

BEYOND

The Bereavement Authority of Ontario magazine



p3 | Funeral and final disposition preferences are gradually evolving

p10 | People are considering their death care arrangements

p13 | From reticence to acceptance – The history of cremation in Canada

About *Beyond*

Beyond is an all-digital, family focused magazine providing useful and interesting stories about the bereavement care industry and why it matters to you.

It is the magazine of the Bereavement Authority of Ontario, a government delegated administrative authority focused on protecting and informing families.

www.TheBAO.ca

Subscribe to *Beyond*. It's free!

Editor

David.Brazeau@TheBAO.ca

Graphic Design

Eyebeam Design Inc.

Photos

- iStock
- Supplied by those interviewed
- BAO P24

Table of Contents

P3 - Funeral and final disposition preferences

- P4 - Differences
- P6 - What is direct cremation?
- P6 - Change is a constant
- P8 - Green – not so much
- P8 - Cremation rules
- P9 - Viewing / E-signatures

P10 - Considering it, but not following through

- P11 - Value of planning
- P11 - Cremation / Burial
- P12 - Alkaline hydrolysis

P14 - From reticence to acceptance – The history of cremation in Canada

- P15 - Worldwide Phenomenon
- P16 - Spiritual
- P17 - Cremation in Ontario

P19 - 5 things MAiD allows you to do

- P19 - Put your finances in order
- P20 - Sort out your legal affairs
- P20 - Enjoy your 'lasts'
- P20 - Make grief as easy as possible for your people
- P21 - Plan the death and what follows

P23 - Terms that may be new to you

Subscribe to *Beyond*

© Bereavement Authority of Ontario

Funeral and final disposition preferences are gradually evolving



People's death care preferences change, but slowly.

Those more traditionally preferred death care services are evolving, as is openness to making such plans, licensed funeral professionals say.

Changes in people's preferences started shifting more than 20 years ago to fewer and less elaborate formal funeral services, with multiple visitations, lavish coffins, gravesite services and large cemetery monuments, professionals have told Beyond, the Bereavement Authority of Ontario's family magazine.



Brett Denning describes in this [interview video](#) how he and his brother's funeral business has adapted to changing family needs by expanding to seven locations across southwestern and northern Ontario.

The magazine sourced publicly available surveys and talked to funeral directors and establishment owners in the northeast, southwest and central parts of the province to provide perspectives on what's changing – and what hasn't yet.

Brothers Bill and Brett Denning are the owners, celebrants and funeral directors of Denning's Forrest Funeral Home, with seven locations across southwestern and northern Ontario. Brett Denning notes that once smaller family-run funeral establishments have expanded to better serve current family preferences and as a matter of business necessity.

There are still many family-run funeral homes in Ontario, but like the Dennings' business model, they've had to branch out into ownership of multiple locations, owning crematoriums or organizing cremations, offering the services of or becoming celebrants, and providing other services to meet changing demands.

They do all of that while following the law (the Funeral, Burial and Cremation Services Act, 2002), which the BAO administers and enforces, managing a profitable operation needed to employ the people and maintain the facilities required for grieving families often asking for fewer services.

The once-standard and more elaborate funeral and visitation services have given way in many larger cities to smaller gatherings – and often direct cremations, sans formal services with the deceased body present requiring a licensed funeral director in attendance.

Differences

But Ontario is a big province. There is no blanket statement that can be applied to all cities, towns and hamlets. It's complex.

Brett and Bill Denning provide funeral and related services across smaller communities covering a wide swath of the province. The brothers saw the need to scale their services laterally providing what today's families want

–currently operating in southwestern communities of Strathroy, Forrest, Watford, and Parkhill, plus since 2018, at northern funeral homes in Haileybury, New Liskeard, and Englehart.

Traditions do continue to be upheld in areas outside of – or far away from – big cities, Brett Denning says.

“Maybe shortened visitation periods, reduced to one (rather than two or more as was once common), but they’re still very traditional,” he notes.



“I’m speaking from rural Ontario, where we are going to be a little more traditional than into the cities, where a bulk of our provincial population is living. We still have a lot of communities that we serve that are very traditional and want that full ceremony with visitations. Now, they’ve all changed a little bit as well,” Brett says.

In between

“But we absolutely have that sect of people that are kind of in between the direct or immediate cremation and the full service that are coming in and potentially seeing their loved one in a casket privately, and then having a cremation or a direct burial take place, and then coming back in a few weeks for a potentially very large celebration of life. So, it really is a mixed bag of services that our communities are asking for.”

That’s one reason why being a one-stop service organizer – funeral services, arranger of cremations or direct cremations, and celebrations of life services catering to different preferences – has been the standard for well over a decade already, says Brett.

“Being in northeastern Ontario has taught us that there is a business model under which we can thrive, not just as a funeral company, but as communities. And that’s been very heartening for us to know that we can have a high level of cremation (with fewer formal services) and still have a profitable model necessary to serve communities properly.”

“And that’s been one of the concerns that my brother Bill and I have talked about for years – the fear that as we see higher cremation and lower revenue per call that we are not able to respond to our communities the way that we have in the past

because the revenue is simply not there. So, it's been a heartening experience in Northeastern Ontario to see that funeral homes can operate under those circumstances and be marginally profitable and serve communities at a level they want."

He encourages people to talk to their local funeral directors about what they would like in death care services. He adds that people are likely to find the professionals are eager to cater to their unique needs.

So, what is direct cremation?

"Direct cremation is, in the minds of most consumers and likely most funeral directors and funeral home staff, when families have opted to have as minimal services as possible – just the disposition, which includes the necessary paperwork and movements to have someone's loved one cremated, and the cremated remains returned to them," Brett Denning says.

Cremation is popular across Canada and in Ontario. "We're seeing cremation at all our locations. We have the three locations in northern Ontario and the cremation rate in the northeast of Ontario where we operate three funeral homes is vastly larger on a percentage basis than it is in southwestern Ontario. We would be close to 95 per cent cremation up in northeastern Ontario, versus likely in the 70 per cent range down in southwestern Ontario.

"So, it does change vastly over the vast distances, and it changes geographically, even over small distances from, say, the centre of London, which would be our biggest city centre, just 25 minutes out into the country in Strathroy."

Change is a constant

Doug Kennedy is a seasoned licensed funeral director, who has had ownership and management experience in corporate and family business.

"In my ongoing interactions with a many funeral providers, it is apparent that the number one challenge is changing consumer preferences," says Kennedy, a past president of the Ontario Funeral Service Association and since 2018 is a quality and communications associate with MacKinnon & Bowes Ltd. in Etobicoke.



Doug Kennedy, experienced funeral director, MacKinnon & Bowes Ltd.

“Since I was first licensed in 1975 the Ontario cremation rate was about eight to 10 per cent. Today, we are seeing rates of cremation at 75 per cent and expected to rise to 85 per cent or higher by 2045,” he adds.

“The emergence of alternative dispositions such as alkaline hydrolysis, green burials, keepsake cremation jewelry choices, and enhanced catering & beverage events have become common, but now there are new opportunities for providers to supply creative and personalized service selections to facilitate the definitions of final arrangements that consumers are requesting,” says Kennedy. This is primarily evident in larger urban centres, where larger corporate and religious cemeteries and crematoriums offer one stop vertically integrated services. The traditional format of the funeral has not disappeared completely but has continued primarily in more rural communities and been influenced by the effects of the pandemic, economic uncertainty and the general erosion of ritual as a response to death. “Everything is on the table when it comes to selecting a provider that can best deliver the event the consumer perceives.”

He notes that people increasingly prefer to celebrate a person’s life rather than have a more sombre funeral service that their grandparents and great-grandparents used to have.

“In fact, often they constitute outright party celebrations. And they occur in various community locations such as golf clubs, banquet halls, restaurants & pubs, legions, outdoor barbecues and cottage lakefronts.”

But change is nothing new in the business of caring for people in times of grief. And that will continue, Kennedy notes.

In my ongoing interactions with many funeral providers, it is apparent that the number one challenge is changing consumer preferences.

- Doug Kennedy

Kennedy predicts an “exponential growth of green burial options” over the next 20 years as people opt for decreasing their carbon footprint.

Although this may not be currently evident in some areas in the province, it will emerge just as we have witnessed in the past 20 years the growth of direct transfer no frills services, rental caskets, food and beverage catering, funeral staff acting as celebrants in lieu of clergy, etc. as consumer preferences have demanded. It is not determined by cost as much as it is convenience and accommodation of changing



Jamie Rheault and his wife have broadened their business of Irvine & Irvine Funeral Homes, in Iroquois Falls and Cochrane, by adding a crematorium and another funeral home to serve families in the north.

family and societal dynamics. But not so fast in rural or smaller communities, Brett Denning has observed.

Green - not so much

“Something we’ve found is that folks are very particular about their wants and very often it circles around the cost. And anything to do with green is very typically more expensive, not less. And that was often something that slowed people down from that,” Denning adds.

“Cremation trends continue to rise, but we have not seen any calls – or a very, very small amount of calls – for green burial options where we are. Northern Ontario funeral directors also observe more talk and general interest, but rarely anyone is asking for a green burial where they live and work.”

Funeral directors Jamie Rheault and his wife Carine own Irvine & Irvine Funeral Homes in Iroquois Falls and Cochrane, along with a crematorium another funeral home.

“In Northeastern Ontario, currently, the demand for green burial remains non-existent,” says Jamie Rheault. More traditional funeral services, some still including automobile processions, continue to be the choice of families coming to the Rheault’s businesses.

Burial in the ground is no longer standard, Rheault adds. Cemeteries nonetheless remain the final resting place for most, but that’s largely because of cremations, Rheault notes.

Cremation rules

“Cremation is by far the most requested mode of disposition in our region and following the cremation the ashes are commonly placed at the cemetery – mainly in the outside columbarium.”

Movies and streaming TV shows continue to perpetuate the lavish funeral as standard. But that isn’t the case, and hasn’t been for several years, both Denning and Rheault say.

*A **COLUMBARIUM** is a structure for interring cremated human remains in niches or compartments.*

What's a 'green' burial?

Although not defined in law, a 'green' or 'natural' burial is a practice focused on minimizing environmental impact and allowing a deceased body to decompose naturally. The practice focusses on sustainability, with no use of embalming fluids or concrete burial vaults, and using caskets made of biodegradable materials.

Rheault says that things are generally becoming more simplified. Elaborate floral arrangements covering much space at a funeral parlour is also no longer the norm, he adds.

"The routines that we used to know have now become irrelevant as we are now challenged with the dynamics of reconstituted families, churches closing, most people not following religious protocols, cemeteries running out of space, people wishing to grieve privately," Rheault explains.

"For us as funeral directors, I believe we are still dealing with side effects from the worldwide pandemic of Covid-19. So, we must remain very creative for every new call we handle."

Viewing still in demand

Rheault says, "I can attest that the one thing that has remained the same is the viewing of the body."

"When making arrangements to have someone cremated, we always ask if anyone in the deceased's circle of family and friends wishes to see that person before cremation takes place. And, in most cases, someone steps up with the wish to see the person one more time."

Arrangements online & e-signatures

Making death care arrangements in person is also becoming much less common – even in smaller communities where everyone knows each other, Rheault says.

That's certainly the case in Cochrane and Iroquois Falls, he explains.

"It is now common for families and their estate administrators to be far apart – all over the world and not being able to complete the arrangements in person. So, it's common practice to complete funeral arrangements electronically and to work with software allowing electronic signatures."

Cremation is by far the most requested mode of disposition in our region and following the cremation the ashes are commonly placed at the cemetery – mainly in the outside columbarium."

- Jamie Rheault

People are considering their death care arrangements, but most aren't following through



A significant development during the last 10 years across Ontario is people's willingness to make their death care plans.

But that change is moving more slowly, than their changing death care preferences toward cremations and smaller funeral services. The general picture shows high intent and low follow-through.

Many still avoid talking about death care altogether, but recent survey data on the subject shows that too is very much evolving.

While most Canadians say that sharing their end-of-life wishes is important to them, fewer than half have made such arrangements, as found in a 2023 survey conducted by Leger for Arbor Memorial.

The online survey of 1,526 Canadians over the age of 18 shows that “92 per cent of Canadians acknowledge the importance of sharing their end-of-life, death, and legacy wishes with loved ones. However, less than half (43 per cent) of Canadians have made end-of-life arrangements or communicated their wishes, suggesting a gap between awareness and action for end-of-life planning,” Arbor stated in its news release.

Death discussion or planning are somewhat taboo, still.

Having a will in place is considered good advice, but an Angus Reid Institute survey of 1,610 Canadian adults, also conducted in 2023, found that half of them don't have a will in place. Even among those 55 to 64 years old, 34 per cent do not have a will.

The value of planning ahead

The sooner a person decides, documents and shares their death care arrangement wishes, the sooner a weight lifts on the person and their family.

At the Bereavement Authority of Ontario, we've heard from professionals and the public that planning and sharing death care arrangements is good practice for people. It's better than the pressure or stress on a surviving family member having to make service and disposition decisions at need – when a loved one has died.

Having a person's death care wishes in writing and available to several family members makes it easier for everyone.

Final dispositions

Determining and sharing your final disposition and funeral arrangement wishes eases distress on your family. People may prepay for their arrangements or simply complete their plan at a local funeral establishment and take a copy of the arrangements home with them.

There are several options to consider.

Let's start with disposition. How do you want your body to rest in peace?

Cremation

There are 78 crematoriums in the province, which Ontarians are increasingly selecting for their preferred form of disposition.

Cremations have overtaken burials in Canada, with 75 per cent of people choosing it in 2024, reports the Cremation Association of North America (CANA). It's a trend in this country that CANA expects will continue, with the US at 60.6 per cent but expected to follow suit.

Arrangements can be made with a crematorium, or people can include such arrangements with their local funeral home.

Burial

Burials at the 3,015 active cemeteries operating across Ontario continues, albeit as an increasingly smaller proportion people's disposition choices. Interestingly, that shift toward cremation works in harmony with a separate but related issue. Available land in the province's larger cities is already scarce and will be more so as time goes by.

There is a shortage of land available for new cemeteries in the Greater Toronto Area, Hamilton, and Ottawa, where established cemeteries are approaching capacity, reports a magazine of a Canadian think tank called the Institute for Research on Public Policy (IRPP).

"Cities such as Toronto, Mississauga, Brampton, Vaughan and Newmarket will be out of full-body in-ground burial space within the next 10-15 years," an article by the IRPP states.

Deaths of baby-boomers (born 1946-64) are also contributing to cemetery land paucity, which will further increase pressure on cemeteries, especially in densely populated centres.

Alkaline hydrolysis

Relatively new on the scene is the option of alkaline hydrolysis, a chemical process which reduces the body to components of liquid and

bone, followed by reduction of bone fragments to a substance resembling cremated remains.

During the last several years the number of alkaline hydrolysis providers in Ontario has grown to eight.

Funeral services or memorial gatherings

How would you want your family and friends to mark your passing and celebrate your life?

You can visit your local funeral home to make arrangements for prepayment or just plan, without prepayment, for your services. Make copies of your funeral service arrangements and share them with members of your family and friends, if you like.

You may also choose to have your life celebrated in a more casual setting, at someone's house or restaurant, after your body has been buried, cremated, or undergone hydrolysis.

You can choose a funeral, memorial or graveside service.

A service may be private (by invitation only), or public (open to anyone). Other options include having a public or private visitation, a full funeral service, procession, a more simple home funeral and/or home vigil, or any other respectful social, traditional or cultural ritual.

You can arrange these yourself or at your local funeral home.

A family member may provide funeral services, including transport, documentation including death registration, and body care, without a licence and for no charge.

To learn more about your family providing your own funeral services, visit this [BAO webpage](#).

If you are planning in advance for yourself, or for/with a family member, you will have time compare services offered by various providers, including funeral homes that can make all the arrangements with you. Funeral homes also provide ancillary services such as arranging to get the death certification for at-need services when someone has recently died or filling for various government forms and possible funds.

From reticence to acceptance – The history of cremation in Canada

By Stuart Lyall Manson



A Roman funeral pyre in ancient times (Francesco Perucci, *Pompe Funebri*, p. 30)

In modern Canada, cremation has become a popular option for the final disposition of human remains. Approximately three quarters of Canadians, or their surviving loved ones, choose it over interring a body, otherwise known as inhumation.

In the early 1900s, however, most Canadians followed the traditional, time-honoured practice of inhumation (burial). In that period, most needed considerable persuasion to change their ways.

Part of this reticence stemmed from the position of the Roman Catholic Church, which officially forbade cremation. Its position held sway: The 1901 Canadian census indicates that Catholicism was the most common religion in the country, representing more than double the population of any other faith. It was not until 1963 that the Roman Catholic Church tolerated cremation for its members.

Things began to shift in Canada, regarding cremation, at the beginning of the 1900s. The Mount Royal Cemetery Company in Montreal built Canada's first crematorium in 1901. It was funded by a generous donation from the Molson family, of beer-brewing fame. The following year, the Mount Royal Cemetery Company published a booklet advocating cremation, titled "Cremation: Its History, Practice and Advantages." Its authors presented several arguments for cremation, described below.

A worldwide phenomenon

In antiquity, Roman and Greek cultures preferred cremation over inhumation. When Christianity subsequently came to the fore, cremation was frowned upon due to its connection to those pre-Christian customs. The practice remained dormant for centuries, until the 1700s when it re-emerged in Europe.

By the 1800s, cremation was gaining momentum. Advocates in Britain, France and Italy were making

headway with public opinion. Studies examined best practices and explored improved crematorium designs. Delays in acceptance were caused by legal cases, focusing on ensuring the wishes of the deceased were always honoured. Favourable judgments in these cases paved the way forward for cremation.

Its popularity exploded in the United States in the last quarter of that century. That country's first crematorium was built in western Pennsylvania in 1876. There were only 16 cremations in the United States in 1884, but this figure jumped to over 2,400 by 1900.

Public health

The authors of the Montreal booklet, when arguing for cremation, referred to traditional burials as "gruesome" and "an undoubted menace to public health." This was not true, of course, except through blatant mismanagement.

British author Peter Ross describes this sort of negligence in his book *A Tomb With A View*. He focuses on early Victorian London, where graves depths of only two feet were commonplace. Ross also harkens back to fellow author Charles Dickens, whose 1853 novel *Bleak House* describes a "hemmed-in churchyard, pestiferous and obscene." According to Dickens, the poisonous air in this cemetery deposited a slimy coating – called "witch ointment" – on all

nearby surfaces. A vivid but obviously fictitious portrayal.

Closer to home, a newspaper in Cornwall, Ontario remarked upon the poor state of that town's cemeteries in 1876. An editorial alleged that many plots had been "buried over two or three times." This required a cemetery manager to deal with "many a little heap of mouldering bones and decayed boards, which he has quickly removed and covered out of sight in order that the mourners at a funeral might be spared the additional pang of knowing that their deceased relative was, even in death, usurping the possession of another."

Many urban municipalities in Ontario passed bylaws forbidding the establishment of new cemeteries within their limits, partly due to perceived public health fears. Future development and taxation of the cemeteries' desirable urban lots, however, was likely the primary factor in these policy decisions.

The Montreal booklet argued that cremation avoided these problems, and included supportive passages from the literature of an British advocacy group: "We disapprove of the present custom of burying the dead and desire to substitute some mode which shall rapidly resolve the body into its component elements by a process which cannot offend the living and shall render the remains absolutely innocuous."

The early-1900s advocates of cremation also cited another added alleged benefit, relating to public health. By burning the bodies of those who died from infectious diseases, they claimed, the offending contagion was destroyed and therefore could not harm the neighbouring population.

Spiritual

The early Canadian advocates for cremation also employed spiritual arguments. As noted above, the Roman Catholic Church opposed the practice well into the 20th century. Despite this position, the advocates asserted that the combustive, cleansing effects of cremation facilitated the transition of the deceased into the spirit world.

This line of argument was at odds with the use of cremation centuries before, in the early years of Christianity. Roman soldiers, who had not adhered to that religion, weaponized cremation. They burned the bodies of their Christian enemies in the belief that cremation would prevent the eventual resurrection of the deceased.

Environmentalism and economy

Cremation advocates of the early 1900s were not necessarily environmentalists – at least in the modern sense. Nonetheless, they recognized that, when compared to a

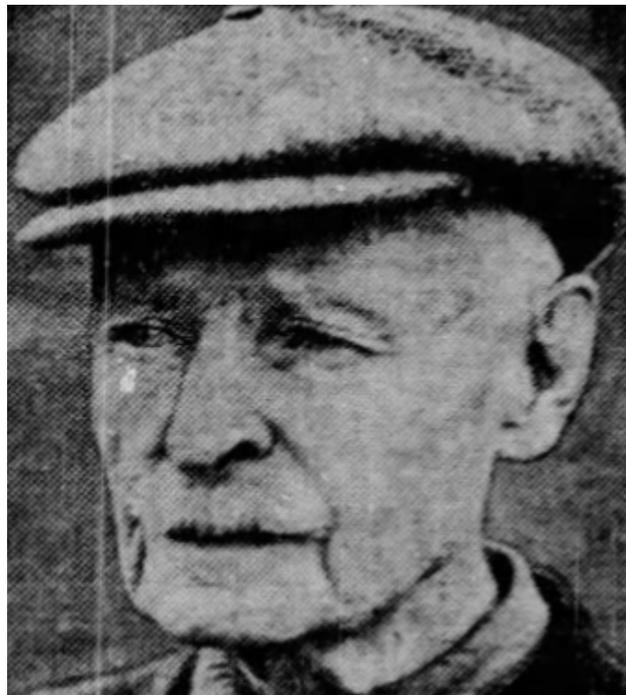
traditional burial, cremated remains took up less space and required fewer resources.

At the time, this was often expressed as an economical measure. With cremation, there was no need for an expensive coffin made from fine wood, fitted with crafted metalwork. They underscored the idea that the ideal coffin, to house the body as it entered the business end of the crematorium, was made of light wood and simple in construction. These approaches would assist the process of burning.

Cremation in Ontario

Early Ontarians were reluctant to adopt cremation, but by the 1870s they had become aware of its rising popularity worldwide. For example, the Ottawa Citizen newspaper, on April 7, 1874, published a poem titled "A Cremation Elegy." It was a tongue-in-cheek view of the practice, and a love story of sorts. Referring to the passing of a loved one, the poem's male author lamented "The chimney stack through which my love has flown" and his own desire to eventually "fly up through the flue up which she flew."

Nevertheless, provincial legislation in Ontario in the early 1900s banned cremation in the province. This moratorium ended in 1932, with the repeal of that law. Consequently, Ontario's first crematorium opened in



Sir John Beverley Robinson, the first person whose remains were cremated at the Toronto Crematorium (Toronto Star, November 13, 1933, p. 1)

1933, located at the Toronto Necropolis Cemetery.

According to a November 18, 1933 article in the Toronto Star Weekly, prior to the construction of this crematorium, Toronto was the largest city in the British Empire without such a facility. Its residents had been forced, in earlier times, to use cremation services stateside in nearby Buffalo, New York.

The first person to be cremated at the new Toronto crematorium was a prominent one: Sir John Beverly Robinson. He was one of the few Canadians to have a British hereditary title. The Robinsons were also a prominent family in the early history of the province. His great grandfather was a Loyalist

who served in the Queen's Rangers during the American Revolutionary War, who migrated from the United States to Canada after that conflict. His ancestors included the first Chief Justice of Upper Canada and an early Lieutenant-Governor.

Since that time, the popularity of cremation steadily increased throughout Canada. The concerns of the past have been discarded. Canadians remain free to choose the method of disposition for their mortal remains, in a way that best suits their own personal values.

■ Stuart Lyall Manson
(stuartmanson.wordpress.com)
is an historian, heritage cemetery advocate, and author of the book series Sacred Ground: Loyalist Cemeteries of Eastern Ontario

5 Things MAiD allows you to do

By Celia Chandler

This is a column. The views expressed are those of the author and not necessarily those of the BAO.

My father wished he knew his death date so he could plan his finances accordingly. You see, Dad didn't think much of inherited wealth. While he wouldn't have begrudged my mother's comfortable widowhood after his sudden death in 2007, but like many of us, he might have regretted not spending more of those funds for his own activities!

Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD) provides people with the financial certainty Dad craved. Having been bedside for my husband, Jack, and my mother at their respective chosen death-hours, I have witnessed many certainties MAiD affords. Here are a few, starting with the money.

1. Put your finances in order

Knowing when you're going to die lets you spend your remaining life without worrying about running short: if the bank balance allows, splurge on a catered party for your family or fly in an Australian friend to visit. As they say, you can't take it with you!



Celia Chandler is a former lawyer turned writer whose articles have appeared in the Toronto Star and on her website, celiachandler.com

But it's more than clearing up the bucket-list. If you've got receivables to deposit, as my husband did in the days before his death, do it before the bank freezes the account. If you want to transfer money to the executor for funeral expenses, or even pre-pay it, now's your chance.

Once Mom told her financial advisor of her MAiD date, they liquidated investments and Mom signed cheques to the beneficiaries. It's not that we kids were anxious to get Mom's money, but since it was imminent anyway, this made sense and avoided possible probate fees.

2. Sort out your legal affairs

Both Mom and Jack had Wills before deciding to be assessed for MAiD. For those who don't, having the death date set is a good time to get Wills written.

Many Wills include contingencies — if beneficiary A is dead, here's what happens; if beneficiary B has children, here's what happens. Knowing the death date allows a review of the Will and a codicil if necessary based on current circumstances.

Finally, while it may seem pointless to name powers of attorney (POA) for property and personal care on the edge of death, by naming me his POA for property, Jack empowered me to do those last-minute deposits on his behalf. (Advantage for me — it gave me busy work to let me clear my head for what lay ahead.)

3. Enjoy your 'lasts'

How many times have you thought "if I knew this was my last day/week/month, I'd do X one more time." Well, MAiD provides that.

For both Jack and Mom, it was about last conversations — one last I love you, one last goodbye.

The circle of people who were in the know on Jack's plan was small but his sons who live in Europe flew in on short notice. They joined his Canadian son and daughter and other relatives for one last conversation and gin & tonic in the hours before he died.

Because Mom was more open about her choice, the 11 days between her decision and her death were the busiest she'd had in years: visits and phone calls with her children, grandkids, extended family, former neighbours, friends, and staff at her retirement home. She took pleasure in seeing people enjoy the tokens she invited many to take — books, costume jewelry, and clothes.

4. Make grief as easy as possible for your people

While Jack was certain about his MAiD date for only five days, he anticipated dying for several months. Once he'd confirmed I planned to stay in our house, he oversaw home-improvements he'd have done himself if he had more time. He helped me choose my new car, something he knew I'd stress about. He emptied and sold the space where he'd run his appliance business to save me the bother. He selected a new fridge for me and had it delivered a week before he died, a fitting goodbye gift from an appliance serviceman.

It felt like my mother spent the last half of her life death cleaning long before anyone outside of Sweden knew about it. Even so, in one of my last visits, I helped her identify things among her remaining few possessions to go into the retirement home rummage sale.

Then perhaps the biggest way Mom made it easy for everyone? She chose to die on the 3rd of August giving us the balance of the month to empty her unit for a new occupant. Practical to the end.

5. Plan the death and what follows

People fear natural death because only the 'what' is clear: the 'where,' 'when,' 'who,' 'why,' and 'how' are all unknowns.

MAiD changes that.

- Where and when: both chose to die at home, Jack at 6 pm on a Monday and Mom at 1 pm on a Sunday.
- Who: both were comfortable with their respective MAiD providers and would have said if they'd wanted someone else. Jack set a guest list of seven. Four of us were present with Mom.
- Why: decided by the MAiD assessor using the criteria in the legislation

- How: the mechanics are set by legislation. Mom and Jack had agency over the ambience though. Each chose a playlist: Canadian bluesman, Paul Reddick, and Polish jazz trumpeter, Tomasz Stanko for Jack; Mom's selections included Leonard Cohen's Hallelujah and a rousing sing-along of northern England folksong, On Ilkley Moor bar t'at. Mom chose to die on her patio on a hot August day, after having felt cold for much of the last few years of her life.

MAiD definitely allows for planning the right death 'look.' Although Jack was too ill to care, Mom inquired how her hair looked just a few moments before the injection, lightening the mood for all!

Medically assisted death also allows the bereaved to anticipate and plan for their immediate grief. For Jack, I had my circle of friends next door, ready to join me when I needed them. Following Mom's death, I debriefed with many of the same people by phone.

Both Mom and Jack reviewed their obits ahead of time and OK'd the content — another way to give them the dignity that had been eluding them in their latter months. Both approved making public their decision to opt for MAiD to help break down some of the stigma and mystery that surrounds it.

Jack went with me to the funeral home too, making sure his celebration of life had the kind of music, food, and format that he wanted. He even decided we'd have vodka shots – the national drink of Poland – to the confusion of those who thought I was handing out water!

Finally, MAiD allows those who live on to make commitments to those choosing to die. With Jack, I committed months before his final decision to continue to live in the house we shared. In the last hour of my mother's life, I committed to continuing to inform people about MAiD, not because I'm pro-MAiD, but because I'm pro-MAiD choice. In both cases, I've honoured those commitments and I couldn't be happier.

Terms that may be new to you

The death care sector – of funeral homes, cemeteries, crematoriums and alkaline hydrolysis facilities – provides services and products that aren't usually part of people's everyday language outside of the premises of licensed professionals.

Here are a few terms you may encounter if you are making death care arrangements for a loved one.



Alkaline Hydrolysis is a chemical process that uses a heated solution of water and potassium hydroxide or sodium hydroxide under pressure and agitation to reduce a body to components of liquid and bone. (It's a newer form of disposition than burials and cremation, and currently available by licensed professionals in eight locations in Ontario.)

Interment is the burial of human remains, including the placement of human remains in a lot (grave, crypt or niche.)

A **Niche** is a space in a columbarium or mausoleum wall to hold an urn.

A **Columbarium** is a structure for interring cremated human remains in niches or compartments.

Crypt/Mausoleum is a structure, other than a columbarium, used as a place for the interment of human remains in tombs, crypts or compartments.

A **Care and Maintenance Fund** is a trust fund that helps ensure the long-term upkeep of a cemetery. The fund pays for maintenance of the cemetery while it has sales of its services and products, and after it no longer has sales. Cemetery operators are required to make contributions to the fund.

There are many more. Please read page five our [BAO Consumer Information Guide](#) for other frequently used terms in the death care sector.

Click
here!



**Plan now -
so your family
doesn't have to
do it for you.**

Then rest easy.

You'll be glad you did and so will they.
Read our free [Consumer Information Guide](#)
describing death care options.

BAO | Bereavement
Authority of
Ontario