

# *“Grave Doubts”*

## *The Ambivalence toward Green Burials in the US*



*Figure 1 Shrouded Body prepared for a green burial*

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Senior Capstone

Professor Horowitz

Spring 2024

Submitted to the School of Liberal Studies  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts

Purchase College  
State University of New York

## *Immortality*

*“Do not stand at my grave and weep,*

*I am not there, I do not sleep.*

*I am in a thousand winds that blow,*

*I am the softly falling snow.*

*I am the gentle showers of rain,*

*I am the fields of ripening grain.*

*I am in the morning hush,*

*I am in the graceful rush*

*Of beautiful birds in circling flight,*

*I am the starshine of the night.*

*I am in the flowers that bloom,*

*I am in a quiet room.*

*I am in the birds that sing,*

*I am in each lovely thing.*

*Do not stand at my grave bereft*

*I am not there. I have not left.”*

*— Mary Elizabeth Frye*

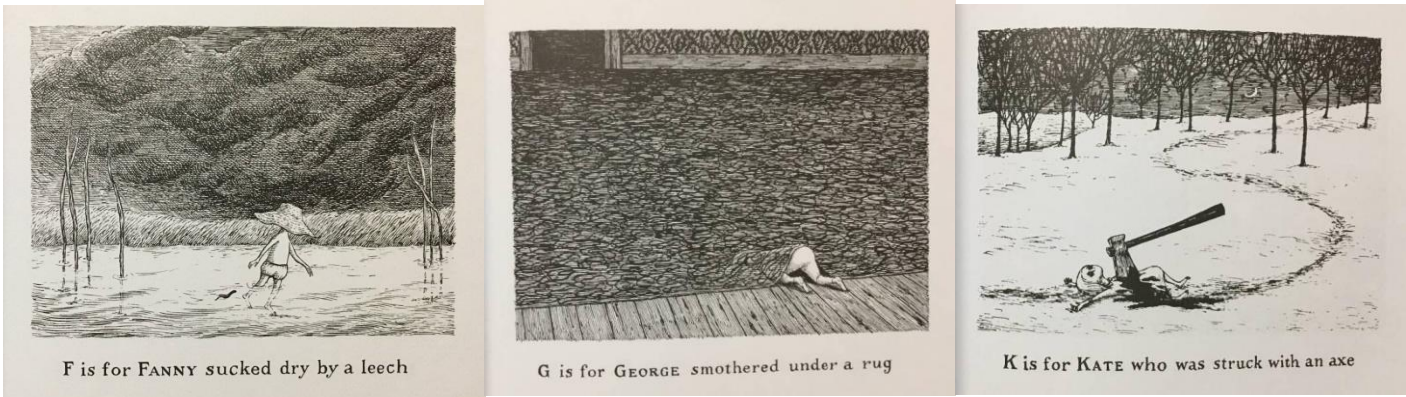
## Dedication

One of my favorite books growing up was called the *Gashlycrumb Tinies*. It was written in 1963 by author and illustrator Edward Gorey. He managed to take death and make it quirky and twisted. His illustrations were epic as well. (I included a few of my favorites below.)

I had a full poster of this book in room growing up and it is still on the wall now in my home. I guess I have always been fascinated by the macabre. I find acknowledging it here to be very appropriate considering my senior capstone could not exist without death.

Thank you to Edward Gorey for bringing out the dark side in me and for making death dark and silly at the same time.

If you have never read this “gory” book—here it is!



A is for Amy who fell down the stairs

B is for Basil assaulted by bears

C is for Clara who wasted away

D is for Desmond thrown out of a sleigh

E is for Ernest who choked on a peach

F is for Fanny sucked dry by a leech

G is for George smothered under a rug

H is for Hector done in by a thug

I is for Ida who drowned in a lake

J is for James who took lye by mistake

K is for Kate who was struck by an axe

L is for Leo who swallowed some tacks

M is for Maud who was swept out to sea

N is for Neville who dies of ennui

O is for Olive run through with an awl

P is for Prue trampled flat in a brawl

Q is for Quentin who sank in a mire

R is for Rhoda consumed by a fire

S is for Susan who perished of fits

T is for Titus who flew into bits

U is for Una who slipped down a drain

V is for Victor squashed under a train

W is for Winnie embedded in ice

X is for Xerxes devoured by mice

Y is for Yorick whose head was knocked in

Z is for Zillah who drank too much gin

## Abstract

American statesman Benjamin Franklin said it best; “*in this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes.*” Death is inevitable and throughout time the rituals associated with disposing of the dead have been a regular part of human culture and society. For centuries communities have developed different methods to part with their loved ones. Today, ceremony and ritual still surround the death disposal process in the United States. In fact, cremation makes up 60.5% of final disposition methods, followed by traditional burials (embalming) at 34.5% and untraditional methods, including natural/green burials at 5% (National Funeral Directors Association). Research has shown that natural/green burials are the best choice in body disposal. The characteristics of a green burial include, no embalming of the bodies, biodegradable caskets, no cement vaults/liners during burial and direct placement of the body into the ground. These methods leave no negative footprint on the environment in comparison to the traditional methods of burial. However, green burials still make up a very small percentage of disposals in the United States. In a world that needs to focus its resources on the protection of future mother earth, it is important that we find out why people are not embracing these methods. This paper will explore these reasons and formulate what can be done to encourage them to embrace the process. Through scholarly peer reviewed research, a local community survey and journalistic interviews of funeral home personnel, the “*grave doubts*” that people currently have will be examined, in the hopes of eventually be resolved.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

*“No one here gets out alive.”*  
— Jim Morrison

Jim Morrison got it right. No one can avoid death. Death is the one thing that every living organism on this planet will experience at some point in time. Flowers die, insects die, animals die, and humans die. It is inevitable. Over time 109 billion people have lived and died on this planet. (Quartz 2023) Disposal of these 109 billion bodies has become an integral part of the human life/death cycle. Various cultural traditions and rites dealing with the disposition of human remains have evolved over time. Currently in the United States cremation makes up 60.5% of body disposal, traditional burials (embalming) 34.5% and untraditional methods, including natural/green burials are at 5% (National Funeral Directors Association). This paper will focus on the top three methods mentioned.

Research has shown that green burials are healthier for the environment, better for the future ecology of the planet, cheaper than traditional disposition methods (embalming and cremation) and often includes a more personal and meaningful expression of closure for the bereaved. People are expressing more interest in learning about green burials. According to the National Funeral Directors Association, in 2022, interest in green burials was up to 60.5%, a 5% raise from the previous year. Why then are these types of burials still currently the lowest utilized? What can be done to encourage people to turn to green burial as a form of disposition of human remains? My research design will include information from secondary sources pertaining to the history of the processes of body disposal in the US (cremation, embalming and green burial) as well as rituals and trends. These sources, including scholarly articles and journals, essays, books, magazine articles and surveys, will also be helpful in acquiring information on the perceptions of

death and death practices today. Next I created a survey for distribution in a small Bronx community that shares space with a large cemetery to find out what people think about burial practices, specifically green burials as an option. Finally, I conducted several journalistic interviews with funeral home representatives to find out their role in disseminating information about the green burial process.

Results showed that people are not embracing the process for the following reasons. For a start, people simply don't know about it. Funeral directors don't immediately bring the method to people's attention and there is more available information concerning traditional practices of burial. Secondly, the cultural and social ties linked to the rituals of death practiced in community and religious circles often keeps people from embracing green burials. Thirdly, people are anxious about the true "naturalness" of a green burial and are concerned about the body left in an unpreserved state. Next, people often find green burial spaces difficult to access and are concerned about the ability to visit the space in the future. Lastly people still crave the need to memorialize a deceased loved one and feel that these types of burials cannot achieve that properly. Some suggestions to combat this include spreading more information and sources about green burial to various communities and age groups. Providing special incentives to encourage people to embrace the process and sharing examples of ways to keep their rituals intact while memorializing their loved ones in a new way. With this paper I hope to shed some light on the process of green burials.

## Chapter 2: Historical Background

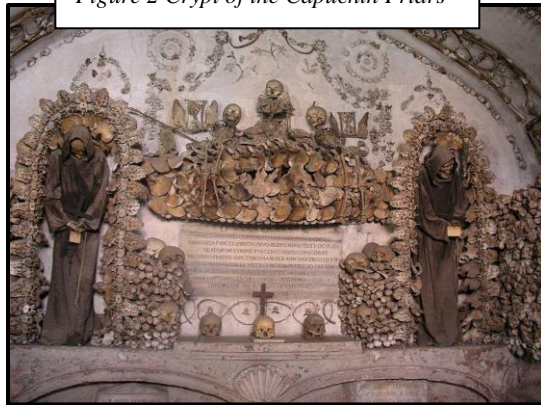
*"Death smiles at us all, all a man can do is smile back."*

— Marcus Aurelius, Roman emperor.

### Introduction

Since antiquity human beings have mourned and revered their dead. Cultures and societies throughout time have found different ways for the final “send-off” of their loved ones. The Egyptians embalmed their dead to preserve their body for the spiritual afterlife (Sarkar, 2021). The Vikings cremated their dead on a funeral pyre so that the smoke would carry their loved ones to the afterlife (Morgan 2021) and the Tibetans practiced sky burials where the dead are left on mountain tops to be consumed by animals and the natural elements (Sohma, 2016). In ancient Turkey bodies were buried under the floors in their family homes (Jarus, 2011), in 17<sup>th</sup> century

Figure 2 Crypt of the Capuchin Friars



Italy friars bodies were placed in vast underground catacombs (Zenou, 2023) and in Ancient Rome thousands of cremations resulted in special buildings being created for the sole purpose of displaying urns containing the ashes of the departed (Melville, 2022). Today culture, tradition and rituals still surround the burial of our dead. In the United States traditional methods of burial are

still used. Today, the three main methods of final disposition are cremation (60.5%), (embalming) 34.5%, and the more recent untraditional methods, including green burials (5%.) (National Funeral Directors Association). These are the three methods that will be focused on in this paper. Each method has a long and interesting history which will be summarized below. In addition there will be an explanation of each practice as it is used today as well as a summary of the method's impact on the environment. It is important to understand the workings of the processes as well as the effects in order to better comprehend why people are choosing them or not.

## CREMATION

*"Ashes, ashes we all fall down."*

Ring Around the Rosie

(American Version)



Figure 3 An illustration of the first crematorium built in the U.S. in 1876



## History

According to the Merriam Webster dictionary cremation “*is the process of reducing a dead body to mostly tiny bits of bone resembling ash that involves exposing the body to flame and intense heat followed by pulverization of bone fragments.*” Cremation has a long history in the world and there is evidence of cremation sites from back in ancient times. The earliest discovered remains from a cremation took place 20,000 years ago in Australia and scientists believe that Europeans began using the process around 3,000 BC (Melville, 2022). The Greeks first adopted cremation as a way to deal with plague outbreaks and later to handle the influx of the dead from wars. The deceased would be cremated on the battlefields and then the ashes sent home for the family to inter (Harris, 2007). The Romans eventually began cremating their dead and expanded the practice to include the storage and display of decorative urns in special buildings. One of the most famous is the *Columbaria of Vigna Codini* in Rome in which buildings were found that contained thousands of carved niches that held urns with human cremains (Melville, 2022).

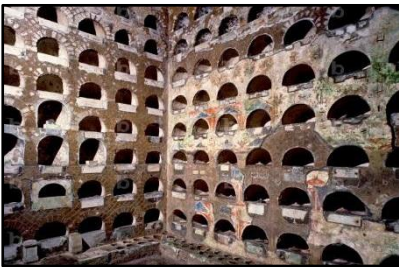


Figure 4 Columbarium of Vigna Codini, Rome

The practice continued until Constantine made the big switch to Catholicism in 300AD and cremation was seen as a sinful pagan ritual (Melville, 2022). The Hebrew method of a natural burial, which was inspired by Christ’s own entombment, took center stage. In 789AD, Charlemagne “reinforced” the law and cremation could be punishable by death (Harris, 2007). Things remained this way for the next 1,000 years until concerns arose over burial processes. Overcrowded burial grounds and the fear of catching something in the air from the “noxious vapors” being emitted pushed people to re-evaluate

cremation once again. In the United States the first cremation took place in a homemade coal retort near Pittsburgh in 1876. The process was attracting interest, however it took a while to catch on as the United States was still mainly a Christian nation. In 1963 the Second Vatican Council announced that cremation was allowed for Catholics and in 1997 permission was granted for bodies to be cremated before the funeral. Finally, in 2016, it was decreed that cremated remains could be buried in a cemetery, however, could not be scattered or stored at home (Harris, 2007). Today cremation has evolved into the most used form of body disposal in the United States. In addition, around the world in places like Japan and India cremation is the most widely used final disposition method.

### **How do you Cremate a Body?**

Today the process of incinerating a body in the United States includes many steps. First, the body is brought into the crematorium from a hospital, morgue or funeral home. It is either in a zipped body bag (hospital or morgue) or in a casket (funeral home). For others that do not wish to have a viewing, a cardboard box type of casket can be used instead. Some places even allow the body to be cremated inside the bag with no container or just wrapped in a shroud or clothes that they are wearing. They unzip the bag and check for any items that may have been placed in the bag or check the casket people have a tendency to put mementos in the caskets during a wake. The body is brought over to the retort or oven. A retort is made mostly of concrete, firebrick and steel. For standard cremations the temperature is set between 1,400 and 1,800 degrees. At this temperature a regular sized human body can become a couple pounds of bone and ash in less than three hours. If already in a casket the coffin handles, metals and plastics on the casket are removed as they produce hazardous smoke and fumes when burned. Once the machine is turned on and heated to the right temperature the casket is placed on a loading table that has spinning wheels for easy movement of the body. The funeral worker uses a

wood stick to push the casket all the way into the oven. As soon as the casket is fully inside the door closes. The timer is set for 150 minutes. Right away a burning smell is produced as the casket starts to burn. There are periods when air is blown into to pump up the fire and direct flames to where they need to be concentrated. After about 90 minutes the mortician will take a peek into the retort. At this



*Figure 5 Cremation retort*

point the entire coffin is gone and most of the body has been reduced to a skeleton. If there are any areas that have not, the worker will use a stick to move the corresponding body part closer to a direct burner. The oven will automatically turn off once the timer has run out. All that will be left of the body is a mound of bone fragments and some ash. Cremation reduces an adult human to about 5 pounds of cremains. The mortician uses a long brush to sweep the cremains into a chute which empties into a pan at the bottom of the oven. The pan is then brought to a special station where metal fragments are sorted out using a magnet. The bone fragments are then put into a processor which grinds up the bone and turns it into a fine powder that resembles sand. The cremains are then placed in a heavy plastic bag and transferred to an urn or other receptacle that the family has chosen. (Harris 2007)

### **Cremation's Environmental Impact**

Some scholars say that cremation is environmentally friendlier than embalming and perhaps it is slightly better, however cremation still does not have the best impact on the environment. According to

the International End-Of-Life Doula Association (INELDA), cremation requires an enormous amount of energy to generate the intense heat (about 1,800 degrees Fahrenheit) needed to cremate a body. The natural gas used to heat up the retort is burned releasing pollutants including CO<sub>2</sub> and toxic elements such as mercury into the atmosphere. “Each cremation results in the release of 350lbs. of carbon dioxide and requires an amount of fossil fuel that is equivalent to driving 4,800 miles.” (INELDA, 2014) To make matters worse some people are embalmed first and then cremated, thereby releasing all of those additional toxic chemicals into the air as well. In addition the ashes or cremains of the deceased have no ecological benefit to the environment. “If the cremated remains are scattered in nature or in bodies of water, they may damage nearby flora and fauna due to their high pH levels and high sodium content.” (Slominski, 2023)

## **EMBALMING**

*“There,” she said softly. “Now he could be sleeping.”*

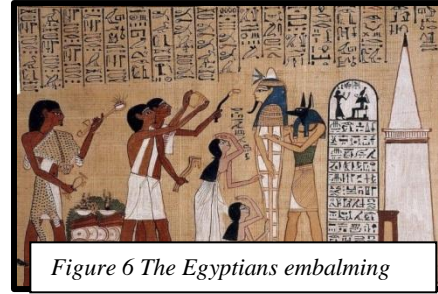
— J.K. Rowling, Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows

### **History of Embalming**

The practice of embalming has an interesting past. Ancient cultures often preserved bodies in the hopes that the deceased would be prepared for the next life. The best known example of early embalming was practiced by the Egyptians. As early as the First Dynasty priests trained in the embalming process removed all the organs, dried out the body and then covered it with natron, a mixture of special salts found in an area west of the Nile Delta. Other cultures have used similar processes such as the Chinese during the Han Dynasty. (Finney, 2022) According to the National Library of Medicine the Middle Ages and the Renaissance were times of advancement in the medical

field and bodies were needed for dissection. Some basic embalming techniques were used for this purpose.

Before the 19<sup>th</sup> century natural burials were the norm in the United States. People believed that a “good death” was needed



to guarantee that the soul would be saved. A good death was one in which the individual was able to make his peace with God and then pass away peacefully at home surrounded by family. Family members would then bathe and groom the body and have a home wake in their front parlor where friends could come to pay their respects (Melville, 2022). The local carpenter would make a simple wood casket and the family would carry and bury the deceased in the local church or grave yard.

During Civil War times this began to change. The war made this type of death impossible. (Melville, 2022). Families of the soldiers killed in battle had no way of recovering the bodies of their loved ones in a timely manner. *“Battle torn remains actively decomposed inside the railcars on the long journey home, and during the sweltering summer months, they might putrefy rapidly, making for an unpleasant arrival.”* (Melville, 2022) Abraham Lincoln commissioned Dr. Thomas Holmes, now known as the father of modern embalming, for the Union armies. He showed surgeons and “embalming undertakers” how to set up shop outside the makeshift morgues and battlefields and embalm soldiers. Thousands of soldiers were preserved for the final trip home to their funerals. When Abraham Lincoln was assassinated by John Wilkes Booth in April of 1865 he was embalmed and his body placed on a funeral train stopping in several cities for public viewing. Lincoln was officially buried May 4, 1865—19 days after his death (Bayer, 2018). Lincoln’s death journey popularized the death practice and cemented its number one place in history for over 100 years.

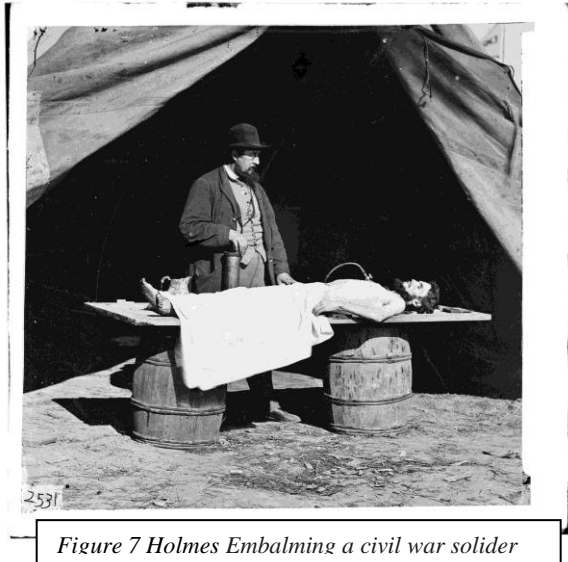


Figure 7 Holmes Embalming a civil war soldier

In the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century “Egyptomania captured the imagination of America.” (Dawdy, 2021). People became obsessed with anything relating to ancient Egypt and that included embalming. After the Civil War the processes of embalming and most services related to body disposal started to become commercialized and dominated by male professionals. The rituals of death were moved from the home (Dawdy, 2021) and by the end of World War I this was permanent and widespread.

### **How do you Embalm a Body?**

It takes 3.5 gallons of formaldehyde to embalm the average adult (Chiappelli, 2008). The entire process should take less than two hours if done thoroughly and professionally. First the body is removed from the refrigerator where it has been kept zipped in a body bag at 38 degrees to help slow down the decomposition process. The body is then placed onto the embalming table. Clothes and personal artifacts are removed (such as jewelry) it is sprayed with a strong disinfectant then scrubbed head to toe with a germicidal soap. Forceps are used to push bundles of cotton soaked in phenol (antiseptic/disinfectant) into the anus (and vagina for women). Dry cotton is then stuffed into those spaces and in both of the ear canals. The embalmer then shaves the face of the body (men, women and

children) as it is an easier surface to apply makeup to later on in the preparation of the body. The cadaver is then positioned in the way it will be placed in the casket. The undertaker massages various parts of the body to soften the muscles and relieve stiffness. This helps in positioning the body and setting the features for viewing. For bustier women the breasts are either taped in place or a half curved needle with thread is used to suture the breasts together. Next the undertaker must “set the features” of the deceased-specifically the mouth and eyes. This part of the process takes the longest as it is his/her job to make the body look as life like as possible. The embalmer wants to create a “memory picture” for the family of their loved one looking peacefully asleep. Many feel that in order for a family to cope with and accept the death they need this final picture to begin the grieving and healing process. They want the picture to be as pleasant and true-to-life as possible (Harris, 2007).

To set the eyes a plastic eye cap with spurs is dipped into a special cement cream and then inserted in the eye. With a special hook instrument the upper eyelid is pulled down over the cap and then the lower lid is pulled up a bit. When the cement hardens it will adhere the caps to the eyelids. This is to give the illusion of sleep. (Harris, 2007)



*Figure 8 Eye Caps for cadavers*

Next the mouth is massaged until it opens. The embalmer then disinfects the inside and stuffs cotton into the mouth and down the throat. To close the mouth again the jaw can either be sewed shut with sutures going from inside the gum through the septum and nostrils or by using “needle injector” a type of staple gun that shoots our barb tipped wires. This is shot into the upper and lower jaw bones. To fix the concaved look of the mouth a type of caulk called mastic is placed inside each cheek and into the

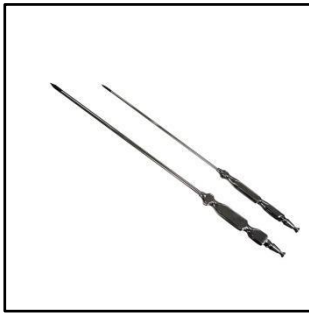
upper and lower gums to fill out the lip line. The embalmer then forms the lips to have a slight upward curve, puts more cement mixture and leaves them for gluing later (Harris 2007).

The embalming of the body takes place in two different stages. The first is the arterial injection which is when the blood is drained from the body and replaced with a liquid preservative. The main ingredients are formaldehyde (to kill bacteria and keep tissues from decomposing), phenol ( a preservative) and a pinkish dye that helps to stain the body and give it a pink lifelike look. The solution is injected into the carotid artery which is on the side of the neck. An incision is made in the neck and the artery is pulled to the surface. Using a saw an incision is made into the artery and a metal tube is placed inside facing down toward the heart. The jugular is also brought to the surface and cut open. The metal tube in the carotid artery is connected to a Portiboy embalming machine which is then turned on. The liquid is forced into the tube and into the body. At the same time another tube is placed in the jugular and that is where all the blood and clots will be pushed out of the body into a gutter that surrounds the embalming table. From there it goes into a basin or “slop sink” at the head of the table and then down a drain where it is flushed away into the town’s sewer system (Harris 2007). The worker massages the arms and legs of the deceased to encourage the flow. After about twenty minutes the liquid in the tube begins to lighten which means that most of the blood has been flushed out and the embalming fluid is in. The tubes are removed and the vessels are tied off. The cuts are sewed close and now the body has a lifelike hue and appearance (Harris, 2007).

The second stage of the embalming process is called the cavity injection. A cavity injection is the disinfecting and clearing out of the abdominal cavity. (Harris, 2007). A long metal rod called a trocar is inserted into the abdomen of the body. The trocar is thrust in and around piercing each organ and suctioning out the fluids that are expelled from the punctures. The heart, lungs, stomach, colon intestines, liver and bladder are punctured to remove clotted blood, fluids and gases along with fecal



matter, urine and undigested food (Harris, 2007). Then formaldehyde and phenol are used to flush the cavity. Once flushed cotton is packed into the opening to allow for any additional gases to escape.



At ninety minutes the procedure is complete. The body is washed once again, rubbed down with moisturizer and left to sit overnight and “set” in anticipation of next day’s wake and viewing (Harris, 2007).

*Figure 9 Trocar*

### **Embalming’s Environmental Impact**

A “traditional” funeral in the United States involves an extravagant ceremony and fancy casket that will eventually be buried in the ground never to be seen again. Aside from their exorbitant cost caskets also present many environmental and public health issues. Many of the metals used on and in caskets can corrode and become harmful toxins. (Shelvock, 2022). Each year in the US 90,000 tons of steel, 2,700 tons of copper and bronze and 30 million board feet of hardwoods are buried into the ground (Bayer, 2018). Once buried in the ground other contaminants can be released into the soil as well including varnishes, sealers, and wood preservatives. Metal caskets can leak harmful substances like steel, copper, zinc and lead which are harmful to the environment (Shelvock, 2022). Plus, all the chemicals and resources needed to build the casket like cloth and fibers for the cushioning are damaging. Finally, the caskets are placed into thick concrete vaults underground and utilize cement for headstones (Shelvock, 2022). Joe Sehee, founder of the Green Burial Council has said that “we bury enough metal to build the Golden Gate Bridge, and so much reinforced concrete in burial vaults that we could build a two- lane highway from New York to Detroit” (Bayer, 2018). Another problem with traditional burial is the embalming of the deceased. Embalming practices in the United States “replaces organic blood with various toxic and carcinogenic chemicals, namely formaldehyde (Chiappelli, 2008). The International Agency for Research on Cancer (2018) has reported that there has been an

increase in deaths of funeral care workers due to exposure to formaldehyde. Also embalming fluids leak from the body and are absorbed into the ground. Formaldehyde, the key ingredient in the embalming cocktail, also enters the septic systems and the sewer system when the fluids are flushed away by the funeral homes (Howe, 2022). Finally, many of the 115,000 cemeteries that house these burials are manicured spaces kept that way with the regular application of pesticides. Toxic biocides are applied to cement headstones for cleaning purposes and lawn mowers/maintenance equipment expel noxious fumes as they are used to dig holes in the ground and trim the lawns and fauna (Schmidt et al., 2001).

## GREEN BURIAL

*“The worms crawl in and the worms crawl out. They crawl all over your chin and mouth. They invite their friends and their friends' friends too, and you look like hell when they're—through—with you.”* Hearse Song



*Figure 10 Green Burial*

## **History**

A green burial is a burial which has three main characteristics. First, no embalming or chemicals are used on the body. Secondly, the body must be buried in a biodegradable container. Thirdly, it must be buried directly into the ground with not cement liner or concrete vault.

Traditionally, green burials have always been practiced by those affiliated with Islam and Judaism. Both religions forbid cremation and embalming and still do so today (Slominski, 2023). Both also believe in the preparation of the body and burial within 24 hours if possible. Cotton shrouds called kaffans are used by Muslims and a simple pine box is utilized by the Jews. In Judaism the pine caskets sometimes have holes in the bottom of them for easier reabsorption of the body into the earth (Uzell, 2018).

Historically, throughout time, other ancient cultures practiced natural burials as well. In ancient Mesopotamia those that died were often buried under the floors of their homes. It was believed that the ancestors represented “the spiritual foundation” of the house (Laneri, 2023). The ancient Buddhist tradition of sky burials or Jhator has been practiced in Tibet for 11,000 years in which bodies are placed atop mountain sides for wildlife (vultures) to eat all in the theory of the spirit leaving the body and then the body giving back to nature (Houchin, 2017). In early America large plantations and farms had family cemeteries as part of their land. (Scott, 2018) Death rituals and funeral practices occurred at home and death was viewed as a natural part of life (Shelvock, 2022). When a person died the family would prepare the body for burial, say their goodbyes and then carry the body to its final resting place where they would dig the grave themselves. They saw death as a part of nature and they said their goodbyes appropriately (Shelvock, 2022). This started to phase out with the rise of the middle class due to the Industrial Age as well as the use of embalming during the Civil War (Harris 2007).

In the 1990's the green burial movement slowly started to gain interest again as more people thought about the environment and how the disposition practices being used will affect the environment of the future. In 1998 the first green cemetery, The Ramsey Creek Preserve, was opened by Billy Campbell in South Carolina. This 33 acre pine forest (now double that size) set the standard for the green burial industry (Harris, 2007). By 2021 there were 31 green cemeteries in the US and 42 hybrid cemeteries (Melville 2022). In addition in 2005 The Green Burial Council non-profit ([www.greenburialcouncil.org](http://www.greenburialcouncil.org)) was formed. This organization is an excellent resource of information, including charts, graphs and tables to help explain green burial processes, dispel the myths and set the environmental standards for green spaces (Melville, 2022).

Today, there are three types of cemeteries that are used for green burials: Hybrid, Natural and Conservation (Bayer, 2018). Hybrid Cemeteries are spaces set aside in regular cemeteries for green burials. These spaces are in a tradition cemetery but sectioned off for this specific type of burial. A permit is needed for this by the city. In this section of the cemetery no embalming of the bodies is allowed and the deceased is buried in a bio-degradable container. In addition there is no cement vault or liner used. The cemetery chooses how they want to maintain the space. Some cemeteries will use lawn mowers and landscaping machinery, others try and take on a more environmentally friendly approach to keep in line with the green burial philosophy (Green Burial Council).

Natural Cemeteries are solely green burials areas. Again, there is no embalming of the body, no cement vaults and liners and only bio-degradable caskets or shrouds allowed. In addition no cement headstones or markers are allowed. These spaces are often in more rural places and respect the naturalness of the fauna and the integrity of the land. People are allowed to have flat stones native to the environment and some allow wind chimes and small wooden crosses. Some areas allow for the planting of a tree, bush or flowers that are native to the area. Often the site will be maintained but no

use of pesticides or machinery is used. The greenery is managed by hand and no pesticides are used in the process (Bayer, 2018).

Conservation grounds are just like natural burial cemeteries but are conserved officially in perpetuity like a national park or landmark. These spaces are often in very rural areas or connected to protected lands or forests. They must be associated with a conservation organization that will be held accountable for the standards that are used. Conservation spaces are kept as close to the natural state of the area as possible. (Bayer 2018) The patterns on the landscape cannot be altered and no markers or sentimental trinkets are allowed. (Often GPS tags are used for these types of areas so loved ones can visit and have an idea of where their loved one was buried.) When a burial takes place the earth is lifted and replaced in the exact way in which it was found. No other plants organic material can be there except what is native to the region.

### **Green Burials Today?**

Today the green burial is very much like the green burials of yesterday. The deceased is picked up by the undertaker and brought to the funeral home. Since this will be a green burial the body will be held overnight in the refrigerated unit to keep the body from decomposing. Bodies are not embalmed. Preparation of the body begins with an antibacterial wash. Some undertakers will apply special aromatic oils to the body. The body is then wrapped in a shroud or placed in the biodegradable container that will be used. The container can be a natural wood box, a wicker casket or even a specially made cardboard box. The body will then be transported to the natural space for burial. The space in the ground has been dug by hand. Flowers, leaves and pine tree branches are often placed inside the space. A simple few pieces of wood are usually placed across the hole for the body to rest upon during the memorial service (Bayer, 2018). After the service the body is placed directly into the

ground. The body will be buried at 3-4 feet depth rather than the 5-6 which is standard in traditional burials. The 3-4 feet allows for greater oxygen flow which feeds bacteria and allows for a “rapid, uninhibited, aerobic decomposition process.” (Green Burial Council) It takes about 6 weeks to lose the majority of soft tissue through moisture absorption by the soil, and up to 2 years for complete decomposition. It could take up to twenty years for bones to absorb in moist soils.

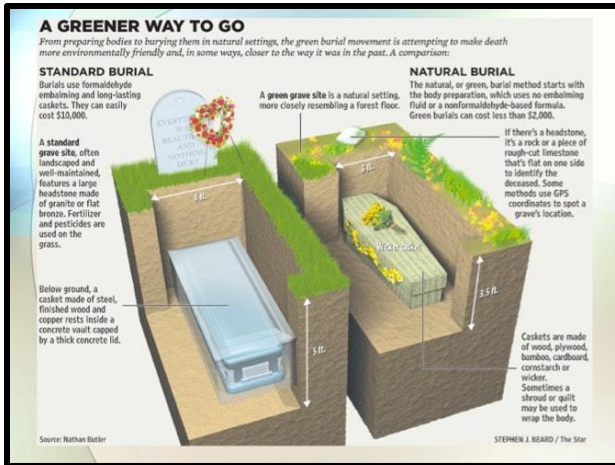


Figure 11 green burial verses traditional

## Green Burial’s Environmental Impact

The vast majority of people who come over to green burials are converts from cremation (Harris, 2007). Green Burial practices have a “net-positive” impact on the environment.” (Slominski, 2023) In contrast to tradition burials, green burials offer a way to honor our relationship to the environment and to our roots. Because green burials don’t allow embalming of the bodies, the toxic chemicals associated with traditional burials don’t permeate the soil or water tables. In addition bodies are only buried in biodegradable caskets or shrouds so the metals, hard woods and plastics that are part of traditional caskets will not pollute the ground. Since the basic premise of green burial is to promote rapid decomposition of the body in the most natural way, no cement vaults or liners are used. Therefore there is no contamination from the ingredients in cement. In addition, since natural

cemeteries don't use gas powered machines to maintain the lawns and shrubbery no horrible gas emissions are released into the air. Pesticides are not used either so there is no worry about carcinogenic chemicals in the soil and fauna (Chiapelli, 2008). In the context that green burials are better for the environment, conservation spaces are the best option for a healthier and more sustainable future. This type of burial is best for the environment because it creates large areas of natural habitat that will preserve whole ecosystems and threatened species (Harker, 2012). Finally the overall health of individuals is better as human exposure to green spaces "improves physical, social and mental well-being." (Holden 2017).



*Figure 12 Mental Health & Green Spaces*

## Chapter 3: Literature Review

### Introduction

*“If you want me again look for me under your boot-soles.”*

Walt Whitman

This literature review will focus on the three main methods of final disposition currently used in the United States. These methods are cremation, embalming and green burial. While the pros and cons of each method will be explored, studies will show that green burials are the best alternative to the traditional methods as they are as eco-friendly, better for the future ecology of the planet, more cost effective and aid in the grieving process. In addition, to understand why green burials are ranked third and the lowest utilized method of final disposition, this review will also include literature helpful in trying to define reasons for this. Finally, death perception and the evolution of how we process death in our American culture will be examined.

### Evolving Perceptions of Death and Death Rituals

*“In life, we weep at the thought of death. In death, perhaps we weep at the thought of life.”*

Marilyn Monroe

V.R. Beard and W.C. Burger are both affiliated with the Department of Sociology at Longwood University. Their article in *Omega: Journal of Death and Dying* article, “Change and Innovation in the Funeral Industry” focuses on the reasons why the funeral industry in the United States is “experiencing changes that are reshaping the death rituals of body disposal.” The writers start by giving a detailed history of death rituals in early American society and then describe the gradual process of the development of the “modern” funeral. The Industrial Revolution, the Civil War and a new code of “status display” were the major forces in this process. The Industrial



Revolution brought about resurgence in the process as the advancements in science including the creation of new chemicals and tools began to rise. (Mopette & Lemonnier, 2009 as cited in Beard, 2017). Then during the American Civil War as more soldiers began to die far away from their homes, embalming was used as a way to preserve the bodies long enough to get them back to their families for a proper burial (Newman, 1997 as cited in Beard, 2017). Finally, because of the increase in wealth due to the Industrial Revolution, funerals began to be used to display wealth and status in society. How and where the body was displayed, exotic flowers and massive marble headstones were all signs to show how rich and important the deceased and the family of the deceased was (Earle, 2008, as cited in Beard, 2017). The authors go on to break down the changes that have come about in the modern age, including use of technology, advances in cosmetic restoration and a change of the traditional rituals of the viewing. Funeral homes today have embraced the world of social media with elaborate websites and Facebook pages to “spread the news of local deaths to those who may have moved away from town” (Heppel, n.d as cited in Beard 2017). As body disposal deviations are examined with findings showing alternate methods including cremation, new ways of displaying the bodies (turning into coral reefs, pendants and vinyl records!), natural burials, aquamation, plastination and cryonics. The authors investigated these motivations for change in the funeral industry by analyzing articles and publications. They explained their results by showing 2 patterns called Business Related and Consumer Related Motivations. Business related indicates those business decisions that increase profits in funeral homes. Consumer related trends include those that funeral homes are recognizing and acting on because of emerging consumer desires. They extensively break down each pattern and use examples to supplement their findings. For Business related they explain how funeral homes are bolstering their profits for cremation by suggesting new and out of the box services to the consumer. Examples given were special memorial services that include pricey add-ons like

butterfly, dove and balloon releases, and a slew of cremation related merchandise like urns, jewelry and sculptures. They are doing this to attract new business and are using special marketing tools via the internet to reach a broader group of people. They are also utilizing the internet by offering “live streams” of memorial services and funerals. Through this model they are “itemizing” services and increasing their profits. The second category labeled Consumer related changes are changes in the industry motivated by the consumer’s desire for specialty items. For example decorated urns and elaborate memorial services with music, décor and even food. Sometimes these services will include props, photo montages and videos (Boreham, 2011 as cited in Beard, 2017) as well.

One trend is how the consumer searches for ways to have a ceremony tailored specifically to the uniqueness of the individual. Therefore, funeral homes are adapting the consumer’s request and charging for each adjustment. Body posing is one example in which an embalmed body is posed at the wake as if they were alive. One instance involves a woman who passed away and her wake consisted of her being posed sitting in a chair holding a beer and cigarette. Another involved a deceased biker who was brought to the cemetery in a custom made plexi glass vertical coffin where he could be buried with his Harley motorcycle. Another consumer trend involved cost. People are slowly trying to move away from the high costs of funerals and search for more cost effective options. The recent rise in cremations is a sign of this. Green funerals also in this category as people look for ways to trim the budget. Another trend, which actually contradicts the last, is the consumer wanting a big and lavish ceremony with pricey services. Showing “status” even in death appears to be important to some by demonstrating through what they buy how much they loved the recently departed. Lastly, consumers are motivated by their environmental beliefs. A new trend toward green, eco-friendly burials is slowly taking shape. In conclusion this paper summarized why the funeral industry has evolved into what it is today. Three top reasons were

given in the discussion section of the paper. First was consumer based and related to cost. Second was business and profits, last was consumer based again relating to the individuality of the purchaser (Beard 2017). All aspects of body disposal were discussed with an emphasis on why these changes were occurring. This article's information aided in answering why—despite all the information showing the benefits to natural burial—are some people still not using the practice.

Equally important, Shannon Lee Dawdy an American anthropologist, historian, and archaeologist describes in her book, *American Afterlives: Reinventing Death in the 21st Century* the new ways Americans are dealing with death, the afterlife and treating the remains of the deceased. She describes the new trends that are appearing and explains why people are starting to look at death in a different way. She gives cremation as an example as it has become the most widely used form of body disposal in the US presently. Reasons she offered include the easiness of transporting the cremated remains of loved ones who die and live far away from family. She also mentions the decline of organized religion as well as the growing emphasis on “do-it-yourself” options (memorial services, home wakes) which promote the individuality and uniqueness of the departed. Environmental and ecological concerns and the changing attitude in the memorialization of the deceased are also revealed. She gives many interesting anthropological insights and even uses examples from her own life to highlight. At one point she creates her own “experimental burial” in which she is wrapped in a shroud and placed into a burial space in the ground (Dawdy 2021). Dawdy provides an explanation for the changing attitudes about death and body disposal which are going to be helpful in explaining why people are drawn to some methods of end of life processes rather than others.

## **Traditional Methods of Burial**

*“To be knav'd out of our graves, to have our skulls made drinking-bowls, and our bones turned into pipes, to delight and sport our enemies, are tragical abominations escaped in burning burials.”*

— *Thomas Browne*

Cremation is the most utilized method of final disposition in the United States. Presently it makes up 60.5% of all methods of body disposal (National Funeral Directors Association). In the paper “Cremation: Desecration, Purification, or Convenience?” by Sociology Professor M. Kearl, Kearl discusses several explanations for this statistic. Firstly, studies have shown that as people age and start to make their own end of life decisions they tend to choose cremation as a form of final disposition. (Cremation Society, 2003 as cited in Kearl, 2004) Therefore, since people are living longer today and the older population is making up a huge segment of society it would make sense that cremation is on the rise. Moreover, people are moving more and losing those traditional familial ties with areas. The sense of connectedness that people had to a town or region where several generations of people lived and died is ending, therefore people don't see the need (as in the past) to be buried in the family vault or cemetery (Kearl, 2004.) In addition, religion has lifted its bans on cremations and now allows cremation ceremonies and the burial of ashes in cemeteries. Moreover, there is also a change in the feelings toward funeral industry's preparations of the remains. Historically bodies used to be handled solely by family members who would wash and prepare the body for burial, themselves. Then it evolved into people not wanting to handle the deceased anymore, distancing themselves from the remains and passing the job over to funeral

homes and undertakers. Now, there is a growing distaste to having one's body handled by strangers so cremation has become the logical substitution (Johnson, 1996 as cited in Kearl, 2024). Also the cost incurred by a traditional burial, which includes embalming, expensive caskets and memorials is turning people away from the process. They are looking for more cost efficient ways to bury their loved ones. Furthermore, new technology has evolved allowing people to memorialize their loved ones in new and different ways (turning ashes into gems for jewelry or even made into a coral reef in the ocean). Cremation is also a practice that many people all over the world in various religions and cultures have used for centuries. With the US becoming even more of a melting pot many of these cultural practices are being used here. Lastly there is a new outlook on death and how "afterlife" is perceived. Individuals are looking at the afterlife as more of a spiritual life rather than a physical one as in the past. Becoming a tree, or scattering ones ashes over the sea bring the deceased a more spiritual connection than being embalmed and buried in a cement box (Kearl, 2004). The author concludes by saying that the once traditional function of cemeteries to remind the living of the dead is changing as our outlook on death evolves and as technology allows humans to memorialize a loved one in different ways. (Kearl 2004) This article gave a thorough synopsis of the reasons why cremation is first for many in the funeral industry and therefore helps to explain why green burial is relegated to third place.

The second most utilized method of final disposition in the United States is the traditional practice of embalming. Embalming makes up 34.5% of human body disposal (National Funeral Directors Association). In the *Journal of Environmental Health* article "Drinking grandma: the problem of embalming", the modern process of embalming a human body to prepare for burial is discussed. The authors, Jeremiah Chiappelli and Ted Chiappelli, explain the negative impacts that formaldehyde, the main ingredient used to embalm a body, has on the environment including leaking into ground water, entering the atmosphere through cremation, and the recent declaration

that the chemical itself is now a known human carcinogen thereby putting embalmers in a path for future illnesses. They dispel the two main reasons that embalming has continued to be promoted in Canada and the United States. The first reason is that it is necessary to embalm a body for public health reasons. The authors argue that embalming is actually harmful to the public health as it “*exposes embalmers to the bodily fluids of the deceased*” and many of these fluids are dumped into sewers when the bodies are drained. The other reason given by many is that embalming is psychologically necessary for the mourning process. Again, the authors explain that embalming is just a band aid, producing a “*short term*” and “*superficial*” effect for grieving mourners. They suggest some alternative methods to embalming include freezing, dry ice and other disposal methods such as green burials and cremation. They conclude by summarizing that a future without embalming would help the environment and help curtail the long term illnesses for embalmers that might arise from the formaldehyde use. Embalming is problematic for the future. An analogy was used at the end about the formaldehyde showing up in the water tables eventually and that it would be like drinking grandma someday (Chiappelli 2008). This article was helpful in explaining the negative ramifications of embalming as a part of the burial process and highlighting why green burials are a potentially better method of body disposal.

Similarly, in the *American Journal of Hospice and Palliative Medicine* an article titled, “The Corpse: Time for Another Look A Review of the Culture of Embalming, Viewing and the Social Construction,” a short but thorough summary and background of the embalming process through history is explained. It continues by illuminating the financial burden, environmental hazards and serious health issues caused by embalming. It further explains how the process does not help people deal with the natural experience of death but rather helps them deny or avoid it by making the body look somewhat alive in death. The authors, R. Finney, L.M. Shulman and R.E. Kheirbek conclude by suggesting that people should know more about the invasive process of

embalming and suggested that doctors should discuss end of life options with their patients early on rather than later when sometimes they are unable to make the best decisions (Kheirbek 2022). The insight about end of life discussions to help encourage people to look toward natural burials was an interesting concept that can be used as an incentive going forward.

In the same way, J. P Stowe, E. V Schmidt and D. Green co-authored the *Conservation Biology* article, “Toxic Burials: The Final Insult” and argue that cremation and embalming are both unsustainable practices that need to change. They explain about the environmental impact of toxins released into the air as well as the unhealthy chemicals that are leaked into the soil and water tables. They also describe how pesticides are used to maintain cemetery spaces throughout the country causing more damage to the environment. Green burials are given as the solution for environmentally friendly methods of body disposal as well as being morally and ethically right. Emphasis is placed on nature and the circle of life with mention of religious institutions and their responsibility to get more involved as a way of truly caring about spirituality and the world (Stowe 2001). This article sheds a more philosophical and ethical light on the way that the US’s current burial practices are affecting the environment and the future of our ecology.

### **The Transition Back to Green Burials**

*“What actually happens when you die is that your brain stops working and your body rots, like Rabbit did when he died and we buried him in the earth at the bottom of the garden... But that is all right because he is part of the flowers and the apple tree and the hawthorn bush now.*

*Mark Haddon, The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*

For most of America’s history green burial was the norm. A person died, the family prepared the body, helped to bury it and understood the circular nature of life and death. After the Civil War and the need to transport dead body’s long distances, a new era of embalming took hold.

From there it progressed to what we know as the traditional funeral. In Mark Harris' book *Grave Matters: A Journey Through the Modern Funeral Industry to a Natural Way of Burial* he describes this journey in detail. His historical analysis of the main methods of final disposition was useful while creating the historical chapter of this paper. In addition the detailed descriptions of cremation, embalming and green burial were imperative to understanding the positive and negative aspects of each process. Harris, an environmental columnist with the *LA Times*, transitions from method to method eventually settling on green burial and its benefits to society as a whole. He uses personal interviews of people's journeys through the various burial processes. (Harris 2007) This book was a plethora of information on the background of the body disposal processes as well as the ins and outs of everything green burial related. It will be very helpful when piecing together why people are not embracing the process whole heartedly.

In the same vein, in the paper *Green Burial, Home Burial: A Return to Redbud Hill*, Associate Professor Ellen M. Bayer, Ph.D., describes her own journey through the green/natural burial industry. It was published in *The Trumpeter* one of the oldest environmental philosophy journals in the world. In the article, Bayer begins with the negatives of traditional burial (embalming) then goes on to describe the history of the practice. She follows with an in depth synopsis of green burials and breaks down the 3 types of green cemeteries—hybrid, natural and conservation. Hybrid cemeteries are natural burial spaces that are incorporated into traditional cemeteries. They are special “green” spaces sectioned off from the rest of the cemetery. These special spaces adhere to the green burial checklist of no embalming of bodies, biodegradable caskets and no cement liners of concrete vaults. However the space is maintained by landscapers. Natural cemeteries are spaces used for green burials only. They are often left in their natural state and no landscaping with machines takes place. Pesticides are not used either. Conservation



cemeteries are the most green of all. They are green burial spaces that are kept 100% in their natural state. No headstones can be used and no landscaping is done. These spaces are protected in perpetuity by a special land trust. She also discusses the new and emerging green “industry” that some funeral homes have embraced. She gives a detailed account of the problems and road blocks she faced while trying to establish a “natural burial area” on land that she owns. Bayer concludes with a few accounts of others struggles to establish green spaces for burials. She ends the paper putting off her quest for now but content in what she has learned (Bayer 2018). I really appreciated the first-hand account of the author’s experience with acquiring information about Natural Burials. She gave detailed information on natural burial spaces and the laws/restrictions which will be helpful in showing why some people don’t want to be bothered with the red tape of green burials in some communities.

Echoing the above sentiment, Alexandra Harker who holds a Master’s Degree in in Landscape Architecture and City Planning from the University of California at Berkeley argues in her paper “Landscapes of the Dead: an Argument for Conservation Burial” that the current standard practices of body disposal in the US (embalming and cremation) are bad for the environment and expensive. Furthermore, she believes that traditional cemeteries do not help with the long term prospect of open space and healthy natural habitats. She proposes that Conservation Burial is the best option for a healthier and more sustainable future. Not only is this type of burial better for the environment overall it is the least expensive and also helps to create large areas of natural habitat that will preserve larger ecosystems. In addition these areas will reconnect people with nature and with each other through the shared sense of community that these spaces will bring. Harker, who received her degree in city planning, concludes her paper with incentives and ways in which city planners can incorporate these conversation burial spaces into cities (Harker

2012). Her thoughts—especially concerning city planning and conservation spaces—is definitely an incentive that should encourage people to look more toward green burials.

Along with Harker, University of Queensland’s M.H. Holden and E. McDonald-Madden are proponents of the conservation burial movement. In their paper “Conservation from the Grave: Human Burials to Fund the Conservation of Threatened Species”, the authors argue that people around the world can support future life through conservation burials. Conservation burials divert money that would usually be spent on to the restoration and protection of habitat spaces. What is suggested is that cemeteries are still spaces that need to be created –especially in urban spaces/cities that don’t have much green space and using “green” practices in new spaces will not only help the environment but will create spaces that can “restore and conserve natural habitats.” In addition they mention that these green spaces will improve the well-being of grieving family members as they are able to reconnect with nature which provides calming and peaceful benefits. The authors also feel that conservation burial is an opportunity to encourage diversity in that several religions (Judaism and Islam) that discourage embalming and cremation can also use these green spaces. This now becomes a sacred and spiritual site for several groups of people. The authors conclude with ways in which governments can incentivize people to look at conservation burials as the wave of the future (Holden 2017). This article was included because of the different perspective in which people are embracing this new type of burial process. The information about incentives was helpful and the statistics they provided concerning Manhattan and how much money could be raised from conservation burials for the nature reserves was another incentive for people to consider. It was also beneficial to have a source from outside the United States.

When it comes to the topic of green burials R.P. Stone, an affiliate at the University of Technology, New South Wales discusses the role of marketing in the natural burial processes. In the paper, “Sustainability Marketing and Natural Burial Grounds”, the author describes three

groups of people that are unhappy with the current funeral industry and traditional practices. They are those who want a green funeral, a cheap funeral optional and those that want something different than the norm. It uses survey results to find out the operators' incentive to run a natural burial site as well as the motivation for people to purchase a plot at a green site. The paper begins by summarizing why natural burial is becoming more a practice than traditional methods of burial. It explains that even though the UK is a world leader in this concept there has been no published research on the marketing methods. The tool used for data collection was a questionnaire with structured questions. They attempted to discover operator motivations as well as their use of marketing to advertise their spaces. They found that those that ran these green spaces were motivated by the ecological impact of what they were doing rather than the financial gain. In fact financial gain was the lowest score on the list. Many expressed the fact that they made little to no profit but felt that what they were doing would fund itself over time. The factors that influenced people to purchase green burial spaces were the location of the site as well as it being the most meaningful for them and their loved one. Again cost was the lowest chosen reason for natural burials. Word of mouth and direct contact with owners inspired many to go the green route. Other methods of marketing did not bring about much of a change. There were few other studies and statistics and the author concluded with a summation that natural burial will take some time to catch on that social and environmental focus is probably the best way to inspire people to move in the green direction (Spence Stone 2013). I chose to include this paper because it represents the statistical and marketing aspect of promoting natural burials to society. It details the marketing activities of individuals that own Natural Burial spaces. My paper is trying to help answer the question why more people are not drawn to the practice which has been shown to be environmentally better and cheaper than traditional methods. I believe that the research done in this paper will help to explain what I am trying to achieve in mine. I wanted to also include studies

from other countries and from various disciplines. This particular author is affiliated with technology and marketing and the results shown from the research will be a good comparison to the data I am collecting as well.

Contrary to the above sources in favor of green burials, A. Balonier, E. Parson and A. Patterson disagree. In their paper “The Unnaturalness of Natural Burials: Dispossessing the Dispossessed” the UK based authors affiliated with the University of Liverpool Management School focus on cemeteries in Germany. They demonstrate the differences and similarities between the natural cemetery with green practice burials and the traditional cemetery that inters those that have been cremated and embalmed. The paper compares the spaces of traditional cemeteries to natural cemeteries and tries to show that often natural cemeteries aren’t the idyllic spaces they appear to be, they don’t always allow for the mourning rituals that people are used to and don’t bring about the closure that some mourners need. They begin the paper by discussing the customs, views and mourning practices in traditional cemetery spaces. They include rules and regulations that are present in these spaces as well. They describe the cemetery as having 4 major functions: hygienic, place for sorrow, a connection with the eternal and a place to exhibit social status. Each of these is explained in detail and confirms the space as a place for people to connect and experience a shared sense of community. Next the evolution of natural burial grounds is explained. The authors used a methodology that includes visiting 8 burial grounds in Germany (4 traditional and 4 natural). A diary was kept with notes on the layouts and designs as well as management of the spaces. Interviews were done with death related professional, cemetery workers and several mourners about their expectations and perceptions of the space. What they found was that people are often disappointed by the lack connection to their loved one because natural spaces do not allow gravestones or large markers or the ability to leave mementos

connecting them to their deceased family member. In addition the constraints of a traditional cemetery are often in natural cemeteries as well (ex. marked paths, cordoned off areas, visiting hours) They feel that sometimes accessibility is still a problem as in older cemeteries and these spaces are often located far away from urban settings making it difficult for people to get there. In conclusion the authors feel that often mourners are disillusioned with the natural burial process once it has been completed and do not find the proper closure that they would in a traditional cemetery (Balonier, 2019). This paper was included because it offers a contrasting viewpoint concerning Natural Burials as it offers reasons why some people are not open to natural burials.

Similarly, author D. Dreese, a professor of English at Northern Kentucky University and the Vice President of Heritage Acres Memorial Sanctuary, questions whether or not natural burial sites may have an accessibility issue for some people. For this essay, Dr. Dreese interviewed M. Katherine Shear, the Founding Director of Columbia University's Center for Prolonged Grief. Dreese explains that the grieving process is difficult and being able to be physically present at the burial site of a loved one is imperative to the healing process. She says that "the gravesite can become a psychological lifeline for those left behind." She feels that grieving at communal place, after a ceremony in the presence of others, helps to bring an individual the acceptance of loss. She describes the three types of areas usually present in green spaces—meadows, ecotones (zones between field and forest) and woods. She says that these areas can sometimes be hard for people to access and these spaces need to be inclusive and offer ways for all people to attend (Dreese, 2023). I included this article because it explains a possible motive why some Americans are not adapting Natural Burial process in their plans.

Lastly, author B. Stewart, an Associate Professor of Worship and director of the Zygon Center for Religion and Science at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, focuses on some of the problems that arise when individuals opt for Natural Burial. Stewart explores 3 areas that

cause tension for people. He describes the problems posed by not being able to properly memorialize a loved one in the open and “natural” spaces of the burial site, the “naturalness” of death itself and the violation of community and spiritual norms that surround a natural burial. He also explains how the individual is often lost in the scenario as natural burials take on a more universal meaning (like a cause) rather than it being about the person’s life. The author uses examples from interviews he has administered to highlight these problems. This article will be a good juxtaposition to my other sources as it shows some of the negative and emotionally complex dynamics that come up as part of the Natural Burial process. Having a counter point of view is beneficial to a research paper especially concerning this topic that deals with different human perspectives and emotions.

In conclusion, some theories have been proposed to explain what motivates people to choose one method of burial over another. This review focused on literature that discussed the three main methods of final disposition currently used in the United States. The context of this review elaborated on the benefits and downsides to cremation, embalming and green burials. In addition the sources showed that green burial is the best alternative (compared to the traditional processes) due to studies which indicate that green burials are eco-friendly, better for the future ecology of the planet, more cost effective and aid in the grieving process. Since green burials are the lowest utilized method of final disposition, this review also included literature helpful in trying to define reasons for this.

## Chapter 4: Methods

*“I have one last request. Don't use embalming fluid on me; I want to be stuffed with crab meat.”*  
Woody Allen

The three main methods of final disposition in the US today are cremation (60.5%) traditional burials (embalming) 34.5% and untraditional methods, including natural/green burials (5%) (National Funeral Directors Association). Research has shown that green burials are healthier for the environment, better for the future ecology of the planet, cheaper than traditional disposition methods (embalming and cremation) and often includes a more personal and meaningful expression of closure for mourners. It has also been proven that people in the US are showing more interest in learning about green burials. (National Funeral Directors Association) Why then are these types of burials still the lowest utilized? What can be done to encourage people to turn to green burial as a form of disposition of human remains?

To help answer these questions, I first began my research by reading several books that pertain to my topic. *Stiff* by Mary Roach, *The American Way of Death* by Jessica Mitford, *Grave Matters* by Mark Harris and *American Afterlives* by Shannon Lee Dawdy all helped to lay a solid foundation of the US death industry and the attitude and evolution of death and death perceptions and practices. In addition each book supplied a plethora of historical information for each of the burial methods. I completed an online search via Google for articles and media that pertained to the topic. My initial search using the keyword *cremation* yielded over 98 million results, *embalming* showing over 21 million and green burials at 17 million was overwhelming. I then narrowed down the search depending on the source and publication date. In addition I added keywords to help navigate the online catalog. For example, *cremation history* or *green burial today*. Next I entered additional names into the search field including *natural burial*, *human body*

*disposal, final disposition, and death ritual.* Several publications including magazines, newspapers, books, medical journals (health, death, psychology and science), and funeral home literature emerged and scientific Journals, environmental publications, psychological publications and articles dealing with types of body disposal, burial options and impacts on the environment. I followed that search by a detailed exploration of the SUNY Purchase library to find peer reviewed articles and resources related to death and burial practices. I utilized the library search engine that included “*Almost Everything*” and entered keywords such as *green burial, natural burial, death, rituals, cemeteries, cremation and embalming.* Many of the peer reviewed resources that came up were from the UK and Germany. Green burial has had a recent resurgence in Europe and the information found was very helpful in attaining the perspective of people that have embraced the natural burial process already and why.

To try and find out why people are adverse to green burials I decided that a survey would be the best option in order to get direct responses concerning burial practices from subjects locally. The next step in my research process included creating a questionnaire to distribute to a segment of a local Bronx community. This community is adjacent to the 400 acre Woodlawn Cemetery located in the Bronx, NY. Surveys of people in Woodlawn helps to get a real sense of what people in the community are thinking. The neighborhood is diverse with several ages (18-80+) being present. Several ethnic groups live in the area and have a personal connection to the cemetery. Many elderly live in the area and getting their thoughts as well as their children’s thoughts on who will be responsible for their parent’s end of life care is ideal. These residents are also helpful in that they have a stake in the environmental questions that will be proposed. The study followed a mixed-methods quantitative research process. An anonymous questionnaire with 33 structured multiple choice questions was created and sent to an email list of approximately 40 local residents of the Woodlawn, Bronx area in a two week period in 2024. Individuals of different ages (18 and up) and



varying ethnicities were given the instrument. The survey was administered anonymously via an online link through Survey Monkey. The table below shows the demographic profile from the questionnaire.

<b><u>Participants</u></b>	<b><u>Gender</u></b>	<b><u>Religion</u></b>	<b><u>Age</u></b>	<b><u>Ethnicity</u></b>	<b><u>Education Level</u></b>
Participant 1	Female	Judaism	35-44	White	Graduated from college
Participant 2	Female	Catholic	45-54	White	Graduated from HS
Participant 3	Female	Catholic	55-64	White	Completed grad school
Participant 4	Female	Catholic	55-64	White	Graduated from HS
Participant 5	Female	Catholic	45-54	White	Graduated from HS
Participant 6	Male	Catholic	55-64	White	2 years of college
Participant 7	Female	Catholic	55-64	White	Completed grad school
Participant 8	Female	Christian	55-64	White	Graduated from college
Participant 9	Male	Catholic	65+	White	1 year of college
Participant 10	Male	Catholic	45-54	White	Graduated from HS
Participant 11	Female	Catholic	45-54	White	2 years of college
Participant 12	Female	Catholic	45-54	White	Graduated from college
Participant 13	Male	Catholic	45-54	White	Graduated from HS
Participant 14	Female	Catholic	65+	White	Completed grad school
Participant 15	Female	Christian	45-54	Hispanic	Graduated from college
Participant 16	Female	Catholic	45-54	White	Graduated from college
Participant 17	Male	Catholic	55-64	White	Completed grad school
Participant 18	Female	Catholic	55-64	White	Completed grad school
Participant 19	Female	Catholic	18-24	Hispanic	Graduated from college
Participant 20	Male	No religion	25-34	White	1 year of college
Participant 21	Female	Catholic	45-54	White	Graduated from college
Participant 22	Male	Catholic	55-64	Hispanic	Graduated from HS
Participant 23	Male	Skipped	25-34	Hispanic	Graduated from college
Participant 24	Female	Catholic	55-64	White	1 year of college
Participant 25	Female	Catholic	55-64	White	Graduated from HS
Participant 26	Female	Christian	18-34	Mixed	3 years of college
Participant 27	Female	Catholic	18-24	Asian/White	3 years of college
Participant 28	Female	Catholic	45-54	White	Graduated from HS
Participant 29	Female	Catholic	45-54	White	Graduated from college
Participant 30	Female	Catholic	45-54	Hispanic/Asian	Graduated from college
Participant 31	Female	Christian	45-54	White	Graduated from college
Participant 32	Female	Catholic	55-64	Hispanic/Latino	Graduated from college
Participant 33	Female	Catholic	18-24	Two races	3 years of college
Participant 34	Female	Catholic	45-54	White	Graduated from college
Participant 35	Female	Catholic	65+	White	2 years of college
Participant 36	Female	Non-dem	35-44	Hispanic	Graduated from college

Data will be summarized by using charts and graphs created by Survey Monkey. Information will be analyzed by me to pinpoint trends or patterns of significance. Questions concerned end-of-life practices, end-of-life decision making and the practice of natural burials. This information is intended to capture the respondents thoughts on the burial processes mentioned. Some of the questions included in the questionnaire are: 1. Does sustainability matter to you when making end of life decisions for yourself and loved ones? 2. Have you ever heard about Natural or Green Burial as an option after death (before reading the description given above in the survey)? 3. Now that you know what it is, would you ever consider Natural Burial for yourself or a loved one? and 4. Would you like to learn more about the Natural Burial process? The full list of questions from the survey can be found in the appendix. Also, the link to the instrument from Survey Monkey is <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/5NLPH86>.

To discover how much influence funeral home personnel have in the dissemination of green burial information I conducted journalistic interviews with administrators from 6 local funeral homes. Phone calls were made to leadership and lasted between 10 and 15 minutes. Responses were taken down with pen and paper in relation to the 7 questions asked. Each subject was told the purpose of the project and agreed to answer questions about green burial practices. Individual calls were made over a week long period in the afternoons between 2PM and 3PM. Out of the 5 funeral homes called 3 of the participants were female and 2 were male. All subjects worked in funeral homes located in Westchester County within a 20 mile radius of the Woodlawn Cemetery. The participants wished to remain anonymous and will be referred to as Funeral Home 1, Funeral Home 2 and so on in this paper. The following questions were asked:

1. Do you offer services for green burials?
2. If yes, how long have you been offering it as an option?

3. Do you suggest green burial as an option when a family member calls to arrange final disposition for a loved one?
4. Have you ever had people call and ask about green burials?
5. If yes, have you seen a recent uptick in inquiries?
6. When suggested what have people said is their reason for NOT wanting a green burial?
7. What is the largest percentage of your business-cremation, embalming or green burial?

The funeral homes interviewed were very informative and showed a willingness to answer questions about green burials. Each subject answered every question given and were very helpful in explaining how they deal with green burials.

Concerning the integrity of my research, survey participants were given the instructions before they started the survey that they could skip any question or stop taking the survey at any time. No one was forced to answer or respond to any question that made them uncomfortable. All results were sent back anonymously so there is no way to trace back answers to the participants. In addition, when speaking to funeral home personnel I did not take down any contact information and explained to each of them as well that they could skip any question and end the interview at any time.

To conclude, the three most utilized methods of final disposition in the United States today are cremation, embalming, and green burial (National Funeral Directors Association). Research has shown that green burials are healthier for the environment, better for the future ecology of the planet, cheaper than traditional disposition methods and often include a more personal and meaningful expression of closure for mourners. It has also been proven that people in the US are showing more interest in learning about green burials. (National Funeral Directors Association)

Therefore, why, even though the growing trend in the United States is leaning toward “non-traditional” burial practices, are natural burials still one of the lowest practiced methods of body disposal? What can be done to encourage people to turn to green burial as a form of disposition of human remains? Through the recently described research methods I hope to give some insight into why people are not embracing the green burial methods more readily. Through a questionnaire of local inhabitants of a community flanked by a big cemetery and through phone interviews with people who work in the burial industry I hope to see a pattern as to why people are behaving the way they do concerning green burials. With this newly acquired information available hopefully more will see the benefits environmentally, financially and ethically to Natural Burials rather than the traditional methods of burial. This will impact the future environment of our world as we find alternate ways to deal with a growing population that will die.

## Chapter 5: Findings/Results

*“Men have died from time to time, and worms have eaten them, but not for love.”*

*William Shakespeare, As You Like It*

It has been proven that green burials are a better alternative than traditional burial methods including cremation and embalming but still make up only 5% of final disposition practices in the United States (National Funeral Directors Association). My research question asks, why, given that traditional burials are environmentally toxic and green burials are environmentally beneficial, are people still hesitant to try green burial and how can we encourage people to do it?

My research concluded that there are several reasons why green burials are not utilized enough. First, there is an anxiety about the naturalness of the green burial and many are afraid that the body will show signs of its un-embalmed state. Second, mourners need to have a place to visit in which a marker is placed memorializing the loved one otherwise they feel like they have abandoned the deceased and disrespected their memory. Third, some people feel that their community and family will look badly upon them if they don't follow the “traditional” rituals that they have always adhered to concerning burials. Next, access to green burial spaces causes some people to hesitate. As a final point there is a lack of information. People simply do not know enough about green burial to make an effort to try it. Through scholarly literature and a survey and journalistic interviews I was able to confirm these results.

## **I. Dead Man Walking. The Anxiety of Green Burials**

The first reason people had for not being able to embrace green burials was their expressed concerns over the “naturalness” of green burials. For most of United States history it was common practice to have a green burial. Rituals and funeral practices occurred at home or in a religious setting and death was viewed as a natural part of life. Families cleaned the body, wrapped the body and carried the body to its final resting place. However, perceptions of death have evolved to become “*denied, medicalized and feared*” (Shelvock, 2022). Practices shifted to embalming which was a way to “stretch out” the period between biological and social death. Embalming creates an illusion of the person as they were before the death. It’s as if the deceased is “*hovering in an in-between state between two worlds not quite dead yet*” (Dawdy 2021). Americans were not denying the death but rather used it as a ritual to slow it down, take a lingering look and say a long goodbye” (Dawdy, 2021). Therefore, the realness of a green burial is too much for some. Will the un-embalmed body leak? Will it smell? Current cultural norms evoke fear and anxiety at seeing the body during the process. One pastor who presided at a green burial remarked, “*You could really feel the presence of the body. There’s a little bit of anxiety about that*” (Stewart, 2018). In one of my interviews with funeral home personnel the male administrator who we will call John (as the man I spoke to requested anonymity) was very honest in his responses concerning traditional methods of burial. When I asked him why people are not embracing the green burial method he explained that “*people are sheltered from the processes of death for a reason*” if “*people really knew what went on during cremation and embalming they would never opt to do it.*” He continued by saying that “*at the end of the day, people are going to go with what makes them most comfortable and right now green burial is not it.*” Unfortunately, this particular reason was not on my radar when I created the survey. I was really surprised by this and wish that I had asked a

direct question that pertained to people's feelings about the body being un-embalmed and the realness of green burials. That is something I would like to explore with further research.

## **II. I need “concrete” proof that you lived: Green Burials and Memorialization**

The next main theme to emerge was the feeling that memorialization of the deceased can't take place in the same way as it does in traditional burials (Balonier, 2019). Green burial sites differ from traditional cemeteries in that they are left in their natural states. No headstones, no cement vaults or liners and no pesticides and lawn maintenance are used in the space. For some the absence of headstones makes it difficult for some to see the spaces as “spiritual” and therefore find it hard to have some closure. Family members actually feel that without the ability to memorialize their loved ones they are actually “abandoning the deceased” in a space that looks like an ordinary meadow or forest floor (Stewart, 2018). Many people need a place to go to leave flowers or a token. Green spaces often do not allow this. In my surveys this concept came up quite a bit. One person even remarked that they needed a place to come, sit and reflect. Without a headstone to show a name they felt that it was not exhibiting proper respect to their loved one. In addition research has shown that people begin to hold a special attachment to areas where their loved one is buried. They see the place as “holding” the memory of the person and feel their presence there (Stewart, 2018). As a final point it was shown that for many *“the spiritual significance of a place seen to be “natural” is important, but the spiritual significance of altering the setting to create a memorial is similarly strong”* (Stewart, 2018).

### III. Keeping up with the Joneses. Community, Rites and Cultural Norms

Data indicates that people care about what their community thinks and how their family will feel if they choose green burial methods over traditional. Many have close ties to the traditions that their family has shared for years and the uniqueness of green burials can be a hard pill to swallow. Traditional cemeteries are established places of sorrow where mourners can come together to visit their dead and tend their graves. The gravesite can become a “*psychological lifeline for those left behind.*” (Dreese, 2023) Grieving at a communal space, after a ceremony in the presence of others, helps to bring an individual the acceptance of loss—as shared sense of community among mourners So the fear of not having that communal bonding because of a process that is not the social norm deters people from exploring the natural burial options. In addition the traditional wake and funeral can also be a sign of status and wealth showing how much the family loves the deceased with an expensive casket and showy funeral and interment (Balonier, 2019). Green burials are about the simplicity of the process and wealth and status do not play a part.

Why has cremation risen while green burials remain at a low percentage? Trinity University Sociology Professor Michael Kearl believed that there are several reasons for this rise in cremation. First reason for this is that the US is a melting pot of immigrants that have brought their religious and cultural rituals with them. India and Asia have the highest cremation rates and when they arrive here they bring these traditions with them. Also, as the population lives longer and grows older, people are now making their own end of life arrangements instead of their children or families. This older generation is choosing cremation over embalming and green burials because of the cost effectiveness of it and because religions are open to the process now. Also the sense of connection that people used to feel for a hometown is fading as they are on the



move. People rarely are born, live and die in the same place as they did before. Cremation makes it easier to transport mom or dad's remains when the time comes. Plus the perception of death is evolving. People now look to the "spiritualness" of the afterlife and feel comforted by the idea of having their ashes scattered at their favorite places (Kearl, 2005) rather than being buried in one place.

#### **IV. I've Fallen and I Can't Get Up! Lack of access to green burial sites**

Access to green burial spaces is another reason people are having trouble adapting. Traditional cemeteries are often accessible via public transportation. Many cemeteries, like Woodlawn Cemetery, run parallel to the train and are near several bus lines. These types of cemeteries often have large parking lots and with their internal paved road system allow for easy and manageable navigation throughout. Unless it is classified as a hybrid cemetery most natural cemeteries are out of the way and in areas very hard to navigate. Conservation spaces even more as they are usually attached to protected lands or state parks. In addition, normal landscaping is not provided in these spaces as they are supposed to be kept true to their natural state. There are typically three types of areas in a natural burial ground. First there is the meadow which can be rough and uneven and could be problematic for someone who can't walk. Secondly, is the ecotone, an area where two systems come together and can be difficult to maneuver through since it's on the tree line or edge of the forest. Dense brush, trees and foliage in this area can hinder accessibility. Lastly, the woods, where there is no pathway, dense brush and a teeming forest floor can prove hazardous to the elderly or disabled (Dreese, 2023).

#### **V. In the Dark. The Lack of Green Burial Information**

In most of the literature that I read one reason came up again and again to help explain the hesitation from some for green burials. People simply did not know enough about the process.

When the term green burial is searched online a good number of results will come up however the results for cremation and embalming are much higher. In addition through my funeral home interviews every one said that they do not offer green burial as an option unless it was specifically asked for by a family member. Even then the process is discouraged as it is cheaper than traditional processes and more of a hassle for the funeral workers. My surveys also confirmed this with a good number of participants saying that they did not know much about green burials. One of the survey participants thought that embalming was mandatory in the US and a few others expressed their surprise that green burials even exist. This lack of information concerning the benefits of green burials such as being environmentally friendlier, better for the future ecology of the planet, cheaper and an improved method for closure, really (Harris, 2007) hurt the industry.

In this next section I will break down the survey questions (33) and attempt to summarize the findings. In the context of research it seems that some of the survey questions asked, though relevant and interesting, could not aid in the answering of my main research question. The information was helpful and could be used for further research however it did not help to elaborate on why people are not embracing green burials even though they say they are interested in them.

My instrument contained 33 multiple choice questions. Questions 1-5 were demographic inquiries. To summarize my results, most of the respondents were female (77.14%), white (74.29%) aged 45-64 with 37.14% stating that they had a full college education and 82.3% identifying as Catholics. They all live in the Woodlawn, Bronx and Yonkers area.

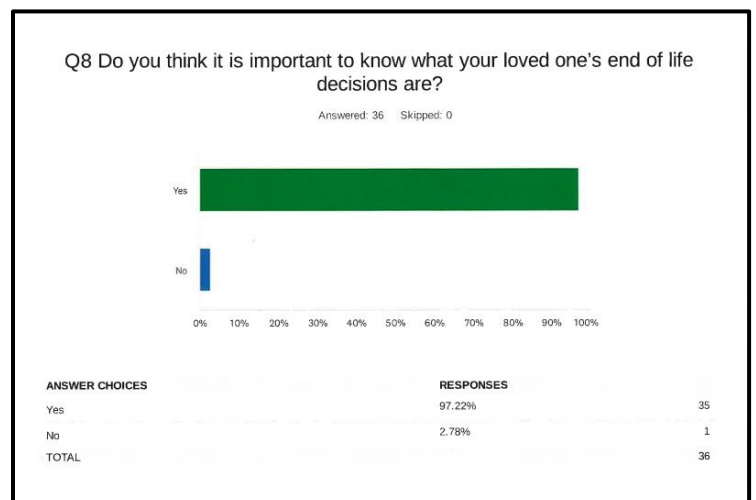
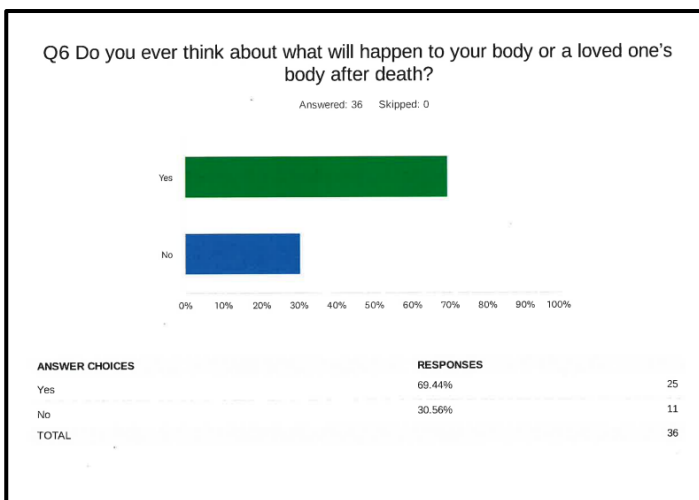
Questions 6, 7, 8 & 9 were introductory questions asked to help garner what people's basic thoughts were on death and dying.

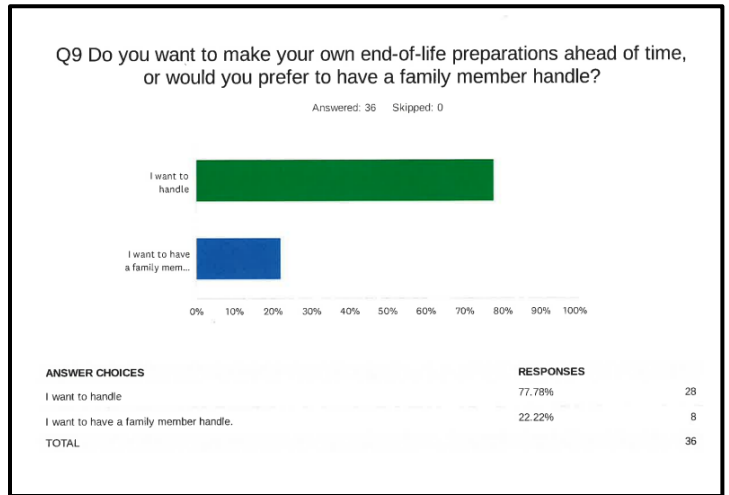
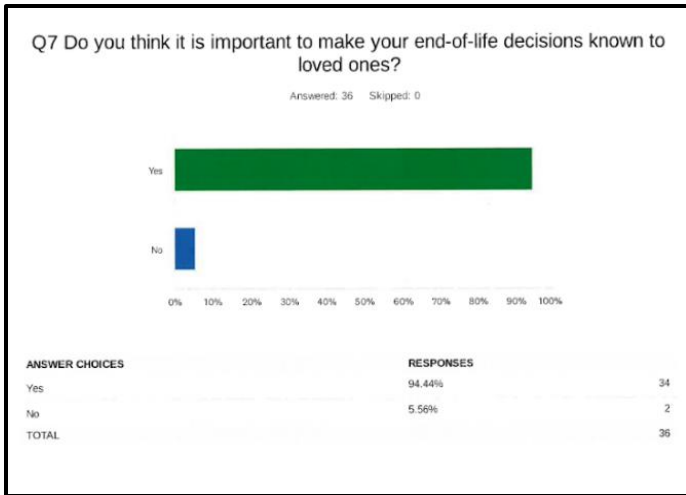
6. Do you ever think about what will happen to your body or a loved one's body after death?
7. Do you think it is important to make your end-of-life decisions known to loved ones?
8. Do you think it is important to know what your loved one's end of life decisions are?
9. Do you want to make your own end-of-life preparations ahead of time, or would you prefer to have a family member handle?

The responses indicated that people are definitely thinking about end-of-life decisions.

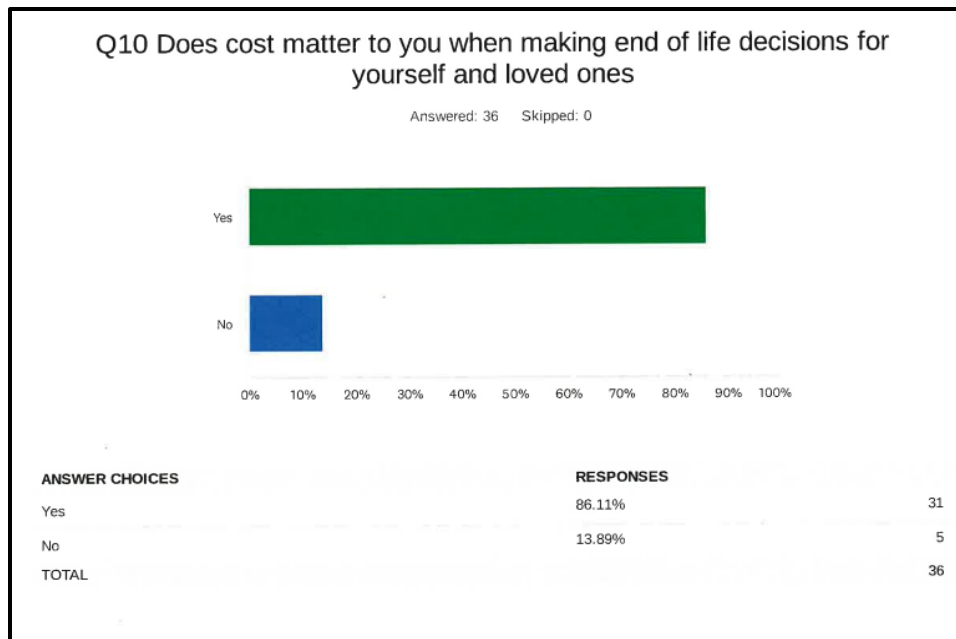
Almost 69% of the subjects marked that they do indeed think about death and end-of-life processes. An interesting piece of data was that out of all the males that took the survey only two said that they never thought about death. Another statistic I was surprised with showed that those that said “no they don't think about what will happen to their body after death” fell into the 45-54 age range. I assumed that those who marked no were younger and not concerned about things like that yet. However it was the older people who are putting it out of their minds (including 2 people 65 and over). In all four questions the answer yes dominated the poll. I don't really see how I can correlate these responses to my research question except to say that people do believe that it is important to know their loved one's end-of-life decisions as well as expressing their own.

Overwhelmingly people wanted to choose their own end-of-life preparations. This is a good indication that with proper education and various incentives we can try and encourage people to make green choices in regard to what type of burial they want.



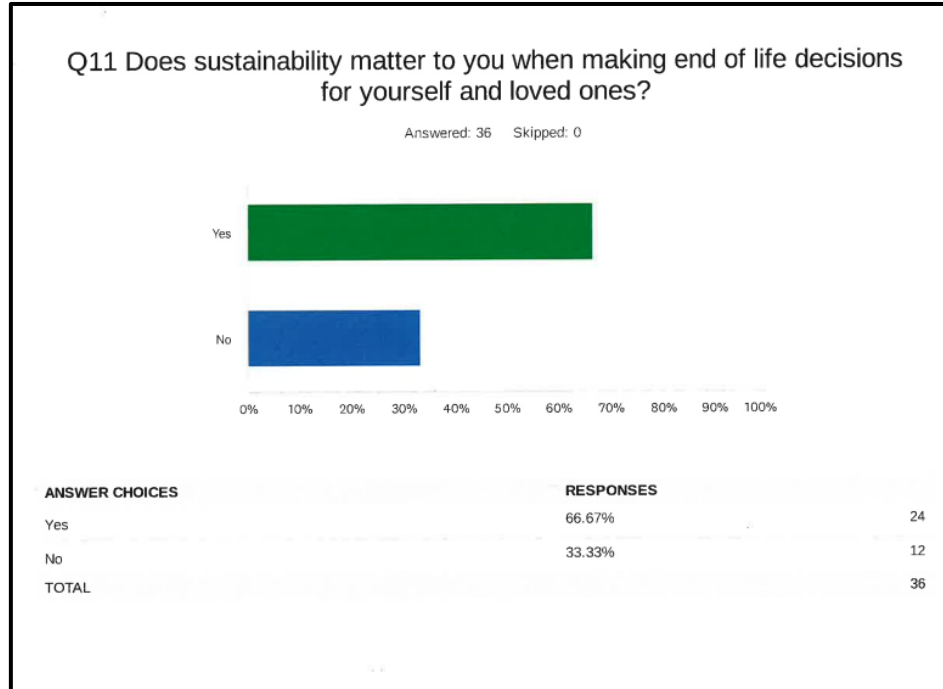


10. Does cost matter to you when making end of life decisions for yourself and loved ones



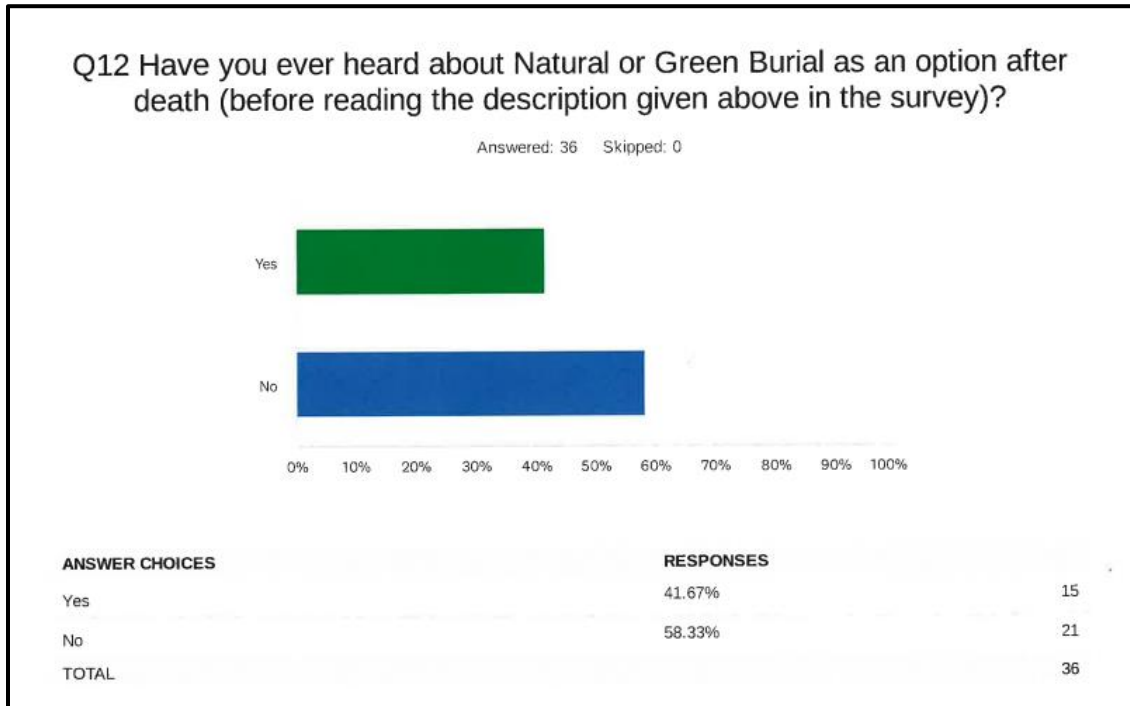
Question 10 proved that cost does matter to most in making end-of-life preparations. Green burials are a cheaper option compared to traditional methods and that should be a positive incentive to look toward green burial as a viable option of body disposal. Out of the 36 people polled 85.71% said that cost does matter. Cost should be an integral part of the dialogue when educating people on the green burial processes.

11. Does sustainability matter to you when making end of life decisions for yourself and loved ones?



Green burial is all about helping to protect our current environment and in trying to reduce our carbon footprint. The future of our world is dependent on the preservation of our ecosystems and wildlife. Only 65.71% said they would consider sustainability when making end-of-life decisions. I expected the number to be higher. This does correlate with some other answers that people gave saying that they are indifferent to what happens to them after they are gone. Aside from cost, the environmental advantage of a green burial is its main selling point. If people are not concerned about sustainability in the future then that could be another valid reason why people are not choosing green burial. However the percentage of people who are concerned is still higher than the average.

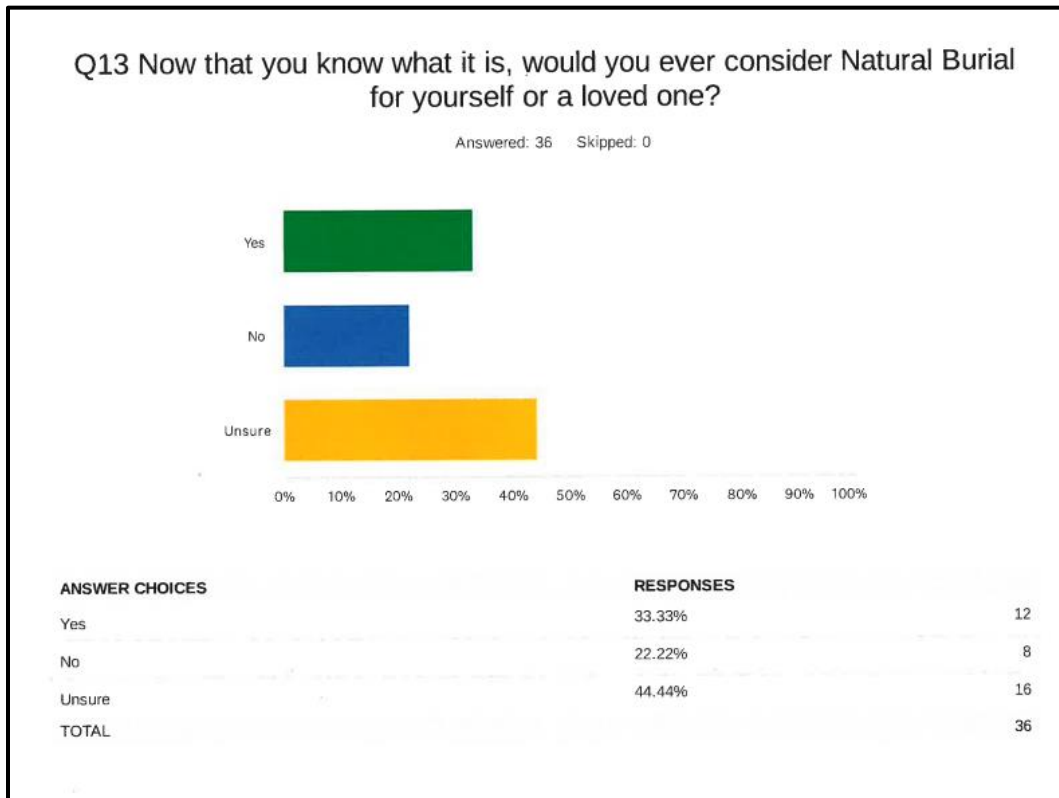
12. Have you ever heard about Natural or Green Burial as an option after death (before reading the description given above in the survey)?



Another reason that was discussed in my earlier research was the lack of information that people have about green burials. According to the survey results almost 59% of the subjects said that they had never heard of green burials. This helps to prove that education is limited. In a later question, when asked why people were still unsure of green burials, 58% of the individuals said that they didn't know enough about green burial processes to make a definitive decision. In another question a participant wrote that they thought embalming was mandatory in New York state and that they never knew of a natural burial. Also, in my journalistic interviews, 95% of the participants stated that they only offer information about green burials when asked. This overall of lack of information and the hesitancy by the funeral industry to inform people about the green burial process is why it is still the lowest utilized.

Questions 13, 14, 15 and 16 were included to find out if the literary research found corresponds to the results of the surveys. It can be conclusively stated that people still have a hesitancy for green burials. Even after learning about the process, 22% said they would not consider it for a loved one and over 44% were still unsure. The enlightening parts of this series of questions were the reasons the participants gave in questions 14, 15 and 16 for their feelings.

13. Now that you know what it is, would you ever consider Natural Burial for yourself or a loved one?



#### 14. A. If yes—why?

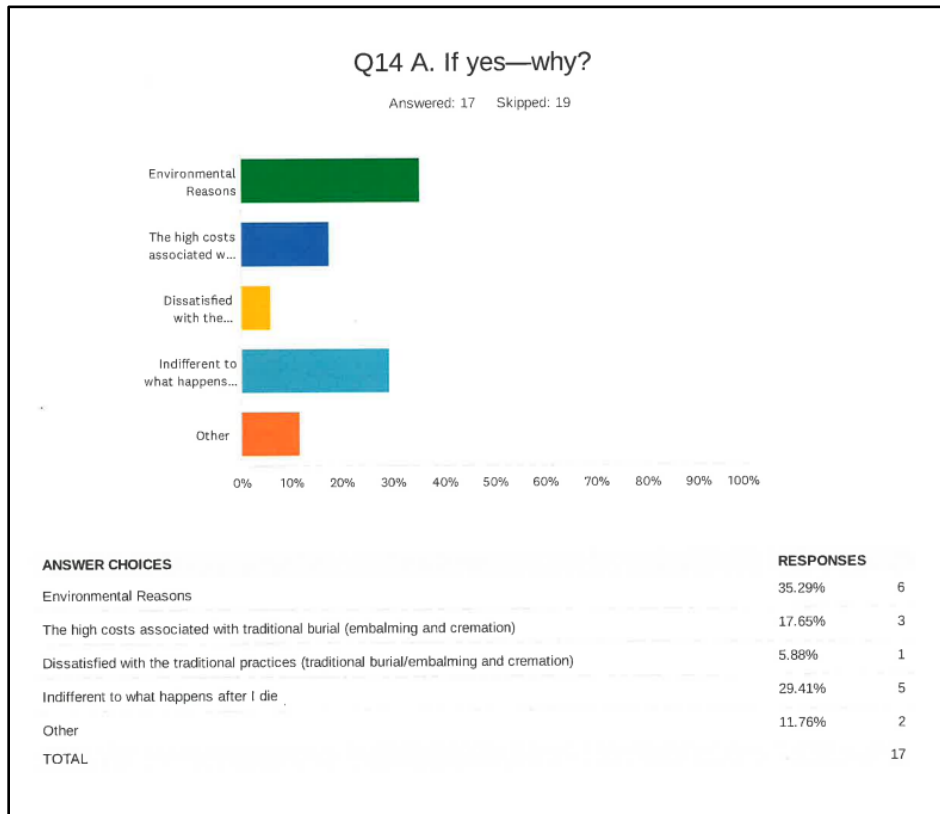
##### Environmental Reasons

The high costs associated with traditional burial (embalming and cremation)

Dissatisfied with the traditional practices (traditional burial/embalming and cremation)

Indifferent to what happens after I die

Other (please specify)



Upon analyzing the data in Question 14 it is shown that those that said they would consider a green burial would do it because of environmental reasons. Over 37% of participants marked the environment as their catalyst for green burials. Next, at 31% was indifference. People don't seem to care what happens to them after they die. Cost also played a significant part with 12.50% of respondents marking that as their motivation. In research presented in the scholarly sources, it was shown that sustainability does play a big part in the green burial outlook. In one article people were polled that wanted to start their own natural conservation spaces. When asked why they were



doing it financial gains was at the bottom of the list. Conservation of landscape well as preservation of ecosystems was the reason people wanted to do it (Pence-Stone, 2013).

15. A. If not—why?

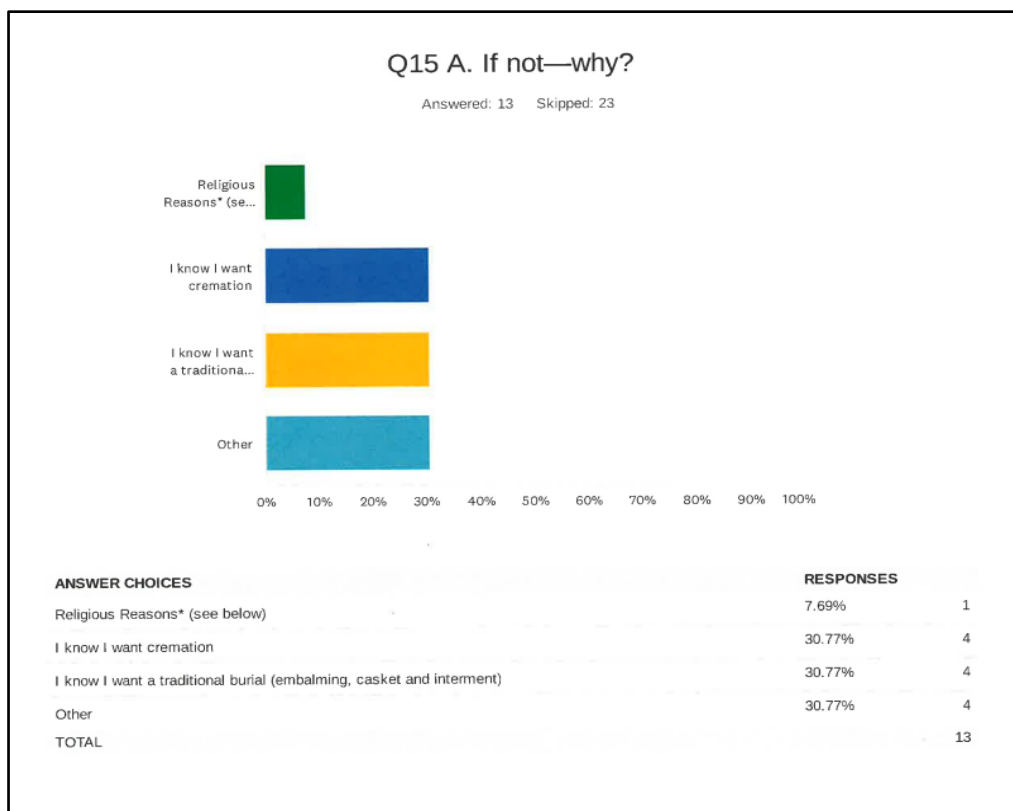
Religious Reasons\* (see below)

I know I want cremation

I know I want a traditional burial (embalming, casket and interment)

Other

\*If you chose religious reasons please elaborate



In Question 15 respondents that said no to green burials were split evenly between the traditional processes of embalming and cremation. To me this proves that the cultural and ritualistic ties that people are comfortable with and have practiced all their lives are still prevalent. Religious reasons only made up 8% of the results. Cultural ties were an important reason why people are still hesitant to embrace natural burials.

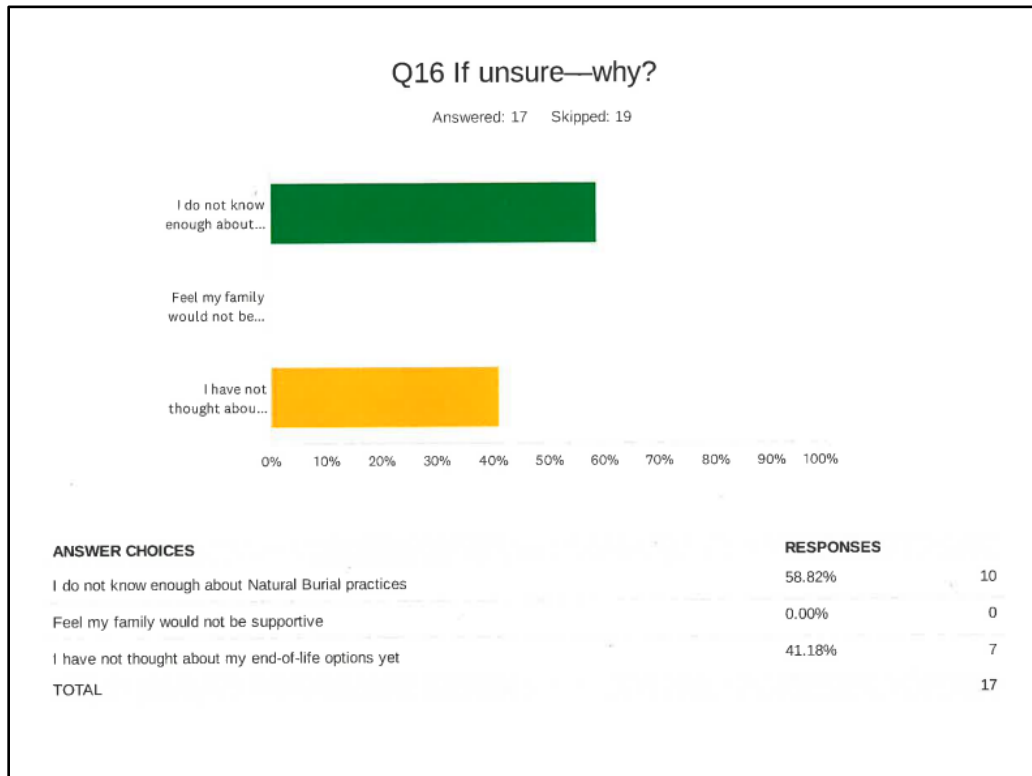
## 16. If unsure—why?

I do not know enough about Natural Burial practices

Feel my family would not be supportive

I have not thought about my end-of-life options yet

Other (please specify)



Question 16 proved that information is a big reason people don't try green burials.

Over 58% of respondents said that they were unsure of green burials because of lack of information. Time and again in my literary sources lack of knowledge about green burials was a consistent reason given. Curiously, 41% haven't given the process any thought yet. That could be because of fear of death or it is just not something that people don't feel it's necessary to talk about yet. Perhaps this sentiment goes back to the Civil War when "death" practices became institutionalized. Funeral homes took over the disposition practices that were normally done at home and the preparations of the natural burial were taken over by the undertaker. This caused cultural changes in the way society viewed death collectively and created the modern system that

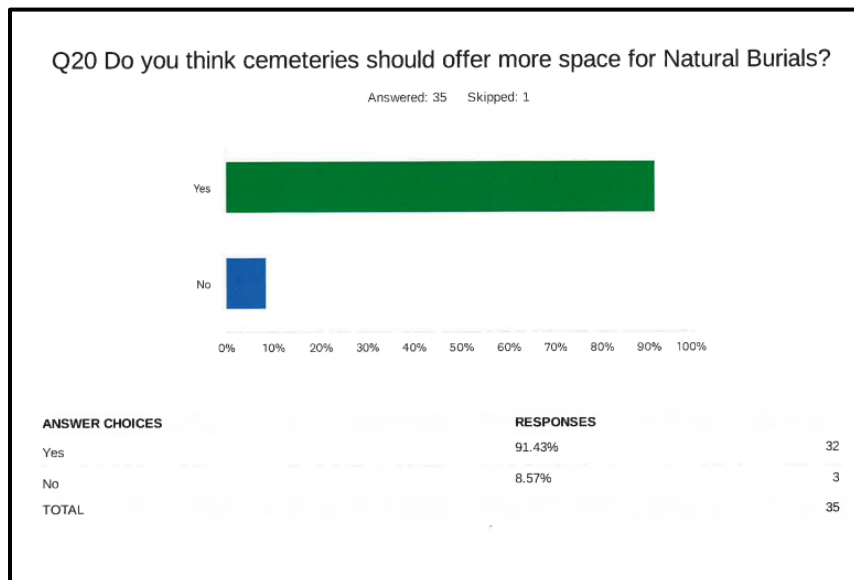
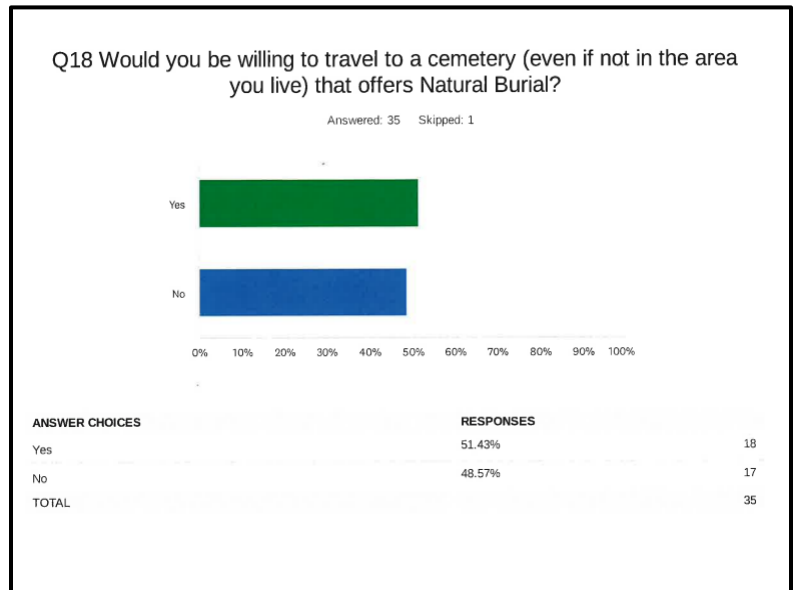
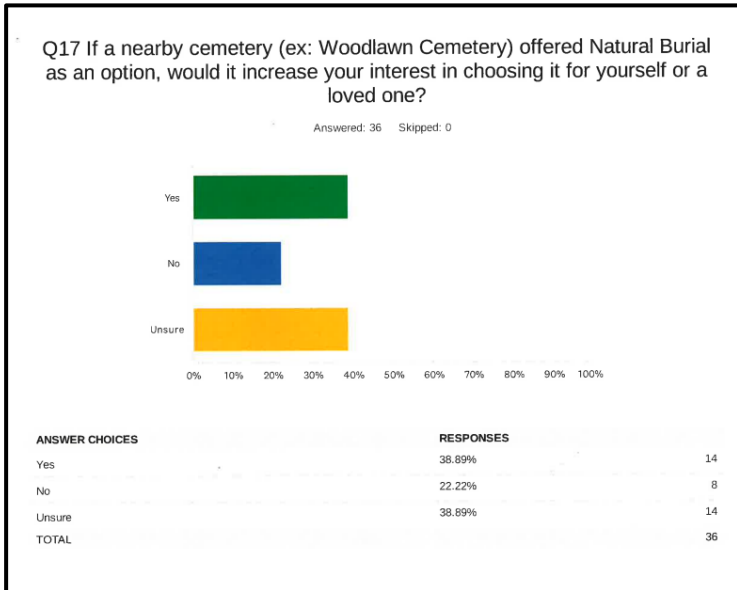
we know now (Beard, 20127). Death was no longer a part of the circular process. It was now feared.

Questions 17 and 18 and 20 have to do with accessibility and location.

20. Do you think cemeteries should offer more space for Natural Burials?

17. If a nearby cemetery (ex: Woodlawn Cemetery) offered Natural Burial as an option, would it increase your interest in choosing it for yourself or a loved one?

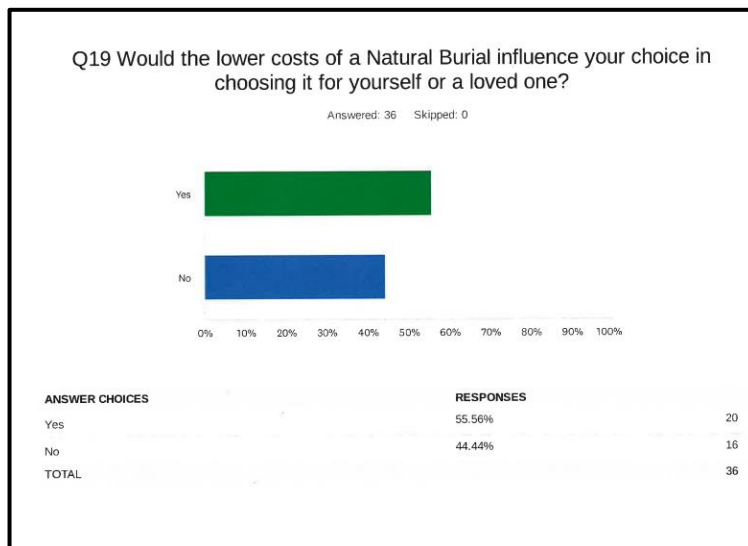
18. Would you be willing to travel to a cemetery (even if not in the area you live) that offers Natural Burial?



The problem of accessibility to natural burial spaces forces some to look negatively on the process. Though a majority in question 20 agreed that cemeteries should offer more green space, the findings in questions 17 and 18 were split down the middle when it came to the actual willingness to travel to a green space. This does back up the notion that people are hesitant to be buried in a green space for fear of access for their grieving family members. However, when asked in question 17 if a local cemetery offered the space, over 37% were unsure with a 23% hard no. So even if spaces are made more readily available it seems that people will still be unsure.

Question 19 asks about cost that is associated with final disposition.

19. Would the lower costs of a Natural Burial influence your choice in choosing it for yourself or a loved one?



Cost is usually a factor that is mentioned when there is a discussion concerning green burials. On average the cost of a green burial is considerably lower than that of traditional methods of burial. “Green burials remove several services and costs, like embalming and casket treatment, so they can be much cheaper than the average \$2,597 burial cost or \$9,420 funeral cost.” (Martin, 2023) Since a lower price would be a possible reason to encourage people to try green burials I

wanted to see if this change in cost was a motivation. According to the data over 54% of the subjects said that cost would be a motivating factor to try green burial. However almost 46% said it would not. Therefore cost probably only makes a slight impact in end of life decisions when it comes to natural burial methods. Follow up questions were asked to gauge if government incentives would encourage people to use green burials.

21. Do you think the government should give incentives (e.g. tax breaks) to encourage people to choose Natural Burial over the traditional practices?

22. If yes—why?

23. If not—why?

24. Would these incentives encourage you to look more into the practice?

25. What type of incentives do you think they should offer?

Almost 70% of the respondents said that government incentives would make them consider green burials. When asked why they felt this way some of the most frequent written answers given were:

- ❖ *For environmental purposes*
- ❖ *Help ease the financial strain of a costly funeral*
- ❖ *People might consider using more*
- ❖ *Government should help with this*

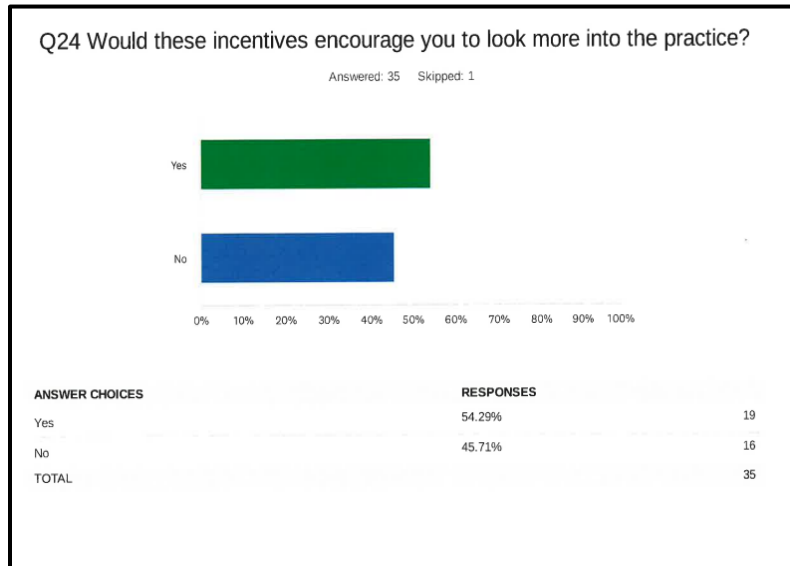
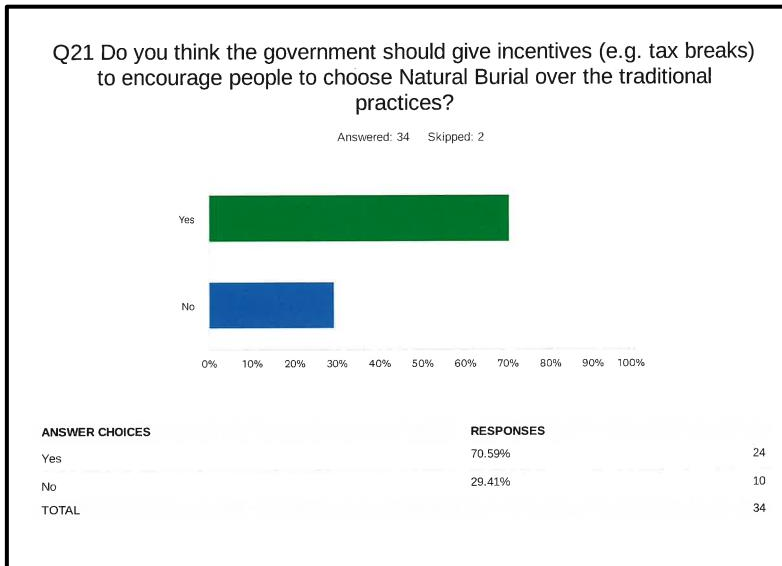
When asked what type of incentives they think the government should give, the following were the most suggested:

- ❖ *Price Control*
- ❖ *Tax Benefits*

- ❖ *Funeral Subsidies*
- ❖ *Tax Rebates*

30% of the respondents said no, the government should not interfere. The main reasons given were:

- ❖ *Government should stay out of people's choices*
- ❖ *People should choose for personal reasons not for financial gain*
- ❖ *This will raise other taxes and others should not have to pay. If you want a certain type of burial then pay for it yourself.*
- ❖ *The responsibility should remain on the individual not governments responsibility*



Again, in question 24, when respondents were close. Almost 53% said yes and 47% said no. The summative conclusion is that cost and incentives don't really make a huge difference to most people when making end of life decisions.

Question 26 directly asked about the respondents' hesitancy about green burials.

26. If you are still hesitant about Natural Burial, please explain what parts of Traditional Burial processes mean the most to you and why?

The answers were interesting and definitely pertained to the concept of memorialization. Out of the 36 respondents 11 answered the question and 24 skipped it. Those that did answer had the following responses:

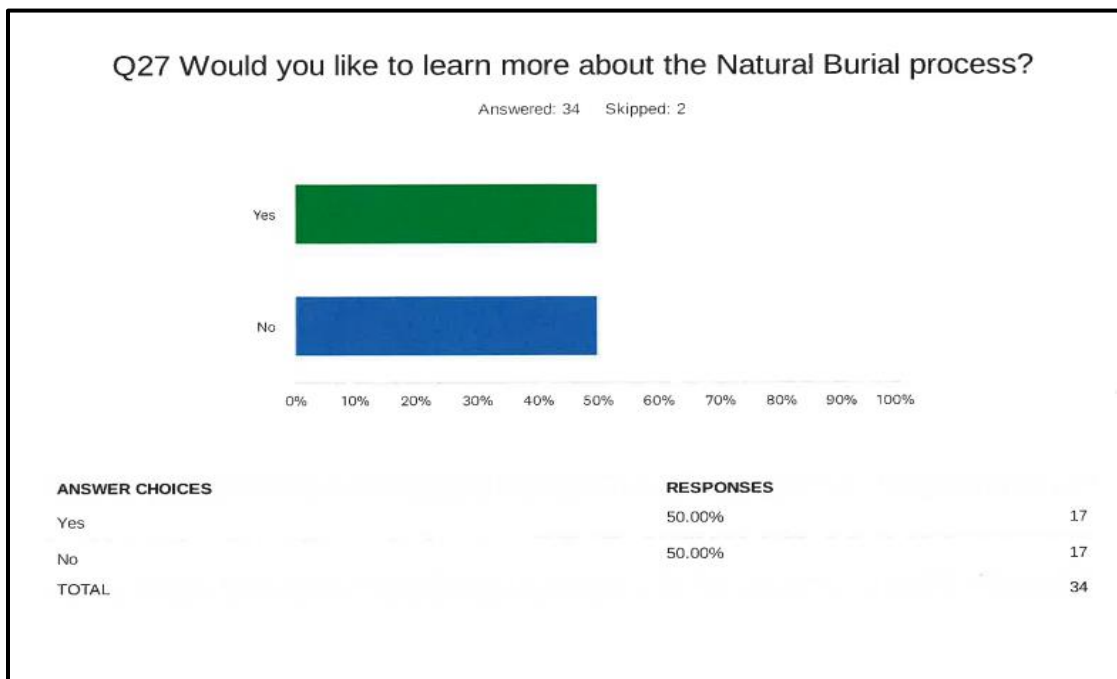
- ❖ *I believe my soul leaves my body to go to heaven so where I lie is not too important to me*
- ❖ *It's a good option for some just not for me*
- ❖ *I thought embalming was mandatory in the United States. I really didn't know there were alternative options. There isn't anything specific about Traditional Burial that has specific meaning to me. I just don't know enough about natural burial to decide if it something I would consider. Also, I have often thought of cremation as an option for end of life planning.*
- ❖ *I like traditional ways of doing things*
- ❖ *I am a veteran and would like to be buried in a national cemetery*
- ❖ *That is our family tradition*
- ❖ *I haven't thought about my preferences regardless of the method*
- ❖ *Looking like you are sleeping so that you look like you are entering eternal rest. Giving friends and family a gathering to come together to support one another and talk about how great I was (ha!) Music and mass as a community*
- ❖ *I prefer having a clearly marked headstone over which family and friends can pray*
- ❖ *I wish to be cremated as I want my ashes, representative of my being and presence, to be with them at all times*

- ❖ *My partner was entombed and I will choose the same*
- ❖ *Traditional burials are what we are all most familiar with; you work with a funeral home and they take care of the process. With natural burials who handles the process?*

I found this question to be the most transparent in why people are still hesitant to try green burials. The weight of past scholarly research suggested that ritual and tradition were still the main reasons that people will not try these new methods. 8 out of the 11 answers above lean toward tradition, memorialization and ritual therefore supporting this argument.

Question 27 does not really give much information that can be applied to my research question. Again the numbers were split down the middle. 50% of people are still not interested in learning about green burials and the other half is. I appreciate that some want to learn more and hopefully with the suggestions I give in the conclusion we can get the remaining to change their mind.

27. Would you like to learn more about the Natural Burial process?





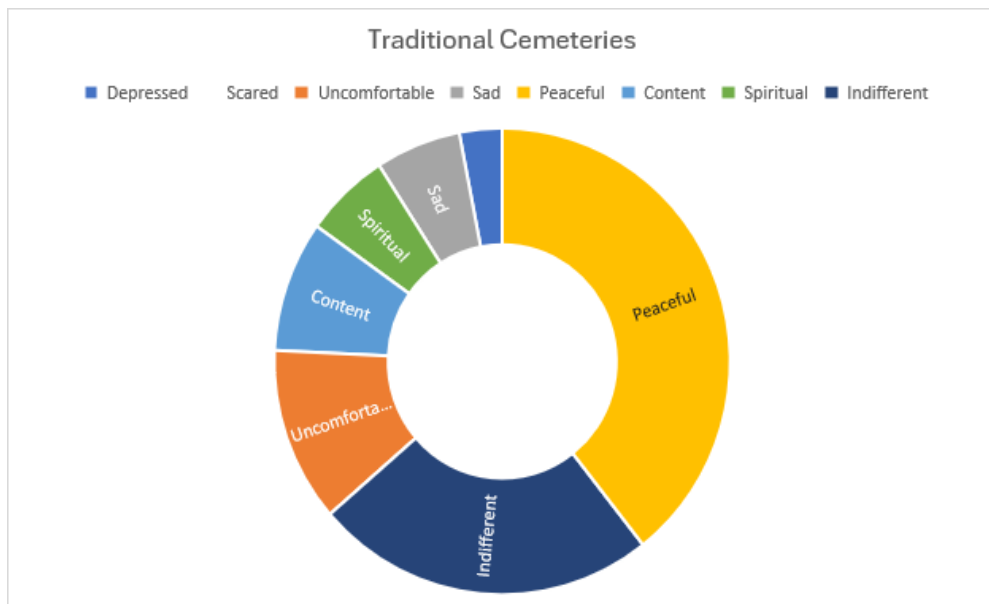
Questions 28 and 29 were thought-provoking and helped to gain new perspectives on burial space. The comparison of the results gave some interesting conclusions.

28. How do these pictures of a traditional cemetery make you feel?



I feel depressed  
 I feel scared  
 I feel uncomfortable  
 I feel sad  
 I feel peaceful

I feel content  
 I feel spiritual  
 I feel indifferent  
 Other (please specify)

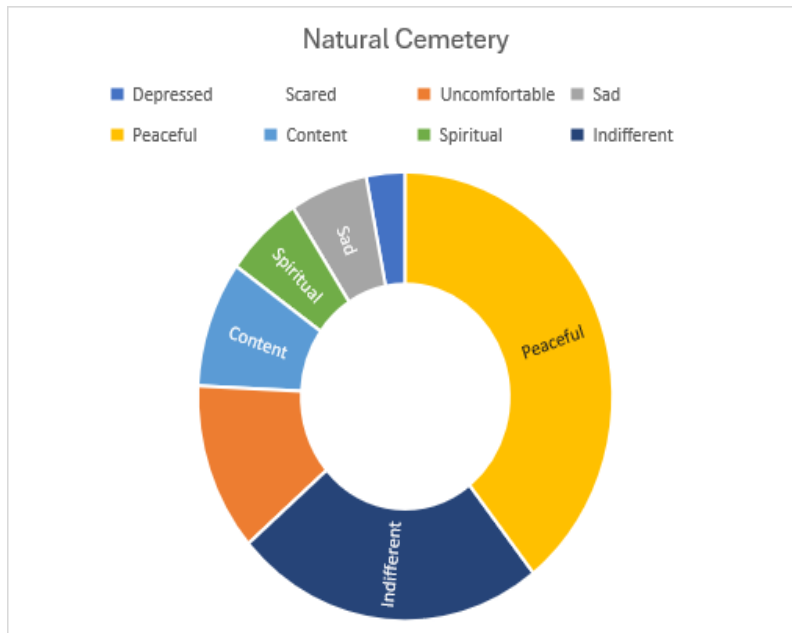


29. How do these pictures of a natural burial site make you feel?



I feel depressed  
 I feel scared  
 I feel uncomfortable  
 I feel sad  
 I feel peaceful

I feel content  
 I feel spiritual  
 I feel indifferent  
 Other (please specify)

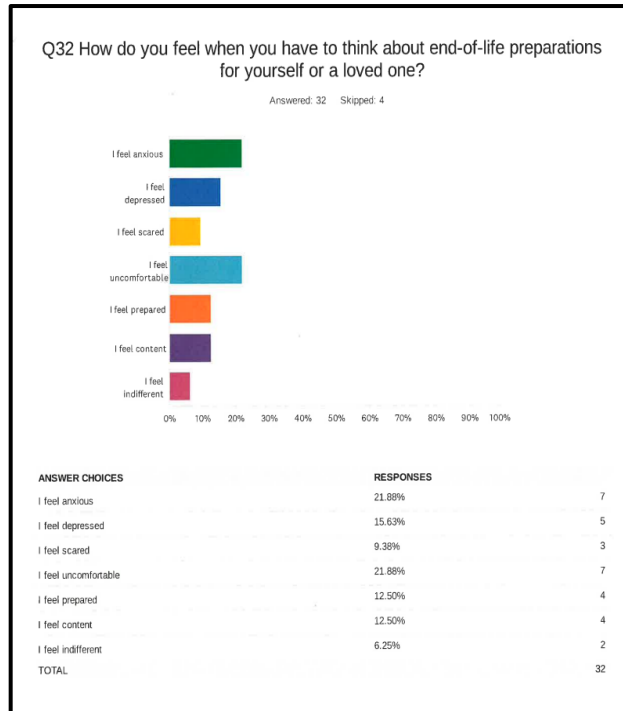


Both spaces seemed to make people feel at peace. However more felt at peace in the traditional cemetery. This proves, I think, that people still feel a spiritual connection to a space with headstones that they can visit with markings for memorialization. The green spaces left people feeling indifferent and uncomfortable. Again this shows that without headstones or memorial markers people don't feel that spiritual connection to the space. Traditional cemeteries also gave a sense of contentment while spirituality and contentment were less in green spaces. For these reasons people are hesitant to try green burials.

The final 2 questions (32 and 33) though interesting do not really add anything to help answer my main research question.

32. How do you feel when you have to think about end-of-life preparations for yourself or a loved one?

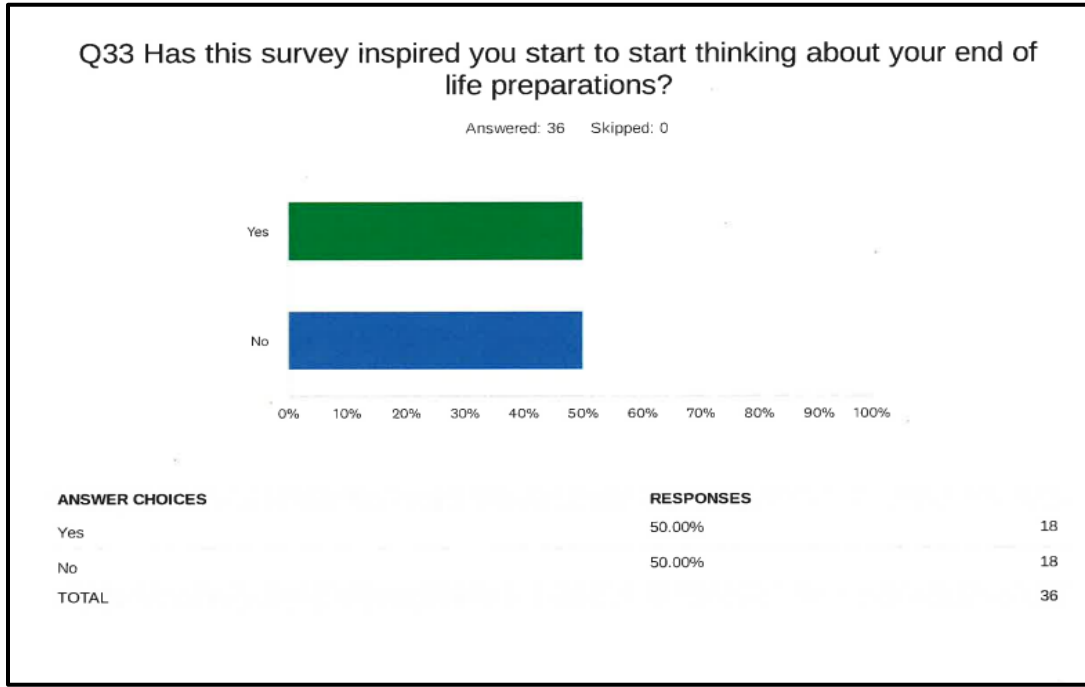
- I feel anxious
- I feel depressed
- I feel scared
- I feel uncomfortable
- I feel prepared
- I feel content
- I feel indifferent
- Other (please specify)



As I would assume people felt uncomfortable about thinking of end-of-life preparations. Perhaps this is another reason why people are hesitant to embrace green burials—they simply aren't ready to talk about it. Anxiety and depression were the next marked the most. I did find it fascinating that almost 13% felt prepared and 13% felt content with their decisions. I would be interested in researching why they feel so confident about their choices.

Lastly, question 33 again had no impact on my research question but I was curious to see if this survey spurred anyone to think more about their end-of-life preparations. I know it motivated me to express my wishes to my children. Interestingly enough, 50% were engaged and inspired to give their death some thought while 50% were disengaged

33. Has this survey inspired you to start thinking about your end of life preparations?



In addition to the distributed survey, I also gave 5 interviews to funeral home personnel. This was done to gauge how the funeral home industry disseminates information about green burials. Seven questions were asked of each funeral home representative. Since they all asked to remain anonymous I will refer to each interviewee as Funeral Home 1 (FH1), 2 and so on. The following questions were asked:

**1. Do you offer services for green burials?**

*FH1-Yes at least five years now*

*FH2- No we only utilize cremation and traditional interment*

*FH3-We don't mention it but if someone asked we can help them facilitate*

FH4-*If they ask us we can help them*

FH5-*We know about it but don't do them because have never been asked*

FH6-*Yes*

**2. If yes, how long have you been offering it as an option?**

FH1- *About 5 years*

FH2- *0*

FH3-*We don't really offer it unless prompted*

FH4-*Don't really suggest it right off*

FH5-*Have a price list for about 10 years now but never used it*

FH6- *For a few years now*

**3. Do you suggest green burial as an option when a family member calls to arrange final disposition for a loved one?**

FH1- *Not really. If they ask we do offer them a price list with all the options*

FH2- *No*

FH3-*We don't mention it but will discuss if asked*

FH4- *We don't suggest it but will provide what they need if directly asked*

FH5- *We will help if asked*

FH6-*We don't usually suggest it but will offer information if we know that they are of a certain religious demographic (Jewish for example)*

**4. Have you ever had people call and ask about green burials?**

FH1- *Yes.*

FH2- *No*

FH3-*Not one person has ever asked*

FH4- *One person called and asked questions but we have never assisted anyone with one*

FH5-*No one has ever asked but it might be our area. I know they are big in Vermont and Northwest.*

FH6-*No. Most people don't have information about it and in urban areas like this we don't have many spaces that offer it.*

**5. If yes, have you seen a recent uptick in inquiries?**

FH1- *We have seen a slight uptick—I would say 10%*

FH2-

FH3-

FH4-

FH5-

FH6-

**6. When suggested what have people said is their reason for NOT wanting a green burial?**

FH1- *At the end of the day people go with what they are comfortable with*

FH2-

FH3-*Because it's not well known or part of the mainstream yet*

FH4- *Tradition. People go with what they are comfortable with*

FH5-*People want that feeling of closure with a traditional wake and funeral*

FH6-*Cultural and religious traditions*

**7. What is the largest percentage of your business-cremation, embalming or green burial?**

FH1-*Cremation*

FH2-*Embalming*

FH3-*Cremation and internment in mausoleums*

FH4-*Cremation and Embalming*

FH5-*Traditional Burials*

FH6-*Cremation and traditional burials*

From the responses that were given it can be surmised that cremation and embalming are still the two top methods of final disposition practiced today. What we also know that funeral home staff are not offering up information on green burials in a transparent manner. Almost all of the facilities said that they will only mention green burials when asked by the purchaser. This is

why people don't know about the method and therefore are not choosing it more. In addition, as was proven previously from the literature, culture, religious rites and tradition are still what bind people to the traditional burial methods. Most said that people still have that familial connection to what they know.

In conclusion, research through surveys and funeral home interviews has helped to prove some of the assertions that have been made in this paper. Specifically, that green burials are not being utilized as much as cremation and embalming. This is happening for the following reasons. Scholarly research has shown that anxiety of a green burial, lack of green burial information, inability to memorialize in green spaces, accessibility issues in natural spaces and strong familial ties to tradition and ritual, are keeping people from embracing green burials. This research has substantiated these reasons.



## Chapter 6: Conclusions

*"I do not fear death. I had been dead for billions and billions of years before I was born, and had not suffered the slightest inconvenience from it."*

Mark Twain

Findings confirm that cremation and embalming, the two methods most used in the United States presently for the disposal of human remains, are harmful to the environment and the future ecology of our planet. Cremation still relies on machines that discharge harmful CO<sub>2</sub> gases into the air and certain metals and chemicals present in the body (mercury from fillings) are also released into the atmosphere. The cremains are then either buried in metal urns or kept in containers. Embalming uses toxic chemicals to temporarily preserve the body. This cocktail of chemicals eventually leaks into the soil and water table. The ornate metal and finishing from caskets as well as the cement used for the concrete burial vaults further pollutes the grounds.

In addition, these practices are expensive and sometimes can be very traumatic for the bereaved. Furthermore, cremains and bodies are often buried in public cemeteries which are overcrowded with cement headstones. Plus, maintenance of the cemetery grounds is often done with machinery which releases pollutants into the air and dangerous pesticides to treat the vegetation. In comparison, Green Burials are safer for the environment. No embalming chemicals are used on the body, burial containers and shrouds are 100% biodegradable and the bodies are placed directly into the earth with no cement vaults, no lawn mowers spitting out gaseous fumes into the air and no pesticides to pollute. The green burial mantra is to leave the space as natural as possible, therefore, native plants, flowers and trees also help to keep the ecology of the area healthy and primarily undisturbed

It's been proven that green burials are a better alternative than traditional burial methods but still make up only 5% of final disposition practices. Research showed that there are 5 main reasons why people are hesitant to try green burials. 1.) They have anxiety about the naturalness of the green burial and are afraid that the body will show signs of its un-embalmed state. 2.) Mourners need to have a place to visit in which a marker is placed memorializing the person otherwise they feel like they have abandoned the deceased and disrespected their memory. 3.) Some feel that their community and family will look badly upon them if they don't follow the "traditional" rituals that they have always adhered to concerning burials. They are concerned that green burials are just "too out" of the norm. 4.) Access to green burial spaces is another reason people are having trouble adapting. Often these green spaces are out of the way and in areas very hard for the disabled and old to get too. The spaces are often in rural areas with native fauna and wildlife allowed to thrive. The land is not maintained as traditional cemeteries but rather allowed to be in its natural state which can be hilly, uneven and hard to navigate. 5.) Lastly is a lack of information. People simply do not know enough about green burials. They are not aware of all the environmental benefits of a green burial and they do not know that green burials can be an emotionally gratifying experience that allows for closure as a meaningful way to say goodbye to a loved one.

On the review of these findings, it is suggested that several things can be done to help encourage people to embrace green burials. Providing more education is the key. TV ads, newspaper ads, stands at local events, and site activities (Spence-Stone, 2013) would be helpful in showing people the real-life experiences of others as well as connecting them to their stories. In addition, the use of social media to promote these initiatives would reach a younger segment of the population. If people are aware of the benefits green burials can provide both for the environment and for their spiritual well-being, then perhaps they will be less anxious to look into it (Dreese

2023). I took the time to search various college course offerings and found that many universities do offer classes on mortality, death and dying. It would be interesting to delve deeper to see if they include final disposition practices in their curriculum. I know that at SUNY Purchase there is a class in the Liberal Studies program called Waste Worldwide which I was able to take. In this class about the history of the world's garbage there is a lecture that includes human body disposal which I found to be informative and fascinating. In addition to college courses, I would go to an even younger segment of the population and suggest high school trips to green burial spaces to take away some of the mystery of the method. When visiting one of these spaces you can witness for yourself the natural beauty and calmness in the area. You can appreciate the environment, its fauna and realize how you can become a part of the cyclical process rather than more of a problem with harsh toxic burial traditions that have little benefit. I know death is an uncomfortable subject to discuss let alone think seriously about however it is inevitable for us all and being educated on the various disposition methods will not only save stress later on it will help take away the fear. Personally, having to research so much on this topic has helped me to see death in a different light and to feel less anxious about it. Furthermore, more intervention from hospice, social workers and medical personnel to suggest green burials when helping to make end-of-life planning decisions with people would be beneficial (Bouverette, 2017). To summarize on this point, the "unknown" is what causes unease but if you are educated on the processes and are informed about options that can provide a meaningful and purposeful death, I believe green burial will be a more amenable choice for people in the future.

In addition, the funeral industry should 100% be embracing this method and offering it as an option readily, regardless of the fact that it might hurt their profit margin compared to the pricey traditional methods. Family members should not have "*to ask for it first*" to get information about it. I mention individual tax incentives later on, but I would also like to see governmental

enticements for green burial spaces to encourage their creation. Perhaps if the funeral industry can see that they will still make a profit then they will be more accepting to sharing about the natural burial process. As a side note, I did find in my research that a few funeral homes have begun to accept this new green burial industry and have found ways to garner a profit by charging extra for elaborate wicker basket caskets and increased goods for memorial services.

As a final point, I believe marketing and digital media must be utilized to spread information about green burial processes. Websites, videos and Facebook pages need to be employed to reach all segments of society. Ken West, an advocate for green burials said *“the topic of promotion is the single most important issue relating to the success of a natural burial site.”* (Spence-Stone, 2013).

Accessibility is important but so is respecting the naturalness of the green spaces and this purpose. For those that might have issues navigating these spaces it is beneficial to let people know that there are different types of green burial spaces available today. As discussed in the paper earlier depending on your wants you can choose a green space that works for you. Hybrid spaces offer the most flexibility as they are part of a traditional cemetery and the spaces are carefully manicured and maintained by the staff. Accessibility will be easier for most as these large urban cemeteries have mass transit nearby and parking lots and paved roads to navigate the cemetery. Natural Cemeteries are more difficult but there are usually pathways throughout and benches to meditate and rest. Getting there might be a challenge but these spaces at least offer a more manageable environment for visitation. Conservation Cemeteries will be the hardest to visit but with other options a person can still be encouraged to embrace the natural burial.

Cost is another way to incentivize people to look at green burials. The average adult's funeral can cost upwards of \$10,000 (Harker, 2012). However green burials are less costly because of the exclusion of embalming or cremation practices as well as costly caskets and urns. In

addition, by embracing green spaces such as a conservation cemetery, what you do spend money on is “redirected toward land conservation” which in itself “promotes rural conservation, open space and the restoration of natural habitats.” (Harker, 2012) If all Americans who embalmed their loved ones bought a conservation burial instead it could produce “\$3.8 billion in conservation revenue.” (Holden, 2017)

Tax incentives are another way that would aid in promoting the use of green burials. We have tax incentives for solar panels why not for green burial practices? The government could invest in the environment by offering “tax incentives, grants, rebates and credit enhancements.” (Haneman, 2021) By doing this they are also “broadening public access and interest.” (Haneman, 2017) It has also been proven that environmental tax credits are extremely effective in changing “ingrained consumer habits.” (Haneman, 2017)

As a final point, the most challenging reason to overcome people’s deference will be the ritualistic ties that people have to their cultures and community. Time and again it was reflected in literature and studies that people have strong ties to what has been done before. They are used to that tradition, and it will be hard to sway from it. I think it would be beneficial to show people that they can still memorialize their loved one without having to sacrifice money and the environment to do so. The concept of planting native flowers and shrubs as well as trees in some places can memorialize someone without all the negatives of traditional burials (GreenerFuneral.org). Heather Hill, a funeral director in Raleigh, North Carolina said that the deceased can become a “living memorial” rather than just an inscription on a tombstone. By doing this the deceased is giving back to the earth, nurturing the soil, sustaining a natural habitat for wildlife and leaving a positive footprint rather than a negative one. There can be a true celebration of life. It will be about saying goodbye to the old which is a constructive form of closure and celebrating the new in which the person is becoming one again with the earth. The traditional funeral home wake where the waxy,

sleeping, painted corpse is displayed then shoved into a cement vault lined with cold grey inscribed tombstones is depressing and does nothing to contribute to the betterment of our planet. Worse yet, is cremation in which the body is taken away, heaved into a burning furnace only to become a plastic bag of ashes and bone. In its place, you can have the memory picture of a calm, comforting burial where flowers, trees and nature surround you. Having the community come together to celebrate the life of the individual in this way will be more gratifying than a typical service in which the deceased is separated from the experience by being entombed in a metal casket. Personally, I find this sentiment lovely. My favorite flower is a lilac. I told my children that I want a lilac tree planted where I am buried and every May when it blooms they should come and visit. Each year will be a renewal of life and I would have helped contribute to that. That gives me peace and I hope will give my children closure and the feeling that maybe I do still exist but just in a different way.

I do believe that further research should be done concerning green burial practices. My questionnaire was helpful but included a small sample size in a concentrated area. A survey should be instituted to a larger segment in other communities and with other religions that frown upon the non-traditional methods. I think a survey to a more diverse population would also be beneficial as well in other areas of the country. This will further the research of the main question which is “why are green burials not being utilized?” and supplement the findings by continuing to show a pattern relating to people’s hesitancy about green burials.

In conclusion, my research has helped to highlight final disposition practices in the United States. Through scholarly sources I was able to summarize the positives and negatives of cremation, embalming and green burials. In addition I was able to explain the history of each practice as well as the environmental impact of each method. Through this research we learned that natural/green burials are the best choice in body disposal compared to the traditional practices

of embalming and cremation. However, green burials still make up a very small percentage of disposals in the United States. This paper explored the main reasons why and addressed what could be done to change that. A survey was given to 35 people about their feelings on green burials. Journalistic interviews were made with six funeral home representatives for their outlook on the subject. More research needs to be done to aid in the progress of green burials and what incentives can be provided for encouragement. All of this, hopefully, will help to alleviate the “grave doubts” that many people have about green burials today.

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### Figures

Figure 1	Shrouded body prepared for green burial [Photograph]. Larkspur Conservation. <a href="https://images.squarespace-cdn.com/content/v1/5efcd31b9f187a52353ee2f2/1608584667547-WRYJPF3K5S6OAC1D5CH/StepByStep.Accent.jpg?format=1500w">https://images.squarespace-cdn.com/content/v1/5efcd31b9f187a52353ee2f2/1608584667547-WRYJPF3K5S6OAC1D5CH/StepByStep.Accent.jpg?format=1500w</a>
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## Appendix

*And though worms destroy this body  
Yet in my flesh I shall see God  
Yet in my flesh I shall see God*

“I Know That My Redeemer Liveth”  
George Frideric Handel

Survey copied from Survey Monkey

### Burials

**Confidentiality: This research will not be made available to the public and the data collected in this study will be completely anonymous. No personally identifiable information will be collected and the information you choose to provide in this study cannot be connected back to you. You can skip any question or stop the survey at any time. Thank you.**

Questions in this survey will refer to the practice of a Traditional Burial or a Green/Natural Burial.

- “Traditional Burial” refers to the process of cremation and/or embalming of the body and burial in a traditional casket.
- "Natural burial" refers to the actual burial process. This means the opening and closing of the grave, preparation of the remains, and the laying of those remains in the burial place.
- "Green burial" refers to this process but also to the cemetery in which the burial takes place. A "green cemetery" uses no artificial pesticides and none of the bodies buried in a green cemetery can have been embalmed or buried in a traditional casket.

### Question Title

1. Ethnicity

White

Black or African American

Hispanic or Latino

Asian or Asian American

American Indian or Alaska Native

Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander

Other (please specify)

### Question Title

2. Age

Under 18

18-24

25-34

35-44  
45-54  
55-64  
65+

**Question Title**

3. Gender

Male

Female

Non Binary

**Question Title**

4. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

Did not attend school

1st grade

10th grade

2nd grade

11th grade

3rd grade

Graduated from high school

4th grade

1 year of college

5th grade

2 years of college

6th grade

3 years of college

7th grade

Graduated from college

8th grade

Some graduate school

9th grade

Completed graduate school

**Question Title**

5. Do you identify with any of the following religions? (Please select all that apply.)

Protestantism

Catholicism

Christianity

Judaism

Islam

Buddhism

Hinduism

Native American

Inter/Non-denominational

No religion



Other (please specify)

**Question Title**

6. Do you ever think about what will happen to your body or a loved one's body after death?

Yes

No

**Question Title**

7. Do you think it is important to make your end-of-life decisions known to loved ones?

Yes

No

**Question Title**

8. Do you think it is important to know what your loved one's end of life decisions are?

Yes

No

**Question Title**

9. Do you want to make your own end-of-life preparations ahead of time, or would you prefer to have a family member handle?

I want to handle

I want to have a family member handle.

**Question Title**

10. Does cost matter to you when making end of life decisions for yourself and loved ones

Yes

No

**Question Title**

11. Does sustainability matter to you when making end of life decisions for yourself and loved ones?

Yes

No

**Question Title**

12. Have you ever heard about Natural or Green Burial as an option after death (before reading the description given above in the survey)?

Yes

No

**Question Title**

13. Now that you know what it is, would you ever consider Natural Burial for yourself or a loved one?

Yes

No

Unsure

**Question Title**

14. A. If yes—why?

Environmental Reasons

The high costs associated with traditional burial (embalming and cremation)

Dissatisfied with the traditional practices (traditional burial/embalming and cremation)

Indifferent to what happens after I die

Other

Other (please specify)

**Question Title**

15. A. If not—why?

Religious Reasons\* (see below)

I know I want cremation

I know I want a traditional burial (embalming, casket and interment)

Other

\*If you chose religious reasons please elaborate

**Question Title**

16. If unsure—why?

I do not know enough about Natural Burial practices

Feel my family would not be supportive

I have not thought about my end-of-life options yet

Other (please specify)

**Question Title**

17. If a nearby cemetery (ex: Woodlawn Cemetery) offered Natural Burial as an option, would it increase your interest in choosing it for yourself or a loved one?

Yes

No

Unsure

**Question Title**

18. Would you be willing to travel to a cemetery (even if not in the area you live) that offers Natural Burial?

Yes

No

**Question Title**

19. Would the lower costs of a Natural Burial influence your choice in choosing it for yourself or a loved one?

Yes

No

**Question Title**

20. Do you think cemeteries should offer more space for Natural Burials?

Yes

No

**Question Title**

21. Do you think the government should give incentives (e.g. tax breaks) to encourage people to choose Natural Burial over the traditional practices?

Yes

No

**Question Title**

22. If yes—why?

**Question Title**

23. If not—why?

**Question Title**

24. Would these incentives encourage you to look more into the practice?

Yes

No

**Question Title**

25. What type of incentives do you think they should offer?

**Question Title**

26. If you are still hesitant about Natural Burial, please explain what parts of Traditional Burial processes mean the most to you and why?

**Question Title**

27. Would you like to learn more about the Natural Burial process?

Yes

No

**Question Title**

28. How do these pictures of a traditional cemetery make you feel?

see below



- I feel depressed
- I feel scared
- I feel uncomfortable
- I feel sad
- I feel peaceful
- I feel content
- I feel spiritual
- I feel indifferent
- Other (please specify)

**Question Title**

29. How do these pictures of a natural burial site make you feel?

see below



- I feel depressed
- I feel scared
- I feel uncomfortable
- I feel sad
- I feel peaceful
- I feel content
- I feel spiritual
- I feel indifferent
- Other (please specify)

**Question Title**

32. How do you feel when you have to think about end-of-life preparations for yourself or a loved one?

I feel anxious

I feel depressed

I feel scared

I feel uncomfortable

I feel prepared

I feel content

I feel indifferent

Other (please specify)

**Question Title**

33. Has this survey inspired you start to start thinking about your end of life preparations?

Yes

No

Why?