

Laying to Rest: A Moral Argument for Green Burial

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Preface

Green or natural burial is a way of burial that seeks to minimize the negative impact of traditional burial practices on the environment, leading to a more environmentally conscious way to care for the dead. The goal is to allow the body to return to the earth in a timely, personal, and natural way.

Typical of a green burial, the body is not embalmed, which means that it is not treated with chemicals to preserve it. The body is instead covered in a biodegradable shroud or encased in a biodegradable coffin often made of cardboard, wicker, or pine. The burial site is chosen with the environment in mind. These burials are frequently performed in specified green burial grounds, often found in picturesque natural environments like meadows or woodlands. Traditional headstones are typically avoided and replaced by a simple natural marker, like a tree, natural rock, or plant, which is used to mark the site.

There are many benefits to being buried 'green'. From an environmental standpoint, green burial is a more ecologically sound option than traditional burial, as it avoids the use of toxic chemicals and materials that can harm the environment. By allowing the body to naturally decay and return to the earth, green burials play a role in the ecosystem and soil quality. Green burial can also be a more affordable choice compared to conventional burial, as it avoids the need for expensive caskets, embalming, burial vaults, and is more self-guided. Green burial fosters a sense of connection with the natural world, as the body is returned to the earth, providing loved ones with a sense of peace and continuity. It can also foster feelings of intimacy as friends and family members often help with the burial, such as caring for the dead immediately after death, helping to dig the grave, or planting a tree or flowers at the burial location. Finally, green burial offers a beautiful way to conserve the land, as green burial sites are often situated in natural settings that are protected from development. In recent years, green burial has grown in popularity as more people look for environmentally sound and sustainable options for end-of-life sendoff ^[1].

Green burial can provide a more environmentally sustainable, cost-effective, and spiritually meaningful option for caring for someone at the end of life, while also promoting familial closeness, land conservation, and a deeper connection to earth.

Part 1

A Reverent Goodbye: Burial in a Dignified Manner

John's Last Wishes: Finding Value in the Face of Mortality

I first laid eyes on John Georgis in October of 2017 when I was peering out my window and I watched some guy rev up onto the sidewalk, toss my Mom onto the back of his

motorcycle, and take off! Just moments before I had seen her hauling down the stairs with a look that was more excited than I had ever seen her. Seeing her run off so excited, was the last thing I wanted to see as an adolescent man, I despised it, but I knew he was a pure character, unique and badass.

John had many beautiful ideas. He was a creative advocate for the weird and meaningful. He made his money through fascinating successful business ventures, most notably: Banjo Billy's Bus Tours which guided you across his mecca of Boulder, Colorado in a bus that more resembled a gypsy's barn than it did the school bus it once was. Outfitted with horse saddles, couches, lazy boy rockers, and just about anything but a regular seat, he would tell you not the boring history that make so many people dread guided tours, but rather the weird, fantastic history of Boulder you would never know without him. With a memory like an elephant, public speaking skills of a Toastmasters President, and social skills like you've never seen in your life he would retort the most wonderful information both on his tours and with his friends.

This wasn't the only business idea John had. He had another that he had quit his job to research, ultimately hoping to pursue in the coming years of his life. This was green burial, which aligned with John's values: protecting the environment, searching for personal meaning and connection, and a lower price tag than modern burial. He had spent the better part of two years researching and developing a plan.

Our Story

When John came into our family, he completed our lives, as my mom and I have never really had a true family. Our lives were lonely and incomplete and only changed when we met John. Like so many others before, John included us and loved us unconditionally. John was kind, fun, both interesting and interested, but most of all John was loving. He loved my Mom, he loved his family, he loved his friends, and he loved me. We created an amazing family. John made our family whole.

Some number of years later, in November of 2020 John was diagnosed with stage four prostate cancer. This was devastating, as the doctor gave us a timeline of 5-10 years. He

was fortunate enough to complete a round of chemo and live life like he always had for some time. Unfortunately, about a month after his diagnosis, more information was given and his timeline was cut short: he was now only given one year to live. With his health deteriorating he said goodbye to skiing, mountain biking, and everything else he held dear. Many family dinners were spent crying and giving our appreciation for John.

John was the role model I had long been looking for, he seemed to hold similar values, and we got along because of this. Throughout high school I had a couple of minimum wage jobs and none of them would ever last all that long because I despised the work and thought my time was worth more. Around the same time, I had discovered the beautiful online marketplace of Craigslist. At first, I started buying and selling furniture, next was bikes, and I graduated to cars shortly after. By the time I was 20 I had sold well over 100k\$ online. I was well over any minimum wage for about a quarter of the time spent. John had seen this trajectory and valued our similarities.

Sometime later with continuous visits to the doctor, he was re-diagnosed with only months to live. And as the pattern followed a month later, we were diagnosed to weeks, and finally again to days. From November to August, we went from believing he had upwards of a decade to a couple of days, no one knew how to acclimate.

Throughout this challenging period, John's generosity remained unwavering as he donated thousands of dollars to friends, family, and animal shelters. He gifted me two things: his cherished watch and a choice. He expressed his desire to leave me with a meaningful present, offering either a modest amount of money for me to travel the world after college, as he had done, or a more substantial sum to fuel my entrepreneurial spirit and launch a green burial business that he never had the chance to start. I made my decision, and with an additional \$75,000 and a seemingly foolproof business concept, my life was substantially changed.

Shortly after his body started to deteriorate. The cancer was metastasizing into his bones, and he needed to choose where he wanted to be buried, rooted so heavily in natural burial he was just looking for the best natural opportunity. Fortunately, one of our family friends

had a property west of Boulder in the mountains. It was just north (over the hill) of a quaint mountain town by the name of Jamestown west of Boulder just tucked into the foothills. On the property there was a beautiful mountainous hill; to the east you could see Boulder, CO the town John spent the better part of his life and cherished so much, then if you turned around to the west you could see the Indian peaks that make part of the continental divide; it was beautiful. When we visited the site John brought a camping mattress up there and I remember him laying on it with my mom experiencing the nature and view his family and friends get every time they visit John today. It was peaceful, calm, and beautiful, full of flowers, and wildlife. It held everything he wanted in a burial site. Watching John lay there made us all happy and gave us peace in the decision that John was making both for us and himself. Our friend generously offered him the option to be buried there and so he was.

In the following days, John began to lose control of his body and his cognitive ability. You could tell he was slipping and ready to let go but he held out for my little sister's birthday which is a memory we will all hold forever, showing his generosity one last time. I recall him loopily smiling and taking pictures of this moment, not quite able to use his phone he still fought to make every moment valuable.

A Time of Transition: Cherishing the Final Moments with John

The next couple of days were a rapid transition for John from having a sense of natural lively vibrance to the stillness of leaving the body behind. While John was completely bed ridden my mom and I would spend our days laying with him, cherishing him, and holding him trying to internalize the last moments of grace he gave us. Then on April 15th of 2020, my mom and I were in the room and John's breathing started to slow until he was faintly gasping. Although unresponsive, you could tell he was waiting. My Mom and I, crying, told him it's okay to let go and in a matter of seconds we heard his last agonal breath, a sign that his brain had let go and he was no longer with us. Beginning our process of caring for John's body.

The Enduring Legacy of John: Meaning and Purpose in the Wake of Death

It was time to clean him and prepare him for burial. Fortunately, we had done our research on what needed to happen. He died with his eyes and mouth open, and we wanted to ensure that they were closed before rigor mortis took over so my mother with her loving touch held his eyes closed for a minute, then we used a buff that tied under his chin to hold his mouth closed for a couple of hours until his features had set. My mom then shaved his face for the last time, and we called his family to come help us with moving his body. Once his family arrived, they were able to help undress him and place him in a cotton shroud that was packed with pouches of lavender which made the room explode with a peaceful floral smell. After he was undressed the men of the family lifted him up and placed him in the shroud, my mom placed the items he wanted to be buried with, hair from his 3 dogs, a small swatch of my mom's favorite sweatpants, and a picture of the two of them together. Then the shroud was tied, and we lifted him off the bed and into a long cardboard box which we kept ice in and on top of, to slow the decay of the body. The burial site had already been picked, and the grave dug, so we called the friends and told them we would be headed up the next morning.

That evening was tough, I recall rummaging through his liquor cabinet and finding his favorite whiskey. There was just enough left for me to take a shot, and then another for John. I then began writing his eulogy, falling asleep reminiscing about his character and everything he had told and shown me.

After falling asleep, I woke up and his family had arrived. We ate a small breakfast together while John was laying on the floor in the other room. We all picked him up and laid him in my Mom's Winnebago which he had loved and went on so many adventures in. My mom drove that old VW van up to Jamestown allowing for one more adventure together and everyone else followed behind. As we got to the top of the mountain everyone helped unload John and place him in his natural grave, we then shared our writing for John, used shovels to fill the grave, and had a picnic. It was a peaceful exit to a life: a fulfilling and natural one.

During our picnic we shared some of John's storytelling and ate his favorite foods, drinks, and whiskey, knowing we're leaving him in a peaceful, beautiful place, buried in the way he always wanted to be.

The following days my mom and I went back to say hi to John and hiked the surrounding the mountainous property and cherished the beauty of the land. Within a couple of weeks we also had his memorial, which was located at a bluegrass, open field river location in Lyons, CO where all of his friends and family came to celebrate his life. There was a lot of laughter, a lot of sadness, but a lot of relief that we did everything John wanted and that all of his friends were still able to reunite. A few people spoke, his brother-in-law, my mother, me, and his best friend Todd Kanta, and we knew John would be happy.

Years later I still visit John, I visit John to experience the nature of that place to remember his values and character. I feel his presence there. Sometimes I bring my car up and sleep in the back of it right next to John. I read there and pour some liquor on his grave. The beauty of it all is that I get to experience what I love most while visiting John, being immersed in nature and existential thought. The last time I went, there were natural flowers sprouting on his grave, with bees pollinating and butterflies fluttering.

Part 2

Modern Burial: An Ethical Dilemma

It's crucial to think about how our end-of-life decisions affect the environment, our communities, and ourselves as we continue to face the difficulties of a changing world. While modern burial customs frequently give families a sense of finality and tradition, they can also have a number of drawbacks that should be understood when arranging these plans. When choosing end-of-life care there are many things to consider, from the ethical and emotional ramifications of modern burial methods to the environmental impact of non-biodegradable materials and embalming fluids. Additionally, families seeking to carry out the final desires of a loved one may encounter disagreements or challenges due to the cultural and religious beliefs that surround current burial customs. In this context, it's valuable to look at the morality of burial customs and to consider more environmentally sustainable alternatives that can lessen the negative impacts on both the environment and our communities. With this consideration, we may make better judgments about our own end-of-life care and contribute to a healthier and more sustainable world.

Environmental Impact

When it comes to the use of non-biodegradable materials and embalming fluids, modern burial methods have a considerable negative influence on the environment. Traditional burial techniques frequently entail the use of non-biodegradable materials that can take decades or even centuries to degrade ^[2], such as metal caskets and concrete vaults. These non-biodegradable materials utilized in contemporary burial techniques have a number of detrimental effects on the environment. Metal coffins and concrete vaults, for instance, can eat up important land in cemeteries, causing a lack of vegetation and habitat degradation. These substances can also stop the body from decomposing naturally, which causes waste to accumulate in the soil ^[3]. As a result, natural habitats that depend on fertile soil and clean water may be altered, causing long-term harm to ecosystems.

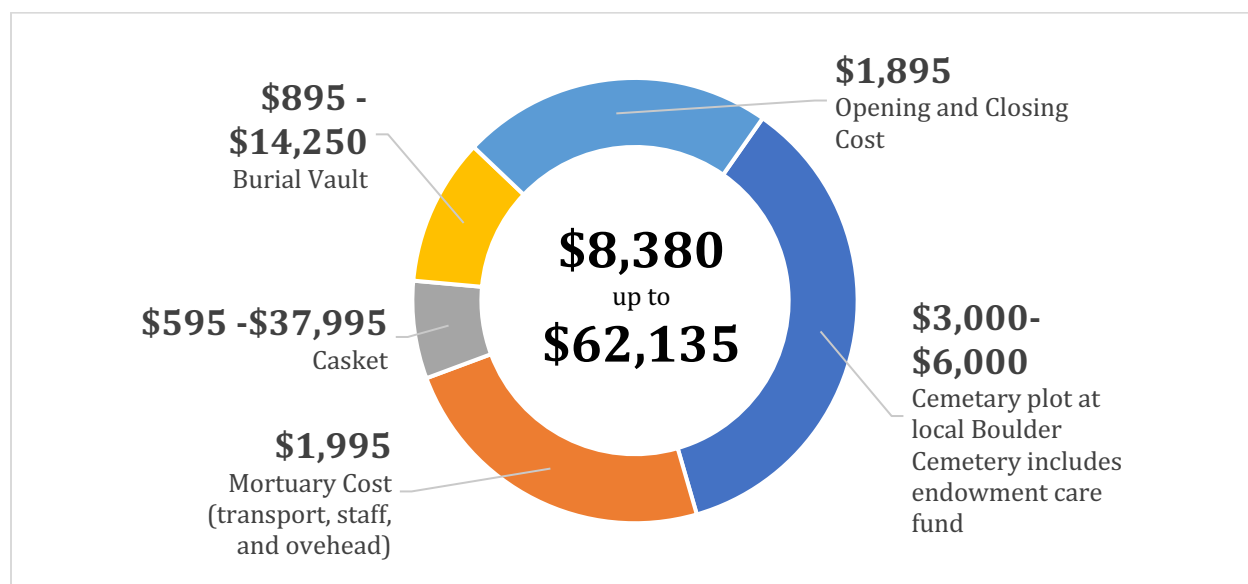
Environmental impacts may also result from the embalming procedure, which includes injecting chemicals into the body to stall the process of decomposition. Formaldehyde,

methanol, and other hazardous compounds are frequently found in the fluids, used to embalm bodies [4]. These liquids leak into the earth and soil, polluting groundwater and endangering wildlife. The use of these materials and embalming fluids can also cause the release of greenhouse gases [5]. Carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases contributing to climate change often result from the fabrication and transportation of coffins and other burial supplies.

Cost

Due to the high expense of caskets, grave sites, headstones, and additional services, modern burial customs can be extremely expensive for many families, making end-of-life care prohibitively expensive. For those who are already struggling financially, this weight may be very difficult. The typical cost of a modern burial in the United States varies widely based on the region, the funeral home, and the particular services needed. According to the National Funeral Directors Association, in 2019 (on average) a funeral with a casket and vault cost \$9,135 [6]. This cost does not account for cemetery costs like headstones or burial plots, which can increase the total by thousands of dollars.

Greenwood and Meyers Mortuary, Boulder, CO as of September 2015



The casket itself, which can cost anywhere from several hundred to several thousand dollars depending on the materials, design, and workmanship, is a major contributor to these high expenditures. The total cost of a contemporary funeral might be greatly increased by various preparation procedures such as embalming, in addition to the coffin. Families may also pay a significant fee for services that are not provided as planned, in addition to the high cost of modern burial. The quality of a casket or other products may be misrepresented, or unreasonable prices may be charged for services that are not essential by funeral homes or other service providers in some situations.

Some funeral homes and other service providers have been discovered to use unethical or unlawful methods in a number of high-profile situations in recent years. For instance, it was discovered in 2018 that a funeral company in Detroit had been issuing fake death certificates and other fraudulent services while simultaneously keeping the bodies of the deceased in an unrefrigerated garage ^[7]. In another instance, it was discovered that a funeral home in Illinois had mixed up the bodies of multiple deceased people, resulting in a botched burial and other issues ^[8]. Families may find it challenging to manage end-of-life care with confidence and peace of mind due to the high cost and lack of transparency of modern burial and the possibility of unethical or unlawful procedures. As a result, many families are switching to less expensive and environmentally friendly options like cremation or natural burial.

Ethical Impact

Many people are becoming increasingly concerned about the ethics of contemporary funeral customs, especially those who value the conservation of natural resources and respect for the deceased. Due to its invasiveness and use of possibly dangerous chemicals, embalming in particular has drawn criticism. The overall environmental impact of contemporary burial techniques as well as the moral questions raised by them are complex and multifaceted.

The ethical ramifications of embalming are one of the biggest worries associated with contemporary burial customs. As mentioned earlier, embalming is the practice of infusing

chemicals into a body to momentarily halt the process of decomposition, enabling a viewing or open casket funeral. Formaldehyde-based embalming chemicals harm both the environment and the embalmer. Since formaldehyde is a known carcinogen, it can lead to cancer and other less severe health risks, such as skin irritation and respiratory problems from exposure. Workers at funeral homes and embalming facilities who handle formaldehyde-based chemicals routinely run the risk of exposure, which may have detrimental short-term and long-term effects on their health [9].

In the funeral business, modern embalming has been a standard procedure for more than a century. While the goal of embalming may be to present the body in a more aesthetically pleasing manner for viewing purposes, the procedure itself is neither delicate nor respectful. The violence and grotesqueness of contemporary embalming can be extremely upsetting.

Along with the health risks, embalming is regarded by many people as intrusive and disrespectful to the dead. Embalming entails removing human fluids and using non-biodegradable materials, which can be viewed as disrespectful to the body. The body is revered in various cultures and faiths and deserves to be treated with the utmost care. Embalming might be considered as a violation of this concept due to its use of invasive methods and chemicals.

The placement of the body is the first step in the embalming procedure. When necessary, plastic or cloth materials are used to firmly shut the deceased person's mouth and eyes. To remove any germs or other impurities that might be on the skin, the body is subsequently cleaned with a disinfectant solution. The embalming procedure grows considerably more intrusive after this initial preparation. To pierce the stomach, intestines, and other internal organs, a long, sharp trocar is introduced into the dead person's belly. The gases and fluids that build up throughout the breakdown process are aspirated using this equipment. To make place for the embalming fluid, the trocar is moved around inside the corpse cavity, puncturing and draining the organs as it goes. The vascular embalming procedure can begin once the body's internal organs have been adequately drained. The main blood vessels are exposed by making a sizable incision, usually near the collarbone or the inside

of the thigh. The embalmer then pushes blood out of the body through the veins by using a pump to drive a formaldehyde-based embalming solution through the arteries. This liquid replaces the blood and permeates the body's tissues, acting as a preservative and disinfectant. The procedure is not delicate, and the force applied can lead to tissue injury such as bruising. The body is then submitted to cavity embalming following the completion of arterial embalming. Using the same trocar that was used to penetrate the internal organs, a highly concentrated embalming fluid is now injected into the body cavities. This fluid aids in the preservation of the internal organs and further postpones the process of breakdown. Following the placement of the embalming fluids, the body is ready for cosmetic repair. In order to conceal any blemishes, bruises, or discoloration brought on by the embalming procedure, different materials like wax or makeup may be employed. The hair of the deceased is frequently styled, and their nails may be painted, cleaned, or substituted with fake ones. The sealing of any cuts and puncture holes is the last step in the embalming procedure. To stop any embalming fluid leaks, the body may be sutured closed and a sealant or glue added. In order to retain any lingering fluids or odors, the body may occasionally be wrapped in plastic or put in a body bag ^[10].

It's challenging to fathom the severity of contemporary embalming. The procedure's intrusive nature, the piercing and draining of internal organs, the jarring injection of chemicals, and the cosmetic changes performed to the body offer a horrifying image of what has come to be accepted practice in the funeral business. While embalming could give the appearance of life for a short while, it's important to keep in mind the harsh realities of what the body goes through.

Another major worry with regard to environmental ethics is the use of non-biodegradable materials. Steel, concrete, and plastic are common non-decomposing materials used to construct caskets and vaults. These substances can take millennia to decompose, which causes trash to build up in the environment. The impact of contemporary burial practices on the environment is exacerbated by the manufacture and shipping of caskets and vaults, which adds to carbon emissions.

The ethical implications of contemporary burial customs are, a complicated and multidimensional topic. Embalming is thought to be intrusive, disrespectful, and possibly dangerous to the embalmer as well as the surroundings. Modern burial techniques also add to waste buildup and carbon emissions by using non-biodegradable materials. The high cost of contemporary burial customs may lead to disparities in end-of-life care and ethical conundrums for bereaved families. Modern burial practices raise ethical questions, which underscore the need for more sustainable, respectful, and reasonably priced burial alternatives.

Other Issues

For many families, the emotional toll of modern burial can be enormous. For some, the thought of interring a loved one in a particular place—whether it's a family plot or a particular spot that bears sentimental significance—can be emotionally significant. Modern burial traditions, however, frequently entail buying a burial site in a specific cemetery, which might not be what the family would choose for their loved one's last resting place. This can lead to a feeling of separation from the departed and their wishes, adding further emotional strain to an already trying situation.

For some families, the embalming and preparation of the body for burial can also be upsetting. While embalming is intended to keep the body in good condition for viewing and to stop decomposition, it can also make people feel distant from the deceased. This is due to the fact that the procedure frequently entails the use of harsh chemicals and invasive procedures that change the body's look and normal state, which can be upsetting for some families. Natural burial methods, on the other hand, require little to no preparation of the body and permit a more natural decomposition process, which can be more consoling for families.

Modern funerals may also cause religious and cultural tensions as end-of-life customs can differ greatly based on culture and religion. For instance, some cultures demand that the body be interred within 24 hours of passing away ^[11], which may not be practicable with standard modern burial customs that frequently call for having a funeral service several

days after passing away. For families attempting to respect their loved one's cultural or religious customs, this may present challenges.

Additionally, certain religions forbid the use of embalming agents, which can clash with current burial customs. Jewish law, for instance, forbids the use of embalming agents and mandates that the body be buried as soon as possible after passing away, frequently within 24 hours ^[12]. Jewish families that are attempting to respect their loved one's religious traditions while also handling the practical aspects of contemporary burial rituals may find this challenging.

The usage of elegant and pricey caskets and headstones can lead to another cultural problem that may result from modern burial practices. These objects could be regarded as necessary garbage in certain cultures while serving as significant markers of respect and remembrance in others. It's important to consider how contemporary burial customs affect people emotionally and culturally. When balancing the practical requirements of contemporary burial customs with the aspirations and cultural or religious traditions of their loved one, families may encounter additional emotional distress. Conflicts like these can make an already trying period even more stressful and painful, and they might even inspire families to think about alternative funeral customs that better suit their beliefs and values.

Natural burial, as previously indicated, entails burying the body in a biodegradable coffin or shroud to allow natural decomposition and return to the earth without the use of toxic chemicals. This method reverses the negative environmental effects of modern burial and frequently aids in the restoration of natural habitats, boosting the vitality of the land. Moreover, the growing interest in eco-friendly funeral options has led to an increased interest in other approaches, including cremation.

There are a number of different methods of end-of-life care that entail less impact on the environment. For those who would rather not be buried, cremation is a more environmentally responsible alternative since, while it still releases greenhouse gases, it does so less than modern burial. According to the Green Burial Council, cremation emits

about one-tenth of the carbon emissions produced by a traditional burial ^[13]. However, it is still not considered a completely environmentally friendly option as it requires a significant amount of energy to complete the process and can release pollutants such as mercury from dental fillings. Additionally, a number of businesses now focus on new, more environmentally sustainable methods of interment and cremation, such as using biodegradable urns or making caskets from recyclable materials.

To restate, embalming and modern burial techniques can have a considerable negative influence on the environment, causing deforestation, habitat loss, groundwater contamination, and the production of greenhouse gases, not to mention that they are not very dignified. Although natural burial and other environmentally friendly end-of-life care practices can assist to lessen these effects, more must be done to spread knowledge of the environmental harm caused by modern burial practices and to encourage more sustainable end-of-life care practices. We may lessen our impact on the environment and restore natural habitats by making wise decisions about end-of-life care and selecting more ecologically sustainable options.

Part 3

Green Burial: Honoring the Natural Cycle of Life

Introduction to Green Burial

A green burial is a manner of burial that puts the environment's well-being and natural decay first. It permits a return of human remains to the soil and seeks to bolster rather than deplete it. A green burial involves a number of steps that are different from those in conventional modern burials.

The preparation of the body is the first stage in a green burial. As opposed to traditional burials, green burials don't typically employ embalming because it uses toxic chemicals that could be bad for the environment. Instead, the body is cleaned and placed in a biodegradable shroud or casket made of unfinished wood, wicker, bamboo, or another natural material. These components enable a healthy, environmentally compatible decomposition of the body. The burial itself follows the preparation of the deceased. Green burials frequently take place without the use of concrete liners or vaults in rural areas like meadows or woodlands. To prevent harming the local ecosystem, the burial is normally excavated by hand or with little assistance from machinery. Instead of a standard headstone, the burial may occasionally be commemorated with a straightforward stone or tree. This permits the surrounding area's natural beauty to continue to exist undisturbed.

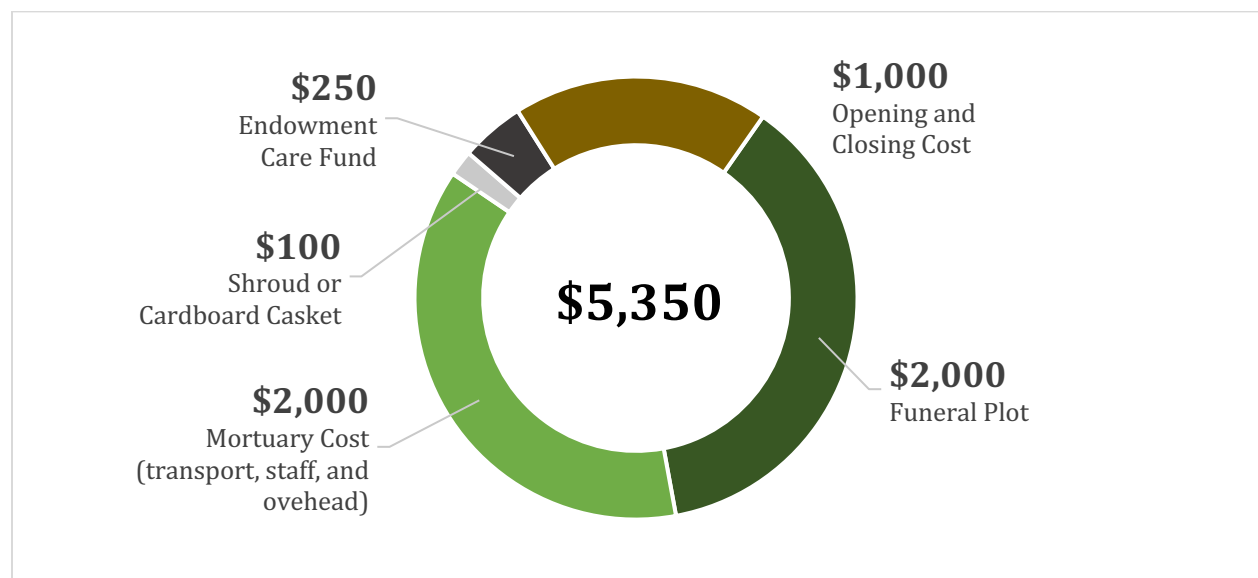
Restoration of the burial place comes after the burial, as the last phase. It is recommended to use native plants and trees since they help to stabilize the soil and provide habitat for nearby species ^[14]. Additionally, non-invasive plants are selected to prevent ecosystem disruption. Sometimes the family will assist in the restoration process by planting and

caring for the plants that will cover the burial site. This can be a heartfelt way to preserve the environment while paying tribute to the memories of a loved one.

The advantages of a green burial over conventional modern burial procedures are numerous. The low impact on the environment is one of the major advantages. Non-biodegradable materials, such as concrete liners or metal or plastic coffins, are not necessary for green burials. This lessens the quantity of waste produced during burial and aids in keeping dangerous chemicals from leaking into the ground.

The price is another advantage of green burial. Given that they don't necessitate pricey caskets, costly headstones, or embalming, green burials are typically less expensive than conventional modern funerals. Families who are struggling financially or who would rather use their funds for other funeral or memorial expenses, such hospice care, may want to take this into consideration. Additionally, a green burial fosters a sense of connectedness to nature. The cycle of life is aided by the body's natural decomposition, which integrates it into the ecosystem. This may be a poignant way to pay respect to the deceased while also helping to protect the environment.

Cost of Green Burial



In addition to the advantages, there are some challenges with green burial that need to be taken into account. The lack of green burial choices in some places is one issue. Being a relatively new idea, not all cemeteries or funeral houses now provide green burial services. As a result, families who want a green burial may have fewer options and may need to travel to find a suitable location.

The absence of guidelines and requirements for green burial is another difficulty. Green burial sites run the risk of being improperly managed or damaging the environment in the absence of clear regulations. Several organizations have created certification programs such as the Green Burial Counsel for green cemeteries to solve this issue. These programs set standards for burial procedures and make sure the site is run sustainably ^[15].

Current Conservation Cemeteries

Name	Date Est.	Location	Acreage	Ownership Structure
Ramsey Creek Preserve	1998	Westminster, SC	10	Proprietor with deed restrictions
White Eagle Memorial Preserve	2008	Goldendale, WA	20	Non-profit land trust
Foxfield Preserve	2008	Wilmot, OH	43	Non-profit conservation organization
Prairie Creek Conservation Cemetery	2012	Gainesville, FL	78	Land trust
Preble Memory Gardens Cemetery	2013	West Alexandria, OH	16	Proprietor
Kokosing Nature Preserve	2015	Gambier, OH	23	Non-profit land trust
Carolina Memorial Sanctuary	2016	Mills River, NC	12	Non-profit conservation easement
Kings Mountain Preserve	2016	Gaston County, NC	50	Non-profit land trust
Casper Creek Cemetery	2019	Pocatello, ID	11	Proprietor with deed restrictions
Baldwin Hill Conservation Cemetery	2020	Winthrop, ME	10	Non-profit

In conclusion, the green burial movement is gaining momentum and provides an alternative to conventional burial customs. A green burial incorporates a number of measures that prioritize minimizing impacts on the environment and allowing for natural decay.

Embracing Natural Death: A Comparative Review of John's and Jenny's Burials

Even though death is an unavoidable aspect of life, there are many different ways we can choose to honor and remember our loved ones. By contrasting these two experiences, I

hope to highlight the differences in the environmental, financial, ethical, and spiritual aspects of each burial method. In this review, I will carefully examine two accounts of death and burial: John's natural burial as described above and Jenny's embalmed open-casket funeral as portrayed in "Grave Matters" ^[16].

John was interred naturally in an effort to leave as little of an environmental footprint as possible. In order to allow for a natural decomposition and the addition of nutrients to the nearby soil, his body was wrapped in cotton and buried under the ground. At his burial, native plants bloomed and animals were offered an environment to visit not avoid, offering a peaceful, natural setting for us to pay respects and reflect on his life. In contrast, formaldehyde and other chemicals were used to preserve Jenny's body during her embalmed open-casket funeral. These substances may contaminate groundwater and destroy nearby ecosystems if they seep into the soil. Additionally, the creation and delivery of her coffin and burial vault used significant natural resources and produced carbon emissions.

Compared to Jenny's embalmed open-casket funeral, John's natural burial was much more affordable. A lower price was made possible by the cardboard coffin, plain cotton shroud, and absence of a burial vault. Additional cost savings came from forgoing embalming services and using our friend's land for the burial place. On the other hand, Jenny's funeral featured embalming, a lavish casket, a burial vault, and a conventional cemetery plot. These factors considerably raised the cost of her burial, burdening her family financially at a time when things were already difficult.

Each burial method has ethical ramifications, which correlate with individual values and beliefs. With a natural burial, John was able to be buried in accordance with his environmental and spiritual beliefs while also having a minimal environmental impact and being buried in a place he loved. By taking part in the funeral ceremony, we felt connected to one another and had a common goal. Jenny's embalmed open-casket funeral followed traditional funeral customs, which may have given her loved ones comfort and familiarity. However, some people may have ethical reservations about traditional funerals due to

their resource-intensive nature and the health and environmental risks linked with the chemicals used in embalming.

For us, John's burial had a profoundly spiritual significance. His gravesite's peaceful, natural surroundings served as a permanent memorial to his appreciation of nature and his spirit of exploration. Our active participation in preparing his body and burying him provided a touching, private ceremony that honored his life and principles. While Jenny's funeral followed tradition, it could have missed some of the sentimental and spiritual aspects the John's burial was able to offer. The carefully controlled setting of a traditional cemetery can come across as impersonal, and the embalming procedure may alienate loved ones from the cycle of life and death.

It is clear from a comparison of John's natural burial and Jenny's embalmed open-casket funeral that the former offers many advantages in terms of the impact on the environment, expense, ethical issues, and spiritual connection. Although a person's choice of burial method may be influenced by personal preferences and cultural standards, natural funerals like John's offer a compelling alternative to traditional funeral customs. By accepting natural death and burial, we may pay tribute to our loved ones in a way that supports a closer relationship to nature and community and is in line with our values.

Ethical Implications

A natural and environmentally beneficial alternative to current funeral customs, green burial has various moral and spiritual advantages. Green burial gives persons who are passing away a chance to interact with nature and take part in the natural cycle of life and death. In a green burial, the body is let to naturally disintegrate and return to the earth, enriching the soil and fostering the rebirth of new life, rather than being chemically preserved and kept in a sealed casket.

A green burial gives the departed's family members the assurance that their loved one was buried in a dignified and respectful way. They can also find consolation in the knowledge that nature surrounds and the burial location will not be affected by subsequent human impacts.

Families may find solace in the depth of the grave and the attention given to the body in a green burial. The body is simply cleansed and put in biodegradable garments or a shroud rather than processed and prepared for display. This simplicity enables a more heartfelt farewell and a closer connection with the deceased. A more individualized approach to death and the funeral process is also provided by green burial. Families can select a burial location that have special significance or meaning for the deceased, such as a private family property or a preferred natural area. A permanent and heartfelt memorial to their loved one can be made by adding natural monuments or plantings to the burial site.

Regardless of one's political or religious views, a green burial provides a method to acknowledge the natural cycle of life and death and to feel connected to the planet. Green burial offers a sense of calm and comfort that is difficult to accomplish with contemporary burial procedures by gently reintroducing the body to the land. In a chaotic and unpredictable period, it gives a means to disconnect from modern life and reconnect with the natural world, giving comfort and a feeling of foundation.

In general, a green burial provides a means to respect both the deceased and the earth, forging a deep and enduring bond between the two. It enables us to return something to the planet that has sustained and supported us throughout our lives, fostering peace and balance in the natural world. In order to find serenity and significance in the cycle of life and death, we can discover a way to connect with something bigger than ourselves through green burial.

Part 4

Alternative forms of Burial: Cremation and Other Innovative Burial Methods

Due to its perceived lesser environmental effect, cost, and variety of memorial options, cremation has grown in popularity in recent years. When contrasting green burial with cremation, a number of variables may make one option more appealing than the other. The price of cremation is a substantial benefit. For many families, cremation is a more cost-effective option because the average cost of a cremation in the United States is significantly less than that of a traditional burial however cremation still has negative environmental effects ^[17]. The procedure contributes to air pollution by releasing greenhouse gases and mercury emissions from dental fillings ^[18]. Green burial, in contrast, has less of an environmental impact because it promotes natural decomposition without producing hazardous pollutants. Families choosing cremation have a variety of memorial alternatives, including spreading cremated remains, storing them in urns, and using the remains to create jewelry or other works of art. Although these choices permit customization, they might fall short of the sentimental connection and sense of place that a green burial might offer. With a green burial, family can pay their loved one a visit in a peaceful, natural setting, forging a stronger bond between the environment and the deceased's memory. In conclusion, cremation offers flexible memorial options as well as financial benefits. For individuals who cherish a strong connection to nature and the deceased, a green burial is still a more eco-friendly choice that can offer a more meaningful emotional experience.

Families may also think about additional non-traditional burial options, each of which has advantages and disadvantages over a traditional burial. The procedure of burying a loved one on family-owned land creates a sense of familiarity and closeness. The first is backyard burial. Since it is dependent on local laws and property ownership, this solution may not be practical for everyone. Additionally, the prospect of moving or selling the property may make this option less desirable than a designated natural burial site.

Another alternative is a Plain Pine Box. Choosing a straightforward, biodegradable casket can be a more cost-effective and environmentally beneficial decision than typical caskets. The environmental effects of embalming, cemetery upkeep, or land use, which are addressed in green burials, are not addressed by this option. Others opt for a home funeral, which offers families a unique opportunity to express their grief and honor the life of their loved one in a private setting. The use of embalming, transportation, and other less environmentally friendly techniques may still be used even if this method creates an emotional connection comparable to that of a green burial. Burial at sea is a more ancient custom that is enjoying resurgence as an alternative for people with deep ties to the sea or nautical traditions. The environmental effects of burial at sea can differ based on elements like the sort of casket or container utilized and local laws, even if it may offer a singular and profound experience. Additionally, it could be difficult for loved ones to visit and pay their respects at a marine site burial due to limited accessibility.

In summary, while alternative burial techniques have their own benefits, green burial maintains a strong balance of environmental responsibility, emotional connection, and simplicity that may appeal to many people looking for a meaningful and environmentally conscious place to bury their loved ones.

Conclusion

The emotional and environmental costs of customary burial practices have come to the attention of an increasing number of people in recent years. As a result, green burial has gained traction and is now a viable option that is both environmentally sustainable and profoundly meaningful. Weighing the advantages and disadvantages of each burial option is crucial when deciding between them. For individuals who seek environmental responsibility, emotional connection, and a return to the natural cycle of life, green burial is an excellent alternative.

Several issues raised by conventional burial methods are addressed by green burial. Green burials make use of biodegradable shrouds or caskets and natural decomposition in place of hazardous embalming agents and non-biodegradable coffins. This enables the body to re-enter the land, feeding the soil and fostering the development of local fauna and plant life. The absence of synthetic materials and embalming chemicals minimizes the risk that the burial process does not pollute the surrounding ecosystem, making it a more sustainable option than traditional techniques.

Green burial can also offer the loved ones of the deceased a profoundly emotional and spiritual experience. A green burial site's natural surroundings generate a sense of peace and connection with nature, allowing for private thought and memory. This close bond with nature can act as an enduring legacy to the deceased's life and principles, offering consolation and support to friends and family as they cope with the loss of the person.

Furthermore, green burial encourages the conservation of natural habitats, as green burial grounds often double as nature preserves or wildlife refuges. This protects valuable ecosystems and provides habitats for native species. Green burial grounds are typically smaller and locally managed, supporting local economies by creating jobs and keeping revenue within the community. Additionally, green burials reduce resource consumption

by eliminating the need for manufacturing or transportation of traditional burial materials like concrete vaults, metal caskets, and elaborate headstones.

Natural burial grounds often have lower maintenance costs compared to conventional cemeteries, as they do not require regular mowing, landscaping, or pesticide use to maintain a manicured appearance. Green burial also promotes public education and awareness, serving as a conversation starter about environmental sustainability, climate change, and resource conservation. This encourages people to make more environmentally-conscious decisions in their own lives.

Green burial grounds may include communal spaces for gathering and remembrance, fostering a sense of community and support among families and community members who have chosen this burial option. Moreover, green burial provides flexibility in memorialization, allowing for a wide range of natural memorial options, such as planting native trees or wildflowers, creating living memorials that grow and evolve over time.

Finally, green burial presents a distinct and persuasive alternative to conventional burial customs. Green burial enables people to pay respect to their loved ones in a profoundly meaningful and environmentally aware way by emphasizing environmental responsibility, emotional connection, and a return to the natural cycle of life. It is crucial to take into account how our decisions will affect the earth even after we pass away as our society continues to struggle with the problems caused by climate change and environmental degradation. By embracing green burial, we can make sure that our last resting place respects and nourishes the ecosystem that has sustained us throughout our lives.

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