

# Technology

By Daniel M. Isard



## THE CEMETERY

### O F T H E F U T U R E ?



**As computers gained popularity in the 1980s, life insurance companies began to reduce their home office staffs.**

**A**s computers made work easier, faster and more efficient, the cost of life insurance premiums decreased. The premium for a 60-year-old used to be \$60/\$1,000 of benefit in 1980. Today it is a third of this. Yes, we are living longer, which is a key factor to premiums, but home office expenses continue to decline. I contend that the same innovation will affect the cemetery of the 21st and 22nd century.

If I asked you to write a story about a funeral home or cemetery in the year 2114 what would the story be?

When someone dies in 2114, the body will most likely be promptly reduced to its core elements by cremation or some other means. I remember a project I worked on 20 years ago. The client was going to build a “green” crematory. Essentially, it was a powerful magni-

fying glass that would evaporate a body to its core elements just as a retort does now. I felt like laughing and kept looking around for Alan Funt (if you are under 40 that would be Ashton Kutcher to you). The project fizzled, but the idea was part of the evolving trend of the disposition of a human body.

I think that in 2114, common graves will be common. Today, a progressive cemetery has double depth. In cemeteries existing on public assistance, many go down three or more levels for burial. For inurnment, why can't we go down five or six levels, or more? If we dig a 6-foot grave, that is enough for four to six urns. Will we have ossuaries that house up to 10 or more cremated remains? The reason that we see this as a problem now is we are interring caskets. To put three caskets down, that is about 8 to 10 feet. But to put



three cremated remains, in urns, 3 to 4 feet deep does it.

The key to the 2114 funeral home or cemetery business will be the memorial. Going three deep makes it tough to have a memorial. But again, this article is intended to visualize the memorial of 100 years from now. In that case, the memorial can be electronic. It can be projected onto a handheld device or whatever device has replaced it by 2114. The memorial can be a full-length movie about the person. It can be projected from the cemetery site of interment.

I bring all this up because even though the year 2114 is beyond my lifetime, we can be doing much of this now. In fact, as we look at the actions of Facebook and other social media outlets, when a person dies, their site doesn't. Why can't we build a virtual cemetery? Why can't I go online and visit a cemetery anytime? Can't I go to the cemetery website and look at the video memorial of

the deceased?

We know that more than half of the adults in the U.S. are living more than 50 miles from their place of birth. If I had to speculate, I would say more than half of that live more than one time zone away. They are not going to return to their birthplace that is the interment site of their parents and grandparents. So, why can't we reach out to them for a true virtual cemetery? Can't we offer to sell them flowers and place those flowers on their family graves? Can't I send images and videos to these consumers?

Maybe the cemetery of the future is making more money from flower sales than from graves or interment fees. Do the math. Let's say your cemetery has 1,000 interments, and you are selling 50 new interments each year. You might be grossing \$100,000 a year. Now, solicit these survivors of the 1,000 interred bodies. Maybe you can reach half. Tell them you are going to put the

video memorial online, and if they do not have one, you can create it for them. Then tell them that six times a year you are going to arrange for flowers to be placed on the grave and have images sent to them. Each flower sale is \$50. That is \$300 in flower sales per surviving family. So, if you get 60 percent of those you can reach to accept this service, you will gross more on flower sales than on interments.

If you do create a virtual cemetery, there are costs. There are sales as well: You could charge to create a memorial video and to post it. You could get sponsors for your site.

If you bury 1,000 remains, you could get 10,000 visits or more per year. I bet a funeral home would love to advertise on this site! By the way, the virtual cemetery takes no water, no mowing, no grounds crew and has no geese! Am I making sense?

The future is wonderful. I think I am here sooner than you! Join me. •

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