

# *Perspective 2009*

## **Annual Newsletter of the Memorial Society of Kitchener-Waterloo and Area**

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### **Annual General Meeting**

Monday, June 1, 2009 at 2:00 p.m.

**Rockway Centre**

1405 King St. East, Kitchener

**All Members and Guests are Welcome!**

Presenter: **Rev. John Barker**

Topic: **Why Join a Memorial Society?**

John Barker is a director of the KW Memorial Society and vice-president of the Federation of Ontario Memorial Societies—Funeral Consumers' Alliance. He is a former member of the Funeral Advisory and Memorial Society of Saskatchewan and is a retired United Church minister. The church he served conducted 70 funerals or memorial services in his last full year of ministry. As a widower and minister, John brings both personal and work experience to discussions of Memorial Society activities.

We are pleased that John is one of our members and we are fortunate that he takes an active role in serving as a director of our Memorial Society. Please join us to hear John reflect on his experiences— some sad, some funny— as he discusses the value of Memorial Societies. “I did a lot of reflecting on how grieving people said goodbye to those they loved,” says John. “The deceased who did thorough planning and had discussions with those they loved gifted the ones who grieved.”

#### **Other Business: Election of Directors for the Board**

There are vacancies on the board. Members are encouraged to volunteer for election.

A brief board meeting will follow in order to select board positions.

### **Seeking New Members through Public Education**

Although new memberships and donations decreased year over year, the KW Memorial Society gained two valuable board members— John Barker and Allan Grose. Coincidentally, both are retired clergymen. Their experience and ease with public speaking will help our Society with its main initiative for 2009; our Society is actively seeking new members and both John and Allan

are available for public presentations about the role of Memorial Societies. Please let us know if you think that your club, association, or other organization could benefit from learning more about how we can help people.

Jeff Bryce,  
President, Memorial Society of Kitchener-Waterloo

## Before You Die

My wife, Nan, was terminally ill with cancer for over two years. We were close and talked a lot about her death. In the midst of it all, she was concerned with my well being after she died. It is over four years since Nan died and I value those discussions more and more. I know both personally and from my work conducting funerals the importance of communication and planning ahead to ease grief.

Planning for our own deaths and discussing these plans with family and close friends seems morbid and negative: something to be avoided. But we are all going to die and if we do not get it right the first time there is no second chance! Planning brings relief and assurance for the one who planned: you do not have to worry about that one anymore! There is also relief for those responsible to plan your funeral, manage your will, and administer what happens to your assets and goods. Furthermore planning almost always means significant savings around funerals and the legal costs of administering your will.

Do you have a will? Have you named a continuing power of attorney for property? Have you named a power of attorney for personal care? Do you want modern medicine to continue to keep you alive when you have no hope of restored health? Do you want family and the one with power of attorney for personal health to know your wishes as to when to let you die?

The three documents just named— your will, power of attorney for property, and power of attorney for health care— ought to be considered essential for every adult over the age of eighteen. What a favor you do for those you love when these three are prepared and known to your family!

Have you preplanned your funeral? The Memorial Society can provide a lot of information to assist your planning. If you are like me, saving money is important. Our Memorial Society has an arrangement with a funeral director for basic services, and we remain vigilant about arranging contracts with other funeral service providers in our area. A basic set of services, known as a transfer service in the death care industry, can cost about \$1300, or less than a quarter the cost of an average funeral. If you want an elaborate funeral you can easily spend ten to fifteen thousand dollars or more.

I know from personal experience how empowering it is when the one who died decided ahead what he or she wanted. There is no guilt trip involved in buying mom just basic service when she was emphatic that is all she wanted. Mom wanted her family and not the funeral industry to have her inheritance. There is comfort and satisfaction in knowing we did what she asked. It was easy to say “no” to sales talk that suggested we buy mom the best. As a clergyman who conducted many funerals I have heard parallel stories from many families. I have heard people in hindsight regret how much they spent on a funeral. I have never heard anyone regret that they spent too little. It is smart to shop around for the best price. Even in death we love a bargain!

There is a growing trend away from burial towards cremation. In Ontario, ashes or cremains may be scattered on your own property, on other private property with the owner's permission, and on crown land without permission. Families have lots of options and often find ways to be creative. Nan had us throw her ashes to the wind from the top of a high hill that was conveniently crown land. I have seen mom's ashes buried in her jewelry box and dad's ashes buried in his fishing tackle box. In both cases the choice was appropriate to the person and no money was spent on an expensive urn.

There is a growing trend away from funeral services to memorial services. Memorial services allow people more flexibility in planning. People who are secular or are religious in non-traditional ways have freedom to do what is right for them. Memorial services can happen soon after death or at some time later when weather is better or relatives from a distance can come. An old man who was not religious but was a connoisseur of single malt Scotch died. Family and friends met in his home to remember and talk about him while sipping on his collection of Scotch. In celebrating a life, do what is best for you and apologize to no one for doing it!

I am at a stage in life where decisions need to be made about who gets what, especially around family heirlooms. Asking children, their spouses, and my grandchildren what they want makes sense. Hard feelings, disputes, and even court cases are common following the death of a family member. A woman who wanted her mother's tea caddy was unnecessarily upset when her brother sold it.

All the planning you do and all the documents you prepare need to be readily available to your executor and to your family. Your doctor is one who should have a copy of your health care directive. Persons holding power of attorney need copies of those documents beforehand.

While your will deals with the future disposition of property and possessions, many matters need immediate attention at the time of death. Does your executor and do family members who will administer your funeral have the names and addresses of your lawyer, financial advisor, and the accountant who prepares your tax returns? Does family have a copy of your prearrangement with a funeral home or transfer service? Do they know where the deeds for property are? Who has the right to get into your safety deposit box?

Communicate with those you love, keep things simple, and make your passing easy to administer. Grief is hard enough without the red tape created by planning not done and documents not found.

John Barker,  
Director, Memorial Society of Kitchener-Waterloo  
Vice-President, FOOMS-FCA

## A Review of “Grave Matters”

*Grave Matters: A Journey through the Modern Funeral Industry to a Natural Way of Burial* by Mark Harris is a highly readable and thought-provoking book that encourages North Americans to take back control of the funeral experience from the mortuary establishment. The book offers strategies which will save thousands of dollars and promote funeral practices which are more personal, meaningful, and environmentally responsible.

It is likely safe to say that the majority of people have only the vaguest of ideas of what the embalming of a dead body entails. Chapter 1— The Embalming of Jenny Johnson— remedies that, as the author presents thorough and graphic details of the physical process and its costs. Reading this chapter should convince most people to opt out of the practice! It is ironic that this highly invasive and “unnatural” desecration and mutilation of a person’s bodily remains is undertaken (at great expense) in order to give a corpse the “natural” appearance (for a brief interval) of being asleep rather than dead. Public viewing, commonly referred to as “visitation”, is by no means obligatory, and is increasingly being bypassed as an unduly morbid and draining experience for surviving family members. If preservation of the body for an extended period before burial is necessary, refrigeration is an acceptable alternative to embalming.

Chapter 2— After the Burial— chronicles the advent of modern embalming and burial practices that emerged in America at the close of the Civil War (1861-1865). It details the exorbitant consumption of resources involved and alludes to a vast array of chemicals used in embalming— arterial fluids, cavity fluids, co-injection fluids, non-arterial preservatives, solvents, sealants, adhesives, cosmetics, cleansing products, antiseptics, disinfectants, deodorizers, tissue builders, feature builders, etc.— up to 600 different products.

The author points out that a typical ten-acre patch of modern cemetery “functions less as a verdant resting ground of the dead than as a landfill for the materials that infuse and encase them.” It is likely to contain “enough coffin wood to construct more than forty houses, nine hundred-plus tons of casket steel, and another twenty thousand tons of vault concrete... a volume of formalin sufficient to fill a small backyard swimming pool and untold gallons of pesticide to help keep the graveyard preternaturally green.” In the US, according to Harris, “on a given day, twenty-seven hundred licensed embalmers... will each wheel a newly deceased family member into their prep rooms and there ply their trade.... Twice nearly every minute, on average, a preservative-filled body will then be sealed inside a casket that’s sealed inside a vault and topped with a ton of dirt that’s all but prevented from ever reaching it.”

So much for the meaning of the words of committal: “ashes to ashes, dust to dust”! Every effort has been made to “provide a last line of defense against mother nature”, to prevent the body from rejoining the elements of the earth from which it originally came. Yet none of this will more than temporarily delay the process of decay and disintegration that inevitably must come.

The modern funeral has become so entrenched and routine that most families believe it’s all but obligatory. It is not. In the section on Natural Burial, Harris explores the alternatives and prioritizes them based on environmental friendliness and sustainability. The final seven chapters profile some dozen families who looked for— and found— more meaningful and “natural” methods of dealing with their dead “outside the slumber rooms and ersatz parlors of their hometown funeral homes”.

Allan Grose,  
Director, Memorial Society of Kitchener-Waterloo

### Memorial Society of Kitchener-Waterloo and Area

120 Ottawa Street North Box 43133  
Kitchener ON N2H 6S9

### Membership: Join or Update

- Enclosed is a cheque for \$ \_\_\_\_\_ (\$20.00/person) for lifetime membership.
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## Board of Directors 2008-09

President: Jeff Bryce  
 Secretary : Shirley Cross  
 Treasurer: Margaret Barker

Directors:  
 John Barker  
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## Financial Statement at December 31, 2008

**\$ 712.43 Income**— Donations, Membership Fees, Bank Account Interest  
**\$1,671.47 Expenses**— Newsletter Publication, FOOMS-FCA Support, Postage, Etc.

“Statements checked and found to be in order.” — Kurt Wilken, April 6, 2009

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 120 Ottawa Street North Box 43133  
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### Thank You for your Donation

- Enclosed is a cheque for \$ \_\_\_\_\_ as a donation.
- Name \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone \_\_\_\_\_
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- My name may be published on the List of Donators in next year’s newsletter.
- I am interested in sitting on the Board of Directors. Please contact me.