new products, and glad that their opinion was valued. They also came up with some creative ways of using the products, and approaching suppliers about the use of their products. So, why not let students decide about new products? After all they are the funeral service professionals of tomorrow.

Mutterings of Mortality: The Language of Death

Linguistics C30--Language, Thought, and Reality
Professor Abraham Demoz

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May 25, 1989

"It's not that I'm afraid to die. I just don't want to be there when it happens "

•Woody Allen

The denial of death is a phenomenon reflected in the language use of today's Western society. Euphemisms for death, both solemn and sarcastic, are abundant. Advertising and popular entertainment feeds upon the cultural appeal of youth and its virtues, choosing not to focus on the elderly who are closer to the end of their lives. If introduced to someone at a party who mentions that he is a funeral director, the instant reaction is that of aversion. This paper will explore the language surrounding death--the euphemisms used in everyday conversation, the etiquette for socially handling the bereaved, the repertoire of the funeral director--and discuss how this reflects and reinforces contemporary attitudes toward mortality.

A Society of Denial.

The fear of death is a basic human anxiety. Death is the gateway to the great unknown, and for human beings, who possess a persistent drive to acquire knowledge and understanding about the world in which they exist, the prospect of "the end" is indeed frightening. Knowledge of reality is sharply terminated at mortality's limit, and while the tangible process of death itself can be studied, no manner of scientific advancement will ever be able to empirically discover how it feels to be dead; what one thinks about, feels, and experiences--if anything at all.

Like it or not, death is an important part of the life cycle, entirely natural, and inescapable. Historically, while not necessarily welcome, death was indubitably more accepted as an inevitable occurrence than it is today. In Medieval times, it "was both familiar and near, evoking no great fear or

awe."¹ Up through the 19th century, death was still intimate enough to account for the popularity of "mourner's manuals" and novels that speculated about such topics as "the eating habits, occupations, lifestyles, methods of child care and courtship current in Heaven."² Families mourned their losses deeply, but they readily recognized death's proximity as natural.

Contrast this attitude to today's fast-paced, brightly lit culture that thrives upon the image of youth and vitality. Since the turn of the century, the steady rise in the standard of living and soaring advances in medicine have lengthened the lifespan and created leisure time (a previously unknown phenomenon), allowing one the opportunity to enjoy other activities away from the labor necessary to sustain food and shelter. A recreational ideal was born, setting the scene for the cultural priority ranking that places youth, health, and beauty at the top of the list and propagates their value through the images of advertising and entertainment.

The consumer market that has grown up around the youth fixation equates old age with death, and products to delay this dreaded event are heralded in the discourse of fashion magazines and television commercials. Advertisements for facial creams "to lift years off your eyes" for "anti-aging... lasting beauty" show that one can easily "say goodbye to the unwelcome signs of aging that appear prematurely." Time comes under

¹ Philippe Ariés, Western Attitudes Towards Death (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974) 13.

² Ann Douglas. "Heaven Our Home: Consolation Literature in the Northern United States, 1830-1880." Death in America, David E. Stannard, ed. (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975) 64.

control in these statements, subordinating aging and death. So explains the advertising strategy behind naming a perfume "**Eternity**."

Mortality is metonymized into the passing of time, and the passing of time is made into a metaphorical battle against death. Consider the ads that proclaim, "I don't want to grow old gracefully--I intend to **fight** it every step of the way," or that call to "**Fortify** your skin's natural **defenses** against aging," or "Live in a perfect world....[get] Skin **Defender**," that can offer "Total **time-fighting** care." Another beauty product is hailed as "The best **weapon to combat** wrinkles," and yet another ad offers a remedy to the pain of the casualties of aging by asking, "Why **suffer**? [when you can] Look younger with beautiful skin and hair."

The movement promoting better health has also swelled in the past decade. While this effort is laudable in its goal to help prevent pain and illness, the implicit ideology is that life can be prolonged and death kept at bay. An magazine advertising supplement on heart attack prevention dictates that the manner in which one takes care of oneself will "largely determine whether you live out your full measure of days," and that "rarely are you given such an opportunity to **control your own fate**....Take control of your future today."³ Again, the mastery of time becomes possible and death is distanced by human-constructed strategies of vitamins and cosmetics. Vivian M. Rakoff summed it up when she said that this philosophy

³ Harvey Wolinsky, "Heart Attack Prevention," Newsweek, 13 Feb. 1989: S-4-5.

makes America "a country of the eternal now, of the young, face lifting, good teeth into the seventies, old ladies in Bermuda shorts, hair coloured at will, [and] endless euphemisms for chronic disease, affliction, and death."⁴

Ironically, as much energy is spent in the attempt to prevent death, a glance at the cinema marquee or at an evening television newscast shows that this dreaded fact of life is nonetheless highly sensationalized. The appeal of "slasher" blood-and-gore murder movies is intense--sequels to Friday the 13th have grown too numerous to count, and other films like Chopping Mall, Texas Chainsaw Massacre, and Silent Night, Deadly Night continue to sell out at the box office. Tragic airline crashes, fatal infernos, and mass murders are given top priority on network newscasts, stories often being drawn out and melodramatized. Screaming headlines such as "MAN SLAIN IN GUNFIGHT," and "TWO CONVICTED IN MURDER OF INFANT" are all too commonly written up in the newspapers with obscure facts about the victim's background and other superfluous details, getting as much drama out of the event as possible.

This apparent contradiction in cultural attitudes towards death can be explained by the hypothesis that the sensationalization and detached attention given to the event are actually forms of management. Death viewed on a television or movie screen seems almost unreal--morbid, yes; disturbing, yes, but distant enough for safety. It always happens to someone else on film or videotape, never to a close family member in one's own home. The fact that society thrives on this perspective that makes death a spectacle to be screened reflects the fierce drive to deny the intimacy of individual mortality, which is not a story to be heard in the cinema or on television, but a very real event in

⁴ Vivian M. Rakoff, "Psychiatric Aspects of Death in America," Death in American Experience, ed. Arien Mack (New York: Schocken Books, 1973) 150.

one's own life. In this way, the sensationalization and detached obsession with death today is not contradictory to blatant denial in other forms. Rather, it illustrates that humans of this society attempt to disconnect themselves from their own inevitable ends by either means of trying to lock down time itself through youth and health commercial propaganda or through the treatment of death as a distant news event or fictional creation. The ideologies behind the "age-fighting cream" advertisements and the gory slasher films are actually the same.

Euphemisms Galore!

Euphemisms, especially those concerning death, are a familiar part of everyday language and a salient indicator of society's drive to deny or distance the inevitable end. They may be used in various degrees, ranging from innocuous to irreverent. They may express a belief in God and an afterlife or atheistic cynicism. In any case, death euphemisms are widespread in common usage and a colorful part of contemporary language.

The person who has died is almost never actually referred to as having done just that; he is termed the **deceased**, or the **late John Doe**. For the faithful, a metaphor of physical departure to an afterlife is utilized: the **dearly departed** has **passed away**, **gone to meet his Maker** or to **join the angels**, **gone to the land of the heart's desire** (in pioneer days, the **Happy Hunting Grounds**), or, New Age style, **translated into a higher sphere**. Often the dead are spoken of not having gone of their own accord, but an externalized force has had them **called beyond**, **called home**, **called to God**, or **called to their reward**. They may not be referred to as having gone to another place, but to have simply **left**, **expired**, having had their **time run out**, or having **paid nature its debt**.

Innocuously, the dead may be said to have **closed their eyes** or **gone to sleep**, this metonymic usage assuming the same close relationship between death and slumber of which poets take advantage.

A number of euphemisms have their origin in specific occupations or character types. **It's curtains for him** and **he took his final bow** come from the theatre, a gambler is said to have finally **cashied in his chips**, and for the sports player or fan, it is **the end of the ball game**. The fighter **takes the last count**, and the cowboy goes to **the last roundup**. The sailor's final destination when he **slips his cable** is **Davy Jones's Locker**. The writer may **lay down his pen** while the farmer **lays down his shovel and hoe**. The use of these metaphors, in which the end of familiar daily duties signifies death, illustrate the tendency toward allegories in avoiding straight talk about mortality.

There are plenty of references made in a sarcastic or ridiculing spirit, no doubt with the purpose to gain a sense of control over life by belittling the power of death. **Bit the dust** and **bought the farm** come from war-time usage, the latter from an officer in Vietnam referring to his killed comrades' physical claim to the ground in which they were buried.⁵ The dead are said to be **pushing up daisies**, **taking a dirt nap**, or to have **gone home feet first**. The phrase **kicked the bucket** has a morbid origin (from hanging suicides where the victim stood on a bucket, then kicked off), yet is used in a joking manner. Euphemisms as a whole serve to cushion the harsh reality of death, but these take the process a step further by subordinating death through ridicule and irreverence.

⁵ Hugh Rawson. A Dictionary of Euphemisms and Other Doubletalk. (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1981) 43.

Other terms surrounding death have evolved in the interest of sounding more acceptable by avoiding direct reference to it as much as possible. "Graveyards" became "cemeteries," which are now often called "memorial gardens." A "gravestone" became a "headstone" or "monument," a "grave plot" an "estate," a "death notice" an "obituary." With these changes, emphasis is shifted away from the concrete elements of death itself onto phenomena not as closely associated in order to keep the reality of death as far away as possible by linguistic means.

The euphemisms utilized in everyday colloquialisms and in the formal terminology of death are a natural extension of the desire to avoid mortality. Even the ancient Egyptians, historically remembered for their death practices, euphemized in referring to the deadhouse where the mummification process took place as "the beautiful house."⁶ Unavoidable as it is, death is still not a pleasant prospect, and euphemisms are a method of dealing with its undesirability, softening the harshness, but also clouding the reality.

The Etiquette of Death.

Being by no means a minor event in one's life, death has become surrounded by elaborate rituals with their own linguistic conventions. "Proper" ways of handling the bereaved have developed along with "civilized" society. Religious leaders and funeral directors, both responsible for providing comfort through rituals, have created their own language styles for dealing with this difficult event that express sympathy while denying the idea of the finality of death by embracing a spiritual afterlife. This next section will

⁶ Rawson, 8.

explore these linguistic conventions for expressing sympathy, including social etiquette, greeting cards, and sermons.

As early as the turn of the century, society was instructed to outwardly suppress demonstrations of grief. Decorum, an etiquette manual published in 1889, advised that "All manner of ostentation...should be carefully avoided. Mourning is rejected by many persons of intelligence, who think it a temptation to extravagance...as requiring too much thought and trouble when the mind is overwhelmed with real grief."⁷ This call to propriety through limiting what were often therapeutic shows of mourning gave legitimate sanction to the denial of death by implying that this is what "persons of intelligence" do. Amy Vanderbilt's Complete Book of Etiquette from 1959 directed that in letters of condolence, "It is better to avoid the words 'died,' 'death,' and 'killed,'"⁸ thus conveying the message that it is necessary to sidestep direct reference to death in order to maintain the "all-is-well" appearance of civilized society.

Sympathy cards have become a convenient way to express one's condolences, and although their section in the greeting card shop is overshadowed by messages for happier occasions, there is still a relatively wide selection (even a 15-card "value pack!"). "Sympathy" is probably the most common word printed on these cards, and all follow Amy Vanderbilt's advice to avoid direct mention of death. The closest reference is in the use of "loss," as in "We share your loss... your loved one was someone we'll all deeply miss." True to cultural standards, the cards do not emphasize the death, but the acknowledgement and sharing of

⁷ Decorum (Springfield, Mass.: King, Richardson, & Co., Publishers, 1889) 302.

⁸ Amy Vanderbilt's Complete Book of Etiquette (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1959) 136.

sorrow and faith, and the hopes that this will bring comfort. Indeed, this focus upon the survivors rather than the deceased is appropriate, but there are a few cards that directly illustrate denial that the person is now physically gone for good. One Hallmark card assures, "Those we hold most dear never truly leave us...they live on in the kindness they showed,...the love they brought into our lives." Not to discredit the spiritual function of these words to provide comfort to those suffering over the death of a loved one, but the usage indisputably disclaims the finality of death. The card in Figure 1 is a clear example of this denial for consolatory purposes.

While many of the same rules of being indirect follow for face-to-face interactions with the grieving (one advice pamphlet instructing that "I'm sorry," is the only appropriate greeting, long philosophical expositions on the possibility of an afterlife being discouraged⁹), direct comments about the dead are more likely at a wake or visitation, where the corpse is actually present and unavoidable. People tend to make short, awkward comments praising the now-dead person ("He was one of a kind"), speaking of the loss ("It seems like such a waste") or making some attempt to accept it ("God must have meant it to be").¹⁰ This language that directly refers to the dead, rare in ordinary discourse, is probably more likely to occur in this setting where death is literally staring one in the face--an open casket with the body lying in view makes avoidance difficult.

⁹ What Can I Do to Help? (Milwaukee: National Funeral Directors Association, 1987).

¹⁰ Thomas E. Murray. "Mortuarial Sociolinguistics," National Research Information Center Research Record. 1.2 (Summer, 1984): 46-7.

FIGURE 1

SHE IS
JUST
AWAY

You cannot say,
you must not
say... that she
is dead. She is
just away!

With a cheery
smile and a wave of the hand... She
has wandered into an unknown
land... And left us dreaming how
very fair... It needs must be, since
she lingers there... So think of her
faring on, as dear... In the love of
there as the love of Here. Think
of her still as the same, and say...
She is not dead, she is just away.

ADAPTED FROM THE WRITINGS OF
JAMES WHITCOMB RILEY

Sermons are the linguistic convention of religion to comfort those who are grieving and to build up faith in God after this confrontation with mortality with the death of a loved one. They serve this purpose through denying absolute physical termination and affirming God's power, the belief being that the soul continues on after the death of the tangible body. To what extent faith in an afterlife is denial of what could be an absolute end is up for debate and not to be discussed here; for now, the language of this faith will be examined simply for the underlying attitudes it reveals.

The use of colorful allegories can be effective in reflecting this faith and providing comfort. Here is an excerpt from a sermon for a child's funeral:

Life can be compared to a rose garden. In this garden there are many varieties and sizes of roses. Now when the owner of the garden wants a bouquet for his table he goes out into the garden and plucks those roses which will make the loveliest bouquet. He may pluck a full-blown rose or a little bud. The choice is his. And when God wants a bouquet for the heavenly table, the choice is up to him. He owns the garden and He picks the flowers as He chooses. Sometimes it's the full-blown flower of an aged person, but last Monday He picked a bright little bud to beautify the heavenly table.¹¹

The theme of being held close to God is frequent, as is the assurance that the loved one will be met again in Heaven and that death actually brings freedom from "all the aches and pains and sorrows and sufferings and problems and

¹¹ W. Herschel Ford. Simple Sermons for Funeral Services. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1962) 28.

troubles of this world."¹² It is evident that the language of sermons makes these assumptions based on faith, thus providing comfort in the assurance of an afterlife so the survivors can feel safe themselves, as well as confident in the fate of the deceased. From one point of view, this is a blatant denial of death's absolute finality, but for the faithful, the flowery language of sermons is an assertion of what they believe to be the true course of life--the immortality of the soul. Denial though it may be, it serves a real human need to be comforted in the face of the unknown.

The Language of the Funeral Home--Toward a Non-Euphemistic Approach.

According to critics, the institution that works most closely with the dead, the funeral home, has been the prime culprit in reinforcing society's denial of death through euphemisms and through its overall treatment of the occasion of death. In the past decade, though, there has been a movement in the funeral service toward a more straightforward presentation to the public, including not only a change in the language, but in the attitudes of those in the business.

Jessica Mitford's The American Way of Death, published in 1963, caused a national furor in its attack upon the American funeral service. Mitford accused the funeral business as being corrupt, indecent, and ultimately a perpetrator of denial. According to the critical point of view, the very idea of preserving a corpse for an elaborate visitation and funeral ceremony reflects the desire to hold off death as long as possible. Almost all

¹² Ford, 13.

funeral ceremonies are religiously based as well, and, as has already been pointed out, this refuge in faith is itself a denial of death.

In its history, the funeral business has indeed been the site of the creation of new terms to deal with death, this event that society finds so ghastly. To start, the title for those who are responsible for the preparation of the body for burial and for the funeral arrangements has gone through quite a bit of evolution. Eighteenth-century "undertakers" (who, as Hugh Rawson points out in his dictionary of euphemisms, were literally, "taker-unders") became "morticians"--presumably to parallel the term "physicians" in order to gain credibility. Around 1925, the title of "funeral director" came into favor.¹³ There have since been proposals of "funeral service practitioner," "embalming surgeon," "grief therapist," and thanatologist,¹⁴ each more elaborate in the use of non-mortuary-associated terms (regular surgeons and therapists being life-emphasizing occupations); but "funeral director" is apparently the strongest candidate for the title and is the common term today. It is distinguished from "embalmer," which specifically refers to the person who conducts that process. This is a term less frequently used, perhaps because it is more closely related to the handling of the corpse.

Mitford cites a number of direct instructions for euphemistic usage in the funeral service. Quoting Edward A. Martin in Psychology of Funeral Service (1950): "The use of improper terminology by anyone affiliated with a mortuary should be strictly forbidden." She says "[Martin's] deathless words include: 'service, not funeral; Mr., Mrs., Miss Blank, not corpse or body; preparation room, not morgue; casket, not coffin...baby or infant, not stillborn;

¹³ Rawson, 113.

¹⁴ Rawson, 114.

deceased, not dead...clothing, dress, suit, etc., not shroud...' She further cites Victor Landig in Basic Principles of Funeral Service (1956), who encourages the avoidance of the word "death" as much as possible, even to the point of calling a death certificate a "vital statistics form;" to "transfer" or "remove," rather than "haul" a dead body, and to "open and close" a grave instead of digging and filling it, "interring," not "burying" the body. One of Mitford's most intriguing citations is that of Anne Hamilton Franz's suggestion in Funeral Direction and Management (1947) that "cremated remains" or "cremains" should be preferred terms, for the use of "ashes" will encourage scattering.¹⁵ This comment, amidst all these other euphemisms directed to be used for the sake of general propriety, most directly illustrates the recognition of the power of language to influence behavior.

Indeed, the entire aura surrounding the funeral home twenty to thirty years ago was that of mystery, either because of the taboo nature of the subject of death or, as Mitford might accuse, to cover up fraudulent business practices, such as superfluous charges for nonexistent or unnecessary services. A professor at the Cincinnati College of Mortuary Science recalled in an interview that a funeral director conducting a tour of his business would always skip the preparation room where the corpses were embalmed, even if the room was empty at the time, "because it wasn't something he could explain in a discreet way."¹⁶ Detailed explanations of the embalming process were avoided for the same reason. The indirect, euphemistic manner in which the

¹⁵ Jessica Mitford. The American Way of Death. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963) 77-78.

¹⁶ James M. Dorn, Cincinnati College of Mortuary Science, telephone interview. 18 May 1989.

funeral service felt it had to present itself was no doubt reinforced further by the language utilized. A new student to the funeral business with a fresh, direct attitude would soon react to the euphemisms and learn to tone down his style for public presentation. As a funeral service employee in 1967 claimed when speaking of the cremation process, "[it is] 'fry' to the staff, 'cremate' to me, and 'commit' to the customer,"¹⁷ acknowledging the unspoken credo that the public must be kept from the crude truth of the death process.

As with liturgical sermons, the religiously based language utilized in services at the funeral home refuses to recognize death as final, giving the bereaved assurance that their loved one lives on in Heaven. A 1927 memorial book created by one funeral home includes several prayers and poems such as Myra Brooks Welch's "Where Roses Never Fade," Robert Freeman's "In My Father's House," and William Cullen Bryant's "Thanatopsis" where the dead "lies down to pleasant dreams." One quote from William Jennings Bryan is resplendent in its imagery of eternal life:

I shall not believe that even now his light is extinguished....If [God] stoops to give the rosebush, whose withered blossoms float upon the breeze, the sweet assurance of another spring-time, will He withhold the the words of hope from the sons of men when the frosts of winter come?¹⁸

These lyrics of immortality are characteristic of the atmosphere of reassurance the funeral home tries to provide. Figure Two shows a page from this

¹⁷ Barbara Jones. Design for Death (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merriill Company, Inc., 1967) 152.

¹⁸ William Jennings Bryan, in Voices of the Valley. (Pomona, Calif.: Edgar Rothrook, 1927.

memorial book, a message from the funeral home in the spirit of help and comfort.

From this history of covertness, mystery, and linguistic trappings, the funeral service has slowly developed a public relations strategy in the direction of being straightforward, honest, and informative. The sharply critical influence of Mitford's book on the funeral business was unprecedented, yet the effects have taken several years to take hold. Since The American Way of Death's publication in 1963, the changes in the atmosphere of denial and mystery in the funeral home have been gradual, but definitely noticeable.

The funeral business reacted in two main ways. First, in order to provide an explanation for the necessity of the embalming procedure and the trappings of the funeral ceremony, it began to proclaim that the funeral process is necessary for the psychological acceptance of death, denying criticisms that the preservation and presentation of the body are in fact a last attempt to prolong life. A 1969 public relations publication claimed that one can either approach a funeral with a healthy recognition of mortality or with "fear, anxiety, and a desire to *ignore death and minimize the funeral*,"¹⁹ implying that the elaborate ceremony is not one that makes a travesty of death's finality, but one that is constructed for its acceptance. This attitude in the funeral service may have been spawned in defense to Mitford's highly publicized attack, for it was not apparent before the publication of The American Way of Death; but it may have simply existed to a lesser extent in silence behind the shroud of mystery surrounding the funeral home.

¹⁹ Roger D. Blackwell. "Public Relations and the Consumer's Need for Information," Public Relations for the Funeral Profession, 1.1 (1969): 1.

FIGURE 2

Voices of the Valley



OUR desire and responsibility in the service we have rendered has been to do all we could to help lighten the burden which has been yours, and we sincerely hope we have accomplished our desire.

It is our wish to dedicate this token of our friendship to the memory of the one who has passed on, with the hope that it may help comfort and sustain you.

Todd Memorial Chapel

Todd and Smith, Inc.

FUNERAL ADVISORS AND DIRECTORS
570 N. GAREY AVENUE
POMONA, CALIFORNIA

The second way in which the funeral service reacted was with a new public relations strategy of honest information and straightforward language. An examination of current literature available in funeral homes finds a marked departure from the traditionally mysterious dealings with the dead and the euphemisms enacted in previous years. In a series of informational pamphlets published by the National Funeral Director's Association in 1987, the language is plain, declaratory, and extremely non-euphemistic. When describing the embalming process, the word "body," or "dead body" is used rather than "remains." The only euphemistic phrase in the pamphlet, "restorative arts," is placed in quotes to highlight its euphemistic use in this case. A pamphlet on cremation states that in the procedure, "intense heat or fire reduces the **body** to a few pounds of **bone fragments** and **ashes** within two hours" that are then placed in an **urn** or **canister**. No softened words here!

Despite the move toward direct language, several leftover euphemisms remain in use. A pamphlet on "disposition" (actually a softened term for "disposal") refers to the final handling of the "deceased's remains," (rather than "body" or "corpse") but, to its realism credit, uses "earth burial," only briefly mentioning that it is "otherwise known as internment." "Cremated remains" or "cremains" is still used instead of "ashes" in cremation. "Cemetery" is used in place of the euphemistic "memorial garden," but the old-fashioned descriptive "graveyard" is not. There is a reference to "markers" and "monuments," neutral terms for "gravestones," and while it could be argued that these discarded terms are outdated, they were no doubt substituted in the first place in a euphemistic spirit. Other substitutions, "casket" for "coffin" and "professional car" for "hearse" were made because of actual replacements--the rectangular steel vault for the octagonal wooden box and the Cadillac for the horse-drawn

funeral wagon--but these modernizations have an air of glossing over the crude aspects of death, albeit in the interest of progress. It appears that even if one has the best intentions of being plainspoken, there are some terms that are resilient to change, words that are so ingrained in the culture that one may not even realize they have euphemistic origins.

The public approach and the language of the funeral service, then, have evolved together from a hazy presentation of mystery to an up-front provision of information about the business and its actual procedures, this change prompted in the 1960's by critical attacks on the funeral business. The relationship between the language used and the attitudes of the funeral director seem to be reciprocal, euphemisms being mandated in a time when the funeral home was curtained in obscurity from the public and being gradually discarded with the policy of a straightforward presentation. Several euphemisms prevail even with this policy, many of which are appropriate; for instance, an embalmer will not go into a grisly description of the body of a violent death to the family in the interest of promoting acceptance of the event. The continued use of some euphemisms, though, illustrates that the desire to deny death is tenacious, even in the attempt to promote the acceptance of mortality.

Conclusion.

The basic human desire to deny the finality of death is apparent in the language use of this culture. Advertisements for products and health measures designed to prolong life proliferate, and images of youth, the antithesis of old age and its proximity to death, are viewed as the ideal. Stories of both fictional and real murders, be they on the big screen or the evening news, are highly sensationalized with the objective of preventing death's inevitable personal intimacy through viewing it at a comfortable distance in a distorted picture on

film. Euphemisms that avoid direct reference to death abound, be they religious in origin, denying mortality and affirming the belief in the eternal life of the soul, or sarcastic, belittling the power of death in an attempt to maintain control in one's life. A central source of these euphemisms, the funeral home, has moved away from its traditional policy of obscurity toward a more honest, straightforward presentation of death, yet many of the old terms remain because of the stubborn refusal to accept the inevitable end.

The denial of death is unlikely to soon dwindle as a societal phenomenon, although the attitude toward old age may improve as the bulk of the population moves into their sixtieth year. The current trend in the funeral service toward non-euphemistic language and its purported promotion of recognition of the finality of death is a step in the right direction, but, as pointed out, euphemisms and denying attitudes are resilient. These attitudes are not necessarily all detrimental, for there is a very real human need to have the reassurance of an afterlife when near death oneself or when a loved one has died. However, the youth fixation and the cheapening of death on the television or movie screen so popular in this culture could stand to be changed.

Language and thought have a reciprocal relationship, both with a powerful influence over the other. The language of death reflects the avoidant or accepting attitudes of those who consciously use it in a euphemistic or non-euphemistic manner, respectively. It also shapes and reinforces these attitudes, the choice of terms being limited to the repertoire of one's ideology. This is why the American funeral business coupled its upfront presentation of honesty and information with the use of plain language following the influential publication of Jessica Mitford's The American Way of Death, moving away from the euphemisms associated with covering up the facts of the funeral process. Perhaps in the future, with the age of the population growing and

hopefully the attitudes toward the elderly improving, a move will be made toward a less heavily youth-oriented language and even possibly a more ready recognition of death. Carefully chosen words could shape this attitude, and with popular use, perpetuate it.

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Molecular and Archeological Biology:

Ancient and Modern Human Remains Preservation,
Burial Rituals and Processes, and Extraction of
Mitochondrial DNA from Disinterred Human Remains

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Senior, 1997

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INTRODUCTORY STATEMENTS

Buried under nature's debris in a stone cave near the Valley of the Nile, a deteriorating coffin lay hidden for thousands of years intended to be undisturbed for eternity. On an archeological expedition, two workers stumbled upon the cave and proceeded to enter, stunned by the "discovery" only an arm's reach away. As the lid to the sacred box was pried open, the workers were shocked to discover ancient remains of a man, almost perfectly intact.

Who was the man? Where did he originate? How old was he? What kind of diet did he have? How did he die? Answers to questions of how the corpse managed to vanquish time can now be answered by a process involving molecular and biological archeology through the extraction of mitochondrial DNA. The success of mitochondrial DNA removal is completely dependent upon ancient preservation techniques used on human remains. Embalming methods used by ancient Egyptians and modern morticians have many similarities, yet various differences. However, whether ancient or modern, the ultimate goal remains the same . . . the perfect preservation of a human body through chemical alteration of proteins, a major component of muscle and tissue.

Archeological and anthropological research has proved cultures of nearly every society have very definite and elaborate procedures used in preparing the deceased for burial. With such importance being placed on funeral preparation, including death rituals and ceremonies, societies have changed the focus from rites honoring the dead to social sciences concentrating on the emotions and needs of survivors. Either past or present, the mortician steps into the essential character role of establishing a framework to serve the functions called for by society . . . eternal preservation of the dead.

Although ancient methods of embalming differ greatly from modern techniques, primary purposes remain identical - chemically treating a dead body to reduce the presence and growth of microorganisms, to retard organic decomposition, and return the body to an acceptable appearance through disinfection, preservation, and restoration. Embalming is a chemical process nearly impossible to reverse and, therefore, perfection is a necessity since, for optimum performance, should be performed only once. If the embalmer succeeds, a body will stay intact until final disposition. However, defective preservation through lack of skill, knowledge or carelessness of the embalmer can prevent a body from being preserved long enough for a funeral service to be conducted.

Pathogens can survive in dead tissue for excessive periods of time; therefore, destroying disease-producing microorganisms through disinfection is the primary purpose of embalming. During the interim between death and burial, the essential secondary purpose, preservation, must be performed to prevent decomposition by fermentation and putrefaction. By chemically altering tissue cell proteins to the point of being an unsuitable host for food or bacterial growth, all enzymes and organisms present in tissue, as well as others attempting to enter or grow during the post-embalming interval, will be inactivated by direct contact and removal of the food source.

ANCIENT EGYPT

Most Egyptians lived short lives as a result of numerous factors such as disease, dying between twenty-five and forty years of age. Some Egyptians, however, lived long lives. For example, Ramses II lived to be ninety years old. Scientific studies indicate his back teeth were heavily worn. Ramses also suffered from severe tooth abscesses and arthritic pain, dying as a result of heart disease and hardening of the arteries. Hair analysis show Ramses II, in his

younger days, had long, wavy, auburn colored hair (Allen). Such accurate tests and results are able to be performed based on two factors . . . embalming procedures and interment methods.

Embalmer priests of ancient Egypt held the most responsible and respected position in the religious hierarchy. Due to the complicated, time-consuming process, the profession was considered to be at the level of an art. Only under the care of Egypt's high priest could the sacred remains of Kings be trusted to when the tragedy of death hovered over the country (Grimal).

Ancient embalmers performed ritualistic, god-like roles in preparing Pharaohs for eternal life by ensuring the body would not decompose or reek of odor. The mortician's role was extremely complicated since environmental factors in Egypt accelerated putrefaction. Religious beliefs dictated Pharaohs were one with the god of the dead, "Osiris". In keeping with ritualistic facets, embalmers wore a costume of death while preparing the body. The process began with the mortician donning a heavy, clay mask, representative of the half-jackal, half-human "Anubis", god of embalming and protector of the deceased (Allen).

In keeping with burial rituals, the Pharaoh was placed in a structure designed specifically for him - the pyramid tomb. After being placed in the coffin, the body was adorned with gold, silver, precious jewels, garlands and lotuses. The gifts would remain intact after thousands of years, as if suspended in time with the Pharaoh's peaceful image of an endless sleep. Finally, a large, gold, sarcophagus was placed over the coffin and delivered inside the Pharaoh's awaiting stone tomb (Allen).

Tombs, the steps to heaven, were built to last eternally and protect the King in his afterlife. With stone being the medium of immortality, the structure had to be flawless in every respect. Exact precision and accuracy were essential since the structure battled to fight against the ultimate enemy . . . time. Since royal Egyptians enjoyed life so much, they went to great

extremes in trying to take life to the grave and beyond. Rooms contained essentials needed for survival in the next life: food and drink (preserved full-course meals, wine, desserts), couches, beds, hand mirrors, perfume, and flowers (Grimal).

Ritual beliefs dictated the room which contained the deceased's coffin was required to accommodate certain objects to lavish him in life after death, just as they had in his first life. Mummified sacred animals and pets such as monkeys, dogs and cats were buried alongside the King. He was provided with all the luxuries and comforts of home: weapons, clay servants to serve him in life after death, sacred and magical items for his journeys, paintings, music, toiletries and pottery. All were essential to assure his place in eternity (Grimal).

Mummies have stories to tell about life in Egypt, stories which scientists can understand through the use of modern techniques. Egyptian wishes have been fulfilled in keeping a King's name intact and remembered. Time-consuming rituals used in preparation of the deceased have allowed Egyptians to tell future generations about how wonderful life was and how death was something to look forward to since there was an afterlife to seek.

By preserving so much of life, Egyptians have opened doors standing between the present and past, allowing them to speak again. Here, now, Egyptians are closer to eternity than they have ever been.

MODERN AMERICA

Death is a reality. Modern America has precisely designed processes to prepare the deceased for an appropriate funeral service. Major functions of funerals in modern America are to provide a ceremonial service allowing survivors of the deceased to provide a final resting place for a loved one. Final disposition is through cremation, burial at sea, or the most common method, earth burial. Over the past five decades, funerary processes and medical breakthroughs

have taken death out of the ordinary American household. The funeral director, in lieu of family members, prepares the body, makes arrangements, and directs the final disposition.

With strong emphasis being placed on funeral preparations, the ceremonial and final disposition methods now assist survivors in accepting the actuality of death. Since the 1960's, the primary focal points have transformed to social sciences. Today's funeral directors not only provide ceremonies to honor the dead, but directors handle the psychological and physical reactions and needs of survivors. In essence, the mortician has become the director of a play, in which all aspects must be controlled and in perfect form for the event to succeed (Dawson).

Funeral directing has transformed to an assemblage and conveyance of reality - a flawless funeral. Carefully planned settings, presentation methods, appearance of funeral home, staff and the corpse are all part of the play with the ultimate goal of putting everyone at ease. All aspects have one goal, producing effects stimulating all senses to receive images of "naturalness" (Dawson). In order to achieve reposing impressions, funeral directors must govern all controllable complications. Through careful planning, production hindrances can be eliminated by controlling possible mistakes: obituary content, postponed deliveries, and losing the funeral cortege en route to the cemetery. By routinizing planned delays, directors can overcome suspected problems through quick responses in time and script (Barley).

Uncontrollable circumstances, which the director cannot control through direct intervention, can result in a perfect funeral service schedule going awry; the director must rapidly assess the problems and quickly devise options for situational control. Through experience, the director can anticipate such disruptions, which include expressive behaviors of the deceased's survivors. Funerals are not familiar to most people; various images, including viewing of the deceased, trigger unpredictable reactions (Barley).

By designing and arranging for a look of serenity, many emotional situations can be controlled to a certain extent. Creating an image of the deceased sleeping and maintaining pleasant visual images associated with the body will put loved ones at ease and the deceased will be remembered in a tranquil setting. To provide a natural appearance, the director embalms, restores, applies cosmetics, selects clothing, and positions the deceased in the casket to mask visual aspects which signify death (Barley). Artifacts are placed in the casket as a personal expression in an act of bereavement of the deceased. Typical funerary artifacts are family photographs, jewelry, eyeglasses, hats, books, pets, letters from the family and Bibles (Elliott).

Although modern embalming methods are conducted in an expedient manner compared to ancient Egypt, the process is still lengthy and must be accomplished with perfection since the chemical alteration is irreversible.

EXTRACTION OF MITOCHONDRIAL DNA

Over the past decade, new advances in the research and development of DNA analysis have allowed modern scientists to answer questions about ancient cultures. Among the most exciting methods is the extraction of DNA from ancient human remains, providing modern America with information about the nature of life and death over 3,000 years ago. Although the ancient Egyptians did not realize their quest for immortality would be answered through the removal of body tissue from their mummified remains, they have provided present and future scientists with extraordinary methods with which to work so the ancient culture may speak once again.

DNA, a double-helix molecule organized into chromosomes, contains an individual's genetic information and is transferred from parent to child. Studies performed on paleo-DNA permit analysis of mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA), the cellular organelles which convert glucose

(C₆H₁₂O₆) into energy. Unlike DNA contained in a cell nucleus, mtDNA is transferred from mother to child as a whole unit. Information provided through DNA studies can determine what happened to ancient cultures and why it happened, exceeding any genealogy test available (Ross). Tests conducted on DNA samples from ancient bone, which can survive in the bone until the bone transforms into its mineralized facsimile, work as well as DNA from fresh bones. Inorganic surfaces of bone provide barriers from decomposition, leaving ancient samples virtually unharmed in structure and function (Edwards).

Extraction of mtDNA tissue samples from ancient bone is achieved through the use of detergent and sodium perchlorate (Na₂ClO₄). Upon removal, samples are rehydrated by an aqueous solution consisting of sodium carbonate (Na₂CO₃), formaldehyde (HCHO) and ethanol (CH₃CH₂OH) for a forty-eight hour period. After the elapsed time, a deparaffination procedure is conducted, and the sample is stained by ethidium bromide and immersed in a phosphate-buffered saline solution (PBS) for thirty minutes, followed by thorough washing in PBS (Edwards).

Following completion of the two-day preparation procedure, mtDNA samples are ready for microscopical study by using standard histological stains in conjunction with ethidium bromide staining, allowing for detection of minute mtDNA amounts through identification of cell nuclei. The radiocarbon age (decaying with a half-life of 5,760 years) of the sample is now determined through accelerator mass spectroscopy and the amplification process commences by use of the Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) (Paabo).

PCR is an innovative enzymatic amplification technique, and the process begins by splitting the double helix of target mtDNA into two single strands at which time enzymes proceed to construct a new second strand from free-floating nucleic acid bases. Through

repetition, a minute single DNA molecule begins duplicating itself indefinitely, geometrically increasing sample amounts available for reproduction, providing for large amounts of genetic "fingerprints" of the body available for detailed analysis (Ross).

After migrating through a gel substrate, solid electrophoretic bands emerge (material traces remaining with varying molecular weights), with the largest mtDNA fragments merging together to be precipitated with ethanol (Ross).

CONCLUDING STATEMENTS

Internal components and composition of the human body have not changed since ancient Egypt, only the methods of embalming for presentation or the afterlife. Modern America prepares the body through embalming processes taking only a few hours in comparison to the Egyptian mummification process taking several weeks to months. Are modern America's methods of embalming and final disposition better than Ancient Egypt's methods of mummification? This is a question which has been and still remains unanswered as each process has its own values. Although modern embalming methods do take time and perfection as well, no tests have proven modern remains will have the stability to withstand tests conducted on them in the future. Methods of embalming may change, but the art of embalming will always be a necessary and important role in preparation of a body after death.

Unfortunately, scientific research has not put much significance on extracting DNA from remains dating 100 years of age to present, leaving scientists to wonder if present human preservation methods will allow future cultures to study remains from today's societies. Tests have been conducted on DNA extracted from living humans with the samples being stored in various environmental conditions for numerous years. However, such tests cannot be accurate since the cells were not removed from an exhumed body. In order for future cultures to know

about the present area, we must rely on continuous development and research methods so modern America may stun future cultures as much as the Egyptian's have astonished our society.

Similarities are apparent in the burial ceremonies of ancient Egypt and modern America as the death of a loved one continues to be mourned. Items of importance are buried with the deceased, each serving a specific purpose. Egypt provided essential needs for an afterlife related to before-death life. Modern America provides items important to the deceased or items to make the deceased look more natural.

With Egyptians taking such time and care in preparing the deceased for the afterlife, subsequent cultures have been provided with clear answers of how life must have been in Ancient Egypt. By the time modern America's remains pose mysterious questions, society will be so advanced that current scientific methods will be antiquated and replaced with innovative procedures limited only by the human mind.

Molecular and biological advances open a new phase of understanding ancient worlds and are essential tools for investigations. DNA technology connects the disarray of biological extinctions and lifestyles and, through use of the Polymerase Chain Reaction process, DNA is now available in abundance to test theories once deemed impossible. By combining molecular biology, archeological biology, and DNA studies and advancements, archeological investigations can be applied systematically to assist in answering the questions of where ancient people originated, what dietary regimens were used, as well as how death occurred. Only through further enhancements of modern science will the scientific community continue answering such important questions.

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