

Cooperative Funeral Fund Inc.

Please Don't Bury Me Next to Felix the
Family Goldfish

as seen in:



*The following article was first published in the October 2019 issue of NFDA magazine,
and is reprinted with permission.*

BY ANN MARIE ST. GEORGE



Please Don't Bury Me Next to Felix the Family Goldfish



You'd think my position as a sales rep for a preneed facilitation administrator would afford me an inside view of what's going on in the funeral industry and where it's heading. But here's the thing: Being *in* the industry sometimes makes one too close to see what is actually going on.

So, what gives me my unique perspective? Oddly enough, it's my husband and my convenience store/pizzeria that have opened my eyes to how the public today truly feels about funerals and their future.

The chosen spot for my shop is on the east side of Canandaigua Lake in a "seasonal" area of the small community of Crystal Beach in the town of Gorham, New York. What makes this area unique is that it alternates with Lake Tahoe for the most expensive lakefront property in the country, which always puzzles me as I look out the front window of the store at the 1960s trailer park across the street. (Um, no, it isn't pretty.) Many of the little cottages on the lake have been sold and torn down to make way for multimillion-dollar homes either because someone has died or the families that have owned them "forever" can no longer afford to pay the taxes.

My husband and I just celebrated 10 years in business in our beloved eclectic community. We have our "year-round people" and our "lake people," and we've often considered putting a sign above our door that proclaims, "Characters Welcome." The young kids who once came in with their moms and dads now work for us.

What is my point? I'm getting to it; a little patience, please. My husband and I are both licensed funeral directors, and over the years, as our community has gotten to know us, folks have become more comfortable asking "funeral" questions. We've become a safe place for death discussions while eating pizza, buying beer or scratching off

lotto tickets. The questions we get and the discussions we have are all over the spectrum of deathcare – anything from "How do I tell my family what I want when I die?" to "What is the best way to clean my wife's monument?" Oddly, there aren't a lot of questions surrounding embalming, and I don't know if that's because of the rising cremation rate or the natural "ick" factor.

My favorite topic, of course, is preneed. I often find myself randomly discussing with a stranger their final wishes. It's eye-opening how unaware people are of what is out there for them when it comes to making their prearrangements. I really thought that as a group, funeral directors were doing a decent job of educating communities on the value of preneed.

A loved one's funeral is the culmination of their life's memories, and as such, it should be a well-thought-out celebration, not a depressing surprise party.

But we really need to do better! It is so frustrating to hear someone say, "Nah, I'm not worried about it; my kids, wife, family know what I want and will take care of it." No, they really don't, so conversations must be had. Our kids are too busy taking selfies; do you really want them to figure out what you want for your funeral without having a discussion?

I find myself actively listening while guiding the person with whom I'm speaking into a conversation that helps them understand the importance of

sharing their wishes instead of having the people they love "guess" what they would want during a very difficult time. I

also ask them how would they feel if their wishes were to be cremated and spread over their favorite fishing hole and instead the kids decided to bury them in the backyard next to Felix the goldfish? At first, I get the “Are you joking?” look until they understand the point I’m trying to make. They need to have a shared conversation with family so everyone feels a part of their decision. It’s important to the healing process. In opening these conversations, I share the importance of not devaluing their lives by not having the type of funeral that celebrates the life they lived.

I cannot sit by and quietly listen as my colleagues discuss their concern over the increase in direct cremation and the decline of two- to three-day wakes. We have to take some responsibility. Preneed is our biggest opportunity for educating families. It takes a year or more to plan a wedding, so how can someone expect a grieving family member to plan a funeral in 60 minutes? Place that person prearranging their funeral right into their family members’ shoes. Their funeral is a culmination of their life’s memories, and as such, it should be a well-thought-out celebration, not a depressing surprise party.

The one thing I’ve learned is that no matter the age, gender or station in life, everyone at some point has heard the phrase “celebration of life.” But while they may have heard it, we still need to help them understand it. We need to use this phrase as much as we can in our preneed arrangement discussions. It is exactly what a funeral is about! Making one’s prearrangement is the perfect opportunity to organize that celebration, especially if you don’t want to be buried next to Felix the family goldfish.

Ann Marie St. George is a first-generation funeral director who has worked for the past 20 years as a regional manager for Cooperative Funeral Fund, a preneed and cemetery care fund management company. Thriving in the industry for more than 35 years as a funeral director/embalmer, she was pulled into the world of national disasters starting with 9/11, as she lived 11 blocks from the World Trade Center. She is a mortuary officer for both DMORT Region II and Kenyon International Emergency Services. She can be reached at annmarie.stgeorge@cffinc.com.



Some Jobs Require Industry Knowledge and Experience



Preneed Fund Management is One of Them

CooperativeFuneralFund.com

800-336-1102



Information contained herein should not be treated as investment advice or a recommendation to buy or sell any security. This advertisement does not offer or promise to offer tax advice, and as such investors should be advised to consult their own tax advisers regarding the tax consequences of their investment activities. Investment return and principal will fluctuate, so that a client's initial investment may increase or decrease. Any investment is speculative and involves a high degree of risk, including the risk of principal loss.