

## Imaginative Memorials

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So you have joined the ranks of people who want to be cremated when they die. There is certainly nothing wrong with that. After all, we are all unique individuals and deserve to have our final wishes carried out as expressed. While cremation is not for everyone, the popularity of this option has really opened the market for some very interesting ways for us memorialize a loved that died and has been cremated.

Last month, I touched on the importance of having a funeral rite regardless of the final disposition to help the survivors begin the grieving process while surrounded by a support circle of friends and family. As a brief reiteration of that subject, I want to remind people that even with cremation, you can still have traditional funeral services ranging from a full wake, where your family and friends can see you one last time, followed by a formal funeral service in church, on the beach, at the funeral home, etc. But if you are going to be cremated either before, or after the funeral service, what is to become of the ashes of your body?

Many families have unused burial spaces that can serve as the final resting place of cremated remains. The ashes are buried, in an urn, just as a casketed body would be. Some cemeteries in the area will allow for cremated remains to be buried on top of an existing gravesite to accommodate a family where some prefer full earth burial, and others prefer to be cremated. Also, many cemeteries have cremation niches in their mausoleum, for those that would like to inurn the ashes of their loved one.

Beyond resting in a cemetery, or in a nice urn on the mantle, many people nowadays want to do something different. I want to bring to light some of the recent options I've been educated on, in hopes to pass on some creative ideas that may help people find value in memorializing their loved one who has chosen cremation.

I will begin this topic by mentioning that when an average human body is cremated, there is about 5-7 pounds of cremated remains left. While some people and some religions hold a firm belief of keeping the all the ashes together, some families find value in doing several different options with the ashes. That is one of the beauties of cremation; you don't have to make just one decision on where the ashes will go. You can take portions of the cremains, and consider a combination of the endless options for disposition.

For instance, let's say a widowed gentleman has passed away and he has four children and numerous grandchildren. Forty years ago, before cremation was common, he and his wife purchased grave spaces in the local cemetery, where his wife is now buried. It is now his final wish to be cremated, but to also be near his wife for eternity. Furthermore, as a U.S. Navy veteran, he loved the idea of being laid to rest in the ocean. The solution is simple. The majority of his ashes can be buried in the cemetery with his wife, either on

top of her grave, or in the adjacent space which they own as well. If the ashes are buried on top of her, the family will still have an open grave space for future use. Also, a portion of his remains can be scattered in the ocean by various methods. There are companies on the east and west coasts that offer very dignified scattering at sea ceremonies. The cremains are either transported by boat or airplane, and are scattered at a particular location. The family will often receive a video of the scattering, and will be told the exact latitude and longitude, so the family can have a place to visit if they chose. There is another company called the Eternal Reef where a portion of the cremated remains are mixed with an eco-friendly concrete to form a coral reef like pod that is dropped to the bottom of the ocean. Family and friend actually take part in the creation of the reef ball, and can carve names, and hand prints into the final mold. The reefs also promote marine life. The reefs are used directly to rehabilitate and rebuild the dying reefs of our oceans by adding new habitat for the marine creatures.

For those of us who feel a little more grounded on land, there are numerous scattering methods as well. Similar to scattering at sea, cremated remains can be released by airplane at very specific locations. Family members will often receive a video of the scattering and they will know the exact location where the ashes were released.

Beyond air and sea, some people are getting even more creative. Companies like Angel Flight and Celebrate Life place the remains inside fireworks, which are ignited and shown in display. Part of the funeral service actually involves a magnificent fireworks show where family and friends can gather and reflect on the beauty of a life well lived.

A new idea is also coming to light. Now, cremated remains can be taken into outer space. A company called Celestis can go on an earth orbit, missions to the moon (where burial of the ashes takes place), or shot into deep space for eternal orbit in the solar system.

Let us not forget the many ways we can use human ashes to be kept forever. Cremated remains can be used to produce a personal diamond, which could be passed on as a family heirloom. A company called Life Gem uses a portion of ashes, extracts the carbon which is then used to create a beautiful diamond that can be set into numerous jewelry pieces. Many funeral homes also offer very tasteful jewelry that can hold a small portion of the remains, so that your loved one can remain close to you always.

The ideas I have mentioned in this article are really only the tip of the iceberg. Many of these options can be carried out in combination, privately, or as a large family event. Try mixing some cremated remains in an oil painting, and keep that precious piece in the family, or scatter portions of the ashes wherever your loved one liked to be, or even put a small portion of remains in a helium filled balloon to float away to the skies. In the garden, in the mountains, or at sea, you are only limited by your imagination when it comes to memorializing the most important people in your life.