

## **A Dream To Come True.**

(Editor's note: This is an article that describes the process of funerals through observing the Funeral Director, as he must grief and raising a family)

Attending to expired humans is comforting to Chandler.

If it is a ballerina with long strong legs dressed in white tights and a firm body that jumps and spins to the notes of music. Or filing into a fire truck dressed in heavy khaki linen bringing safety to homes engulfed in flames, these are all dreams that somebody once had and made come true.

While Chandler was serving others as a missionary for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints he decided to be a Mortician. "It feels like the right thing for me to do" From that choice 5 years ago Chandler has been preparing for school and working at a funeral home.

The body is an amazing figure we tend for by feeding, dressing and use for decades. It is cared for until we lay it into the ground with the proper tender love and ended in burial. Loved ones die without our desire and on average 155,000 people die daily. We tend to love all those around us but it is how was care for them till their grave is what matters. When we lose them it is hard.

### **Getting to the Grave**

When Bryce Woodhouse 21year-old son of a Funeral Director in Washington State, was asked what his dad does for a living he said, "He picks

them up, cuts them open, sucks out the blood and plans the funeral” It sounds simple but more goes into the work of this profession.

Inside the bachelor pad, draped over the back of the microfiber coffee couch are arms and legs. Coming upon it closer are the blanketed bodies and their heads propped up on the olive tweed pillows. “CLICK” the steady hands, press the power button on the remote for the 64-inch flat screen placed squarely on the wall. 26 year-old Chandler Olsen steps over the maze of cords hooked up to the play station, which he clicks off. The silence is broken from the steady breathing coming in and out.

The living room connects to the kitchen which has an open window space above the sink to peer into the sleeper’s latest quarters. The sound carries from room to room making it uneasy to become silent for his roommates. He hesitates in the kitchen as he hears his roommate breathe out abruptly with a roll on the couch. Chandler shakes his head and walks out the door.

The bouquets have been placed in perfect alignment in the viewing room. Chandler has prayed with the family and they follow him as he pushes the arranged, glistening casket to the chapel where there are stories waiting to be heard and the songs to be sung in behalf of a lost husband, father, brother, uncle and friend.

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successful and respected octogenarian.”

“Please arise”

In respect to the gentleman they all stand, in great honor for him and how he has touched their futures. Standing they turn their heads towards the entering casket and make contact with the tearing eyed family. Chandler's soft, solemn face describes peace and respect for this silent gentleman.

According to Ezine articles a funeral costs from 6,000 dollars to 9,000 dollars funeral director's services \$1,500, casket 2,300, embalming 500, funeral home 500, grave site 1,000, digging the grave 600, grave liner outer burial container 1,000 cost of headstone 1,500.

The doors close and the funeral begins. Chandler grabs the few extra programs and plant stands and heads to the van. He slips on an oversized pea coat that hangs over his shoulders. He isn't recognized by that but the fur hat that covers his shiny head. His strong, clean hands engulf themselves into their familiar leather gloves.

Nobody at the funeral asked him any questions about touching a dead person. They have loved him and are grateful for care he has given to the man who deserved every bit.

The funeral is ended and the casket is loaded into the Hurst.

When the guests arrive to the burial everything is in place thanks to Chandler. He has set up the microphone, making it easy to bless the area. This son will rest till it rises to the east, never to be separated from body

again.

The humming of the computer breaks the echoing silence of the office. Organized desks align the room. A family is scheduled to come and make arrangements for their dear sister who passed two nights ago. She died in her home and was picked up and brought to be embalmed ready for viewing and follow again the steps above.

Hours later he hears footsteps ahead, Britney Spears latest hit Circus playing down the hall way and laughing from the floors below. He sits in a corner of a brown couch and observes the multi colors and shades of pink surrounding him.

One of the girls asks him in disgust "why do you touch dead bodies?"

He doesn't ponder to answer, as he gets the repeating question of his choice of profession. "If you died right now would it be gross to touch you?" He waits and continues. "Should I just leave you there and not try to help you because you are dead?"

There is no argument.

Beaming over the white-blanketed mountains appears the sun. It falls onto a 1985 Toyota 4Runner inside is leather glove gripping the steering wheel. Its pair follows the demands of switching the gears.

### **Grief with Death**

Dale Crane an embalmer responds to grieving. "It is simple I am just

like everybody else. When my wife's mother died I do not think I felt any different than her other son in laws. I have embalmed and prepared for church members. I separate my work and the job that needs to be done and that I am trained and counted on to do with my memories of them and the admiration I have for them and the blessing they have been to the Crane family. It is like a Mom gets to love her kids but there are also dirty diapers with it. I am still a regular person with all the same emotions and needs and everyone else."

Professor Donald Gustafson said that unlike sorrow and regret, grief is directed to the loss of the lives of person. The strength of this emotion is difficult to explain if the loss which is it's cause and object is not of something irreplaceable, unique, in short, person like.

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Chaplain Glenn Davis, a County Sheriff Officer addressed professionals who deal with victims of traumatic grief. Dealing with survivors of a murder victim takes more than compassion -- it requires proper training in what to say and how to say it, Davis said. Otherwise, he cautioned, more harm than good may result (Davis)

Sometimes, he said, a grieving family member may not want to talk, and the silence should be respected.

"You don't have to fill the silence with details,' he said. At other times, they want to share their feelings, and it's important to be a good listener, he said.

Davis tries not to tell a grieving person what they should or should not do, and tries to remain as non-judgmental as possible.

"Few things tax the resources of clergy and other professional caregivers more than ministering to the needs of the traumatized -- those survivor-victims whose lives have been forever changed by violence, crime and disasters of all kinds,' Davis said.

"When you become a victim of this type of trauma, emotions are piled upon rage on top of sadness, guilt and despair. Survivor reactions can sometimes be so intense and repulsive that friends, co-workers and sometimes even family members want to back away and feel powerless in terms of how to respond and help," he said. "This often leads to the survivor-victims feeling further isolated, misunderstood and ostracized on many levels," Davis said.

But the role of the religious community, as well as mental health and other groups, is particularly important, he said, "Because no social institution is so crucial for so many people in times of crisis or transition as their church/parish."

### **Becoming**

Sometimes our career choice is changed by a certain circumstance.

Dale Crane an Embalmer says "My brother got sick with cancer at age 4 and

died at age 7. For 3 years he suffered with pain but also the indignities that go along with bloating, losing all body hair, inability to control bowels etc...His appearance near the end was freighting. I was 15 when he died and being a witness to all this I was still shocked when he died.

You would think I would have prepared better or seen it coming but denial is normal and I guess a protection as well. When he died there were relatives at our house, people coming over all hours, and Chaos. My Dad was the Bishop or leader of our ward and we had Stake leaders and people I had never met from a cancer care group that my Mom took part in. My Dad's response to this was don't say anything to upset Mom so we had to pretend nothing happened and we were reminded that we were boys and older brothers and could not let Mom see that we were sad. His answer to this was to keep doing our chores and added an extra measure so there was not time for hanging around the house.

Thirty minutes after being told he had died I was instructed to take my 2 brothers and go dig postholes and repair a corral. The morning of the funeral I got up 2 hours earlier so I could get a field plowed and he said "the funeral is at Noon try to get this field done by 11 and that will give you time to get a shower and at the church by 11:45." I got there at 11 because I wanted to see my brother before a lot of other people were there. He looked wonderful. He seemed as though a lot of pain and problems were gone. And the funeral home staff were nice to my Mom and Dad they seemed to bring order and purpose to my out of control world and somebody for once helped my brother this was important because I felt the Medical people always talked of finding a cure and doing all kinds of wonderful new treatments,

I felt they could have done more to help his pain and that their promises were a betrayal. (I was only 15 mind you, but that is how I felt). I knew very little about Mortuary work but I knew I would have to peruse this work without any support from my Dad. My Mom and I in later days discussed ways in which the Mortuary Staff helped all of us. I think this formed my ambition to proceed with my career. I went to San Francisco College of Mortuary Science because the staff of the hometown Mortuary that helped us went there and I had some contacts for a part time job before school started.”

Chandler has will have completed his associates in science and then he will been accepted to a program, completed an internship, completed requirements of the state and state licensing board for the time of his graduation. Passed the state’s Board to receive the embalming license and work at any funeral home in the state.

There are about 21,528 funeral homes in the United States. According to the 1997 U.S. Census of Service Industries, 16,031 have payrolls beyond their owners.

These funeral homes employ 103,258 individuals and generate about \$11 billion in revenue, creating a significant economic impact in America's cities, towns and villages; 68,258 are non-licensed funeral service and crematory personnel; 35,000 are licensed funeral professionals and eligible for NFDA membership.

Eighty-nine percent or 19,160 of these funeral homes are owned by individuals, families or closely held private corporations and average 66 years



in business. Eleven percent, or approximately 2,368 of these funeral homes, are owned by one of five publicly traded stock corporations.

The average NFDA funeral home handles 182 calls per year: Some handle fewer than 50 calls per year and are often run by husband and wife; others handle hundreds of calls and may be owned by small companies or large corporations.

The average NFDA funeral home has three full-time and three part-time employees. The average cost of a funeral, as of July 2004, is \$6,500. That cost includes an outer burial container, but does not include cemetery costs (NFDA)

### **Family life**

As much as we think the world that we create around us doesn't affect anyone but ourselves we fooling ourselves.

As Dale Crane an embalmer in Oakland, California has come to find family is important. He says "Wow, if you want a 9-5 job, run from this. Death is a very selfish event. When the phone rings and the person calling you says "our Mom is on the floor in the kitchen with blood coming out of her mouth and she is ice cold and smells bad" they do not care that your family is sitting down to Sunday dinner, Christmas dinner, a picnic with the kids at the park.

They only want you to come to help and that is what you always do. It is a very hard job on family life and my wife Joan has been remarkable. The

smartest thing I ever did was drag her into this and she loves it too. It affects the whole family. You do not get to go to your kids' soccer game because some other kid got hit by a car riding his bike to his game. There are a lot of sacrifices to make.”

“My dad was very paranoid about everything. If you chew gum you can choke and die. If he had it his was when we went to a swimming pool we'd be wearing life jackets. He was paranoid about us dying; He's just been so close to death that he thinks it is easy to die” Bryce Woodhouse.

Chandler will one day come home to his family. For now he walks in from his long day and finds the familiar roommates on the couch this time their hands embrace the controls of the play station. Chandlers goes upstairs prepares for bed, sets his alarm and tucks himself into bed in preparation for the next day or who may pass in the night.