

Lay Me to Rest in a Plain Pine Box

One mother's letter to her children

I'm getting older now. I'm beginning to think about which of my personal things I want each of you to have. Yes, I've written a will, so each of you will share equally in what little is left after I'm gone. There are a few special things, though, I'll want to give you while I'm still alive, because they should not be counted in the sum total of it all. Some of my treasures will mean more to different ones quite apart from the monetary value and I hope you'll understand the pattern of my giving, for I *do* have a special place in my heart for each of you.

While I'm dwelling on it, I want to make clear that, when I die, I want the absolutely least expensive funeral you can possibly arrange. I don't want some funeral director telling you that you ought to have "the best" for your mother. If you want to spend money to show how much you love me—for goodness sake, do it while I'm still alive—you know how much I love flowers!

But far more than how much you spend on me or anyone else, I hope you know that it's the personal, thoughtful, sometimes-little-things that count the most. "Considering others" is the major life-lesson I'm sure we all have to learn. Material things don't matter as much as generous caring.

So, contemplating my funeral—because, yes, it will come sooner or later no

matter how often I sometimes think I might want to live forever—I got a little silly tonight, given all the possibilities. I certainly had a good laugh. . . and I hope you will, too.

Imagine me, a plain, ordinary, not-very-good-looking, wrinkled, not-in-great-shape-and-therefore-baggy-in-places mom—a mom who got into more mischief than most, with many embarrassments for all of you, I'm sorry to say. (As my favorite pin puts it, "I'm an outrageous older woman." Thank you for enduring through the early years when I was an outrageous younger woman, too.)

I enjoy a good laugh . . . and sometimes I feel entitled to get angry when the world doesn't seem fair. Can you really see me being "comfortable," perfectly-posed in a casket full of satin and crepe? I hear that some of them even have adjustable head-rests! I sit here wondering what it would be like...100 years from now...1,000 years from now...to have my body captured inside a metal casket—inside the other box-for-the-box called an "outer burial container"—all of it six feet under, dark as can be. I'm sitting here with my eyes closed, just imagining. Then I peek one eye open, and...you know what? I'm still six feet under! I'm howling with laughter now at this even-more-outrageous image...what would my pesky spirit do in a situation like that?

I'll tell you what I really want—it's very easy: "Ashes to ashes and dust to dust." I want a plain pine box. No, not

plywood with all the glue and formaldehyde. I want a plain wooden box, one that will return naturally to the soil, as I'd like to do.

"Plant" me under an apple tree, or—better yet—flower garden. (I always did better with the flowers and frivolous things than I did with the vegetable garden and practical matters.) That's where my spirit would be most happy. It feels strangely warm to "see" myself becoming one with the earth, to picture my elements feeding new life. That's the way I want to go—that's the way I want to come back again—as nourishment for a beckoning flower.

For me, it would be a terrible "sentence" to be stuck with a stopped-in-time expression of religious contemplation forever—that's just not me. I want to laugh, I want to be sometimes naughty and irreverent . . .and, yes, I want to move on when I die—I think there's a much bigger picture out there, bigger than any of us will ever know until we get there. When I'm ready, cremation may be the answer, but I want to be free to go in a plain pine box, one that's not too perfect ...just like me.



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Smoothing the Way

This and the following pamphlets are available from your local funeral consumer organization or from the national FCA office. Please send a donation with your request to: FCA, 33 Patchen Road, South Burlington, Vermont 05403.

Cremation Explained

Death Away from Home

Did You Forget?

Earth Burial: A Tradition in Simplicity

Eco-friendly Death and Funeral Choices

Guide to Funeral Planning

How to Help Grieving People

How to Plan a Memorial Service

Lay Me to Rest in a Plain Pine Box

Light, Like the Sun—an essay on cremation

No One Wants to Talk about Death

Organ & Body Donation: A Gift to Science

Prepaying Your Funeral: Benefits & Dangers

Recycle Your Medical Devices

*Simple & Cheap, My Father Said—daughter of
Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black*

Ten Tips for Saving Funeral Dollars

Twelve Reasons People Spend “Too Much”

Veterans’ Funeral & Burial Benefits

Viewing & Visitation: The Difference

What Shall We Do with the Ashes?

What You Should Know about Embalming

Directory—A listing of the approximately 120 funeral and memorial planning societies in the U.S. Your membership is transferable at any time, with full rights of reciprocity.

Additional Resources

Dealing Creatively With, Death: A Manual of Death Education and Simple Burial by Ernest Morgan, Barclay House, 1994, 13th edition, 163 pages. \$14.95.

A concise and readable guide on simplicity in funeral arrangements, cremation, body and organ donation, advice on procedures at the time of death, suggestions for memorial services, and much more.

Caring for the Dead: Your Final Act of Love by Lisa Carlson, Upper Access. 1998, 640 pages, \$29.95.

Funeral law for the consumer, state-by state, including a complete guide for families who might wish to handle a death without the use of an undertaker. Lists crematories.

Considers practical matters and how to obtain and file permits. Very useful, even if you choose to work with a mortician.

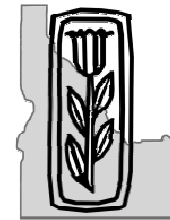
The above materials are available through the FCA office. <http://www.funerals.org> or call 1-800-765-0107.



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