

Funeral Arrangements

December 2016

Forty-three years ago, at age 56-years, my father received his death sentence when the doctors at Stanford Hospital found pancreatic cancer and declared it to be inoperable. They predicted he would be dead in six months or less and they were correct. After recovering from the exploratory surgery, my father began to make his funeral arrangements.

Along with my mother, he visited St. Mary's Cemetery to select a burial place. He chose an outdoor location in the mausoleum with an eastern exposure. Looking ahead to future grave site visitations by small grandchildren he selected a vault about 36 inches off the ground – just high enough for them to see his burial site at eye-level.

An aside: Even though my mother remarried and lived another 25 years, they are buried side-by-side at this location. Whether it was because the grave had already been paid for, she decided to use it, or whether she preferred to be with him still, I have no way of knowing.

After his selection of the burial site, my father then visited the funeral home to select his casket, and pay for all the costs associated with his imminent funeral. He was a practical person; he knew what had to be done and saw no point in leaving these loose ends to the worries of his grieving wife. Finally, he met with the attorney who handled his will and made some adjustments he thought would be of benefit to his wife his two grown sons.

Is it now my turn?

I have not yet received any such medical death sentence but at the age of eighty-one not only is it conceivable but even likely I will soon enough.

I will not need a burial plot because I do not wish to be buried in a cemetery, I expect to be cremated and have my ashes scattered off the coast of Mendocino at Spring Hill Ranch and at a suitable location on the grounds of Loaves & Fishes where homeless people safely congregate and are looked after.

Church funeral services are out of the question but if the family wishes to sponsor a memorial service at a time and place convenient for them, I would have no objections. And even if I did, how would I make them known?

Beyond that, what other arrangements are to be made? Our living trust has been executed and will handle what little property and personal effects I leave behind. I have no idea what might happen to the historical and literary work I have published online or to the hard copy materials that are stored in the garage cupboards but I believe it best to leave that decision to the girls and/or their children. They will figure something out and if they decide to trash it, I won't be in a position to care very much.

As I think about these end of life matters, it seems to me that what few material possessions I leave behind is insignificant compared to the scores of action-packed, family-filled years of highs and lows I have lived. Besides, all that is really left after my life is over are the memories that others, especially family members, may have but those too will soon fade away.