

Ashes

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creative ways to preserve or disperse the 4 to 6 pounds of ash that's left behind. And the possibilities are endless.

"There's quite a variety of options these days," says Harley Forrey, general manager at Chapel of the Chimes Funeral Home and Chapel of Memories in Oakland, which serves more than 650 families per year. About 70 percent of those select cremation.

"While (cremation) is typically less expensive than burial, the decision often has to do with personal preference even more so than cost," he says. "You can do pretty much the same services as with traditional burials if you want, but a lot of times people do their own memorial services. They'll go out on yachts and scatter remains, or hold gatherings at restaurants or favorite places.

"We do have quite a few families who just take their loved ones home," Forrey adds. "Some split up cremated remains and put them in small keepsake urns for other family members. There's no one way to do things these days."

While many still choose to place ashes in a columbarium niche, on the fireplace mantle or out at sea, others are having ashes incorporated into jewelry or mixed with paints in a fine work of art or blown into glass sculptures. Some have remains blended with cement and added to underwater memorial reefs off the coast of Florida. Others, such as Gene Roddenberry of "Star Trek" fame and '60s icon Timothy Leary, have been rocketed out into the final frontier.

Rising rates

For reasons ranging from cost savings and efficient land use to shifts in cultural and religious customs, the cremation rate for the 2.5 million Americans who die each year doubled in the past 15 years and is projected to increase to about 49 percent nationally by 2017. In California, the rate is about 56 percent, according to 2011 data; Nevada tops the list at nearly 74 percent, and Mississippi is at the bottom with about 15 percent.

Industry research conducted every five years by the Illinois-based CANA shows the fastest-growing trend is for people to scatter or preserve ashes themselves.

"We're finding more and more people saying, 'We don't need to buy anything special as far as a container goes; we'll take Grandma home in a simple urn and wait until Grandpa dies and figure it out later,'" says Barbara Kemmis, CANA's executive director.



D. ROSS CAMERON/STAFF

An urn available for the storage of cremains, at the Chapel of the Chimes in Oakland. More and more families are choosing cremation over traditional burial.

UNUSUAL RESTING PLACES

If you don't want to go the traditional route to preserve cremated remains, or perhaps want to express a loved one's quirky personality, here are a few of the more unusual options out there, most with big price tags:

■ **Rocket's red glare:** Companies like Angels Flight Fireworks in Southern California and Heavens Above Fireworks in the U.K. can arrange special fireworks displays incorporating cremation ashes to provide for a spectacular farewell; www.angels-flight.net, www.heavensabovefireworks.com.

■ **Become a masterpiece:** Have a small amount of someone's ashes blended into the pigments of a commissioned painting from places like Loved Ones Art; www.lovedonesart.com.

■ **Rest in a reef:** Sending the deceased to the sea has become popular in recent years, not only scattering ashes but working with companies that mix cremated remains with cement and apply them to man-made underground reefs off the coast of Florida for the growth of coral and other sea life. Families charter boats to the sites or even snorkel or dive to visit their loved ones; www.nmreef.com, www.greatburialreef.com.

Laws vary across the country about where it's legal to scatter, with California maintaining some of the strictest rules. Mortuaries and crematories are required to provide guidelines, and you also can consult the Cremated Remains Dispersers Booklet from the

California Department of Consumer Affairs, Cemetery and Funeral Bureau. (Download it at www.cfb.ca.gov/licensee/crd_booklet.pdf.)

For instance, did you know it's illegal to spread ashes on beaches, but it is possible to drop them into the ocean if you're more than 500 yards from shore? Private properties require written permission from the owner, and you usually can get permits in national or regional parks such as Yosemite or on Mount Diablo, but there are restrictions that come along with those spots, too.

Yet while there are plenty of permitted ways to do it, people still try to sneak ashes into places such as the San Francisco Giants' AT&T Park or Disneyland. (Pirates of the Caribbean and Haunted Mansion are said to be the most frequently attempted sites.) But spreading on your own illegally can backfire. Not only might you end up in Disneyland jail, but "remains don't automatically go into the ground," Kemmis says, "and a groundskeeper will end up sweeping up remains and throwing them away. That's probably not the final resting place you had in mind."

Eternal options

Jewelry has become a popular choice. Rikki Quevedo, of San Jose, makes custom lockets for South Hill Designs, and has created some that hold a small amount of a loved one's ashes. "One I did was for a child who died," she says. "The family buried the ashes because they wanted a gravesite to go to, but the mother wanted some in a locket as a way to always have her child close to her heart."

Memory Glass in Goleta can fuse ashes into beautiful, unique works of blown glass to make colorful orb sculptures or pendants. Even the humble urn has

taken on more creativity in recent years. The folks at In the Light Urns, based in the Central Valley, offer myriad containers such as special hourglasses in which ashes replace sand to sift time. They also offer photo-box urns, urns in the shape of motorcycle gas tanks, soccer balls, chess pieces and even teddy bears.

There are sites with custom urns for Raiders or 49ers fans, "Star Trek" enthusiasts or KISS groupies. You can get an urn in the likeness of President Barack Obama, or the shape of the deceased person's head. These days, even Walmart sells urns.

Air scattering is also a frequent option. Guy Wentzel, owner of Sacramento-based Wentzel Flying Service, has been scattering ashes all across California and around the globe for more than 30 years.

"A lot of the people who request air scattering are former pilots or those who either loved airplanes or loved a particular spot they want to be scattered over," he says by phone from Puerto Rico, where he was spreading someone's ashes. "We can scatter anywhere along any coast. We also scatter up at Lake Tahoe on the Nevada side, we've gotten permission in the past to scatter over Yellowstone, Kings Canyon, in Santa Cruz near Big Basin." Families often choose to watch from the ground as the ashes flow like smoke from a special chute attached to the plane.

Whatever you do with cremated remains, you don't have to do it right away. Terry has been holding onto his dad's ashes until just the right time. "It's been since April. I thought I might do it on Father's Day, but I still wasn't ready," he says. "So I think it'll be good up in Sonoma. He'll get all the racing. He'll like that."

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