WOULD YOU TAKE A SELFIE AT A FUNERAL?

New survey shows funeral trends are evolving, yet people still find the topic too taboo to discuss even with loved ones.

TORONTO, October 13, 2015 - While “funeral selfies” have emerged in popular culture, appearing on Instagram and Tumblr pages, with even President Obama taking one during Nelson Mandela’s memorial service, most people don’t plan to tote a selfie-stick next time they pay their last respects to a loved one. A new survey conducted for Arbor Memorial Services reveals that only five per cent of Canadians polled find the practice acceptable during a funeral. Further, only seven per cent would feel comfortable accessing social media on their phone during a service.

Notwithstanding this social media restraint, funerals are evolving quickly from black-clad, somber gatherings to highly customized, often celebratory events, featuring everything from motorcycle processions to poker tournaments that capture the spirit of the dearly departed. The Arbor Memorial survey revealed that almost half (45 per cent) of Canadians want to customize their own funeral, and the many (53 per cent) envision their end-of-life memorial as a “celebration of life” rather than a mourning.

“Funeral directors have always viewed their role as providing relief, support and an opportunity for reflection to help people through the grieving process, and increasingly that means organizing unique and highly memorable events in advance,” said Brian Snowdon, President and CEO, Arbor Memorial Services. “Regardless of the request, customization is something we always welcomed, and we are experts at it.”

Lack of dialogue

Most survey respondents (68 per cent) claim to have given at least “some thought” to their end-of-life wishes, however an almost equal percentage (60 per cent) haven’t shared those wishes with anyone, leaving their loved ones to figure out all the details once they have passed, and potentially guess at what they would have wanted.

“At Arbor we say there are up to 87 decisions to make, or things to do, in order to plan a funeral, and if nothing has been planned in advance, about 72 hours to get it all done,” says Snowdon. “Ensuring that your wishes are met, and that your friends and family can focus purely on supporting each other, starts with thinking about what you want, and sharing those plans. Today’s modern funeral directors can help.”

The troubling lack of dialogue about funerals was further revealed when survey respondents were asked how much they know about their partners’ or parents’ end-of-life wishes. Nearly 70 per cent admitted they only know basic details of their partner’s funeral preferences, or haven’t discussed the topic at all. Fewer than four in ten (38 per cent) say they know every detail of the parents’ funeral preferences.
Customization can be affordable

“Despite the vital role that a funeral plays in helping people grieve, heal and memorialize a loved one, most people spend much more time planning other milestones in their life,” said Snowdon. “Leaving your funeral plans to others is like giving someone else three days to plan a major life event— it’s a lot to ask during a difficult time.”

Planning ahead can offer significant cost-savings as it ensures the services and products are paid upfront or over time. Being proactive gives individuals the opportunity to decide how they will be remembered, while allowing family members to focus on the grieving process, instead of dealing with the stress of making dozens of decisions.

While every funeral is different, there are basic, important steps that should be observed and customizing certain items, such as flowers, music, the casket, and even catering, can be affordable.

The impending Boomer boom

As Canada’s baby boomers continue to reach retirement age, the cohort is poised to bring their modern perspective to their end-of-life wishes. For instance, the survey showed that more than half (55 per cent) of Canadians aged 55-64 would like their funeral to be a celebration of their life.

“While we might expect that younger adults are the ones who plan to break from tradition, it’s the Baby Boomers that are saying ‘I’ll do it my way, even after death’,” says Snowdon. “Before long, ‘unique’ and ‘customized’ will be the new norm and Arbor has been personalizing our services for nearly seventy years.”

About Arbor Memorial Inc.

Arbor Memorial Inc. is a family-owned Canadian company that provides interment rights, cremations, funerals and associated services to families across the country. Established in 1947, the company now comprises of 92 funeral homes, 41 cemeteries and 27 crematoria. 23 of our cemeteries have full-service funeral homes on premises, offering complete services to our client families. Our highly trained professionals at our funeral homes and cemeteries deliver personalized support and customized services to all Canadian families.

About the Survey

EnviroNics Research conducted a qualitative online survey of 1,033 Canadian adults. The fieldwork was completed between August 14, 2015 and August 17, 2015. Data is weighted on the 2011 Census and is balanced based on age and gender within each region. As online surveys are not random probability samples, no margin of error is cited.
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