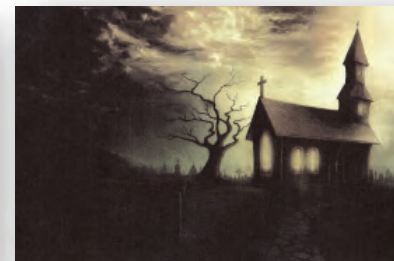
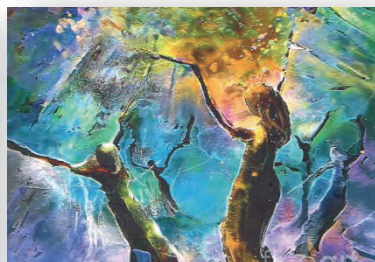


Thoughts and Feelings About

# Traditional funerals and your end of life ceremony



A ZMET study for

**Funeral**  **Service**  
f o u n d a t i o n

August 2012

OLSONZALTMANASSOCIATES

# A Study of The Market We Are Losing

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In the spring of 2012 the Funeral Service Foundation engaged Olson Zaltman Associates to apply its patented ZMET™ research process to better understand the deep unconscious metaphors triggered in the minds of those consumers seeking alternative services and vendors. The study spanned:

- Ages 50 to 70
- Equal balance of men and women
- Range of ethnic groups
- A range of religious beliefs from atheist to fundamentalist Christian
- Range of educational background

The ZMET® methodology involves an intensive 1.5 to 2.0 hour one-on-one interview. Each interview is followed by an analysis by a team of trained experts from several different disciplines that can take up to 8 hours per interviewee. This team is looking for commonalities among participants that reveal shared metaphors in both visual and verbal cues. These visual and verbal cues then provide a basis for marketing and communication strategies that enable companies to engage more deeply and more effectively with current and prospective customers.

The Funeral Service Foundation chose to target that part of the market that had chosen or was seriously considering alternatives to traditional funeral homes and services because we believe reengaging them is the most important current priority.



Olson Zaltman Associates is a **cutting edge** research and consulting organization


Founders:

**Jerry Olson**, Professor Emeritus,  
Penn State University

**Jerry Zaltman**, Professor  
Emeritus, Harvard Business  
School

Since 1997

Dedicated to helping clients  
understand people at **deep,**  
**emotionally rich** levels.

A man in a black suit is shown from the back, bent over and using a shovel to dig in a field of golden grass. The background is a clear blue sky. The image is used as a metaphor for digging deep into people's minds.

**Olson Zaltman has extensive experience in the past 15 years**

**Completed 500+ ZMET® studies in 32 countries**

**Olson Zaltman holds the rights to ZMET®**

**Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique**

**A patented interview and interpretation process**

**Designed to dig deep into people's minds**



The list of **Olson Zaltman** Clients consists of a veritable “who’s-who” of North American and International companies, universities and non profits

The ZMET® method has been a primary influence in the marketing of goods and services beyond North America, spanning industries around the globe in all cultures



**Humans think in images, not words**



**Emotion is critical to how we think, behave, and interpret our world**



**Most thought, learning, and emotion occurs unconsciously and without awareness**

# The ZMET Process | Interviews

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Participants collect images to represent their thoughts and feelings about the topic



1 ½ hour interviews



All interviews are transcribed



# The ZMET Process | Analysis

## Consumer Language

"I always remember being 8 years old and the smell of opening the Ziploc bag and all the oranges inside and getting pulp all over my face."

"When I drink orange juice, I baby myself."

"Orange juice tastes zippy, like Pop Rocks."

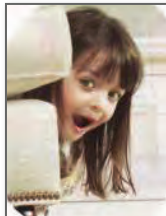
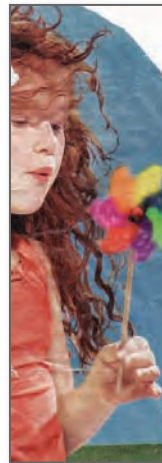
"You drink your orange juice at your desk and for just a minute you feel totally carefree, no responsibilities."

## ZMET Insight

When I drink orange juice, I feel like a kid again.

It is an escape from my stressful adult life.

## Consumer Imagery





# Report Outline

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Introduction to Olson Zaltman Associates and ZMET

## Project Overview

What is Death?

What is a traditional funeral?

What do I want from **MY** end-of-life service or ceremony?

Frames for funeral directors

Implications

# Project Overview | Why & Who

To better **understand what modern consumers are seeking** in an end-of-life service or ceremony?

Why are end-of-life services and ceremonies important?

What are the perceived benefits of non-traditional services compared to more traditional funerals?

What experience do consumers want for their friends and loved ones?

How do people perceive the funeral industry?

**In sum:** How can the Funeral Service Foundation help its members **communicate more effectively** with consumers, and create the kind of **emotional experiences** consumers want from an end-of-life service or ceremony?

Who:

Consumers who “probably” or “definitely” want a non-traditional service or ceremony.

Even split between **men and women**

**Age** 50-70 (evenly distributed)

**Mix** of race/ethnicity and religious affiliation

# Project Overview

---

Respondents asked to collect:

**3 or 4 pictures** that represent, “Your thoughts and feelings about traditional visitations and funerals.” and

**3 or 4 pictures** that represent, “Your thoughts and feelings about your end of life service or ceremony and what it means to you.”

All images shown in this document – unless otherwise indicated – are images participants collected in response to this assignment.

All quotes in this document come directly from participants.

Respondents interviewed for 1 ½ hours using the Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (**ZMET**).

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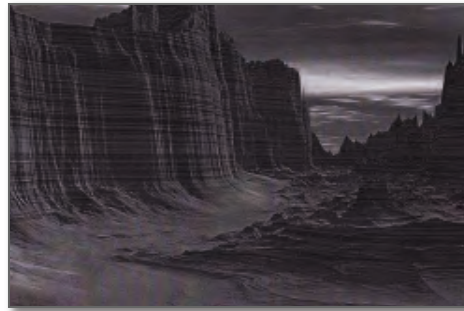
Implications

# Image summary | Traditional funerals

---



Marilyn B.



Rick



Jay



Mary



Becky



John



Carole



Lee

A traditional funeral is like

**A Lonely,  
Lifeless Tomb**



A traditional funeral is like

# A Lonely, Lifeless Tomb

**The setting**



**The mood**



**How I feel**



## The traditional setting | Funeral homes are cold and confining

---

**When you shut those doors, it's silence.** I almost feel a relief that I'm out of there and I can hear the wind and the cars going by. [In the funeral home] I have to **suppress my normal being** because normally I'm pretty happy and easy-going and tend to want to laugh.

Rick

It separates you from the outside  
**like a coffin.** You are **enclosed.**

**A cold, sterile environment.**

Leslie

Lee

They are **sterile and cool** and  
don't do much for me.

They were dark. There was nothing.  
There's no light. They're **closed in  
like a casket.**

John

Arlene

They're **cold.** Kind of **intimidating.** It's pretty formal...sometimes not real inviting. Like art museums or galleries.

Marilyn H.



## The mood of a traditional funeral | Cold and lifeless

---



Every day of my life as a child I had to have a glass of orange juice with breakfast. It was mindless. **Traditional funerals are mindless.** You just **go through the motions.** I think, is that all this person was worth? **Didn't anybody think any more of that person** to want to really show what that person's life was about or why they loved that person or what they liked about that person? It's kind of sad to think they **didn't put any energy** into their supposed "celebration" of life....**We just have to bury the old broad** and let's get on with our lives.

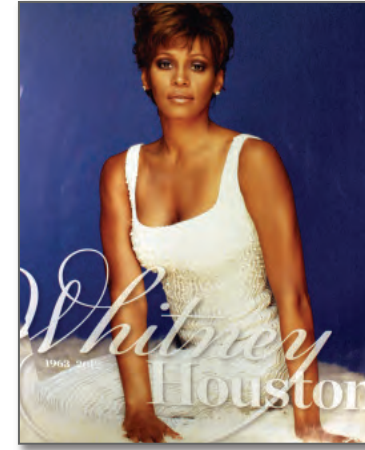
Jody

# The mood of a traditional funeral | Dark – Difficult to see

---



This is **that feeling of darkness**. Not that death is positive, but it can have its [positive] elements. And so when you go to a traditional funeral **it's just about death** and death is depressing and sad and it's just about **broken relationships** and there is just nothing positive about it. You go to a funeral home and it's dark and it's depressing and it's **hard to find anything good to come out of that**.

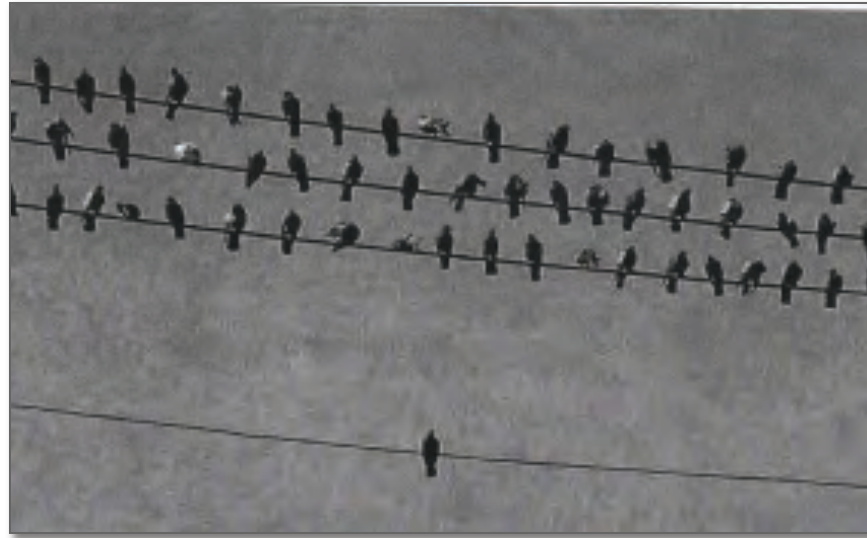


We see a deceased person with the year they were born and the year they left. What comes to my mind is the in-between. That dash. **Those are the years you actually lived**. It's so many things that you did and **all you get is a dash**.

There is so much that has happened in a person's life that you don't really get to know and express during traditional [services]. There's so many things that in a traditional funeral get **overlooked**. You don't get a chance to **see** the total person.

## How I feel at a traditional funeral | I feel alone (male emphasis)

---



When I go a funeral, I feel like **I am alone**. It's not a group. **You're just there as an individual** to say goodbye to this person. The only real group there is the family and I never feel like I am a part of that. You're not there to socialize. You're not there to reminisce. You're just there to say goodbye. **It's depressing and it's lonely.**

Rick

## How I feel at a traditional funeral | I feel uneasy

---



If you're underwater with the shark, obviously you'd rather be on the surface, **Nobody wants to go to a funeral.** They'd rather be at Starbucks. I think funerals early in my life were kind of **fearful.** I think just being in the room with lots of people crying, that was **very uneasy** for me, even as a little child. The close relatives look a mess and are just **destroyed.** It's an emotionally charged time. [You] don't want to be there.

Marilyn B.

## How I feel at a traditional funeral | I feel like I am being controlled

---



Traditional services are almost a lecture, of sorts. Some people who preside over death ceremonies **don't allow for any release** of sorrow. In fact, the ceremony itself makes participants more sorrowful. When my grandmother died, there were readings from the Bible, but they were readings about sorrow.

It was almost like **we were being forced to feel sorrow** instead of being able to celebrate. I almost think of traditional funerals as **puppetry** with someone in control **manipulating the people** in attendance to act the way they feel is appropriate.

Becky

A traditional funeral is like

# A Lonely, Lifeless Tomb

## The setting



Suffocating

Confining

Cold and sterile

## The mood



Cold and lifeless

Dark

Hard to “see” the real  
person

## How I feel



I feel alone

I feel uneasy

I feel controlled



At a traditional funeral

there is

**No**

**Transformation**

## No transformation | Family and friends remain sad and disconnected

---



The non-traditional that I have experienced tend to **get you balanced**, taken away from that sad, pensive state. I don't know many traditional funerals that do that as well as the non-traditional. They quite often just **leave you sad at the end just like you were in the middle.**



The message:

**This is  
THE  
END**



## The message of a traditional funeral | This is the end

---



Gladiolas say old traditional, old typical. [I want] tulips, roses, **something open...** Tradition tells me you have to cry. Tradition tells me you have to grieve. **Tradition tells me I have to accept it.** If I go to a funeral where there's a casket and a person I will not go up there...I guess it makes it real, but yet **it's a real that I don't like.**

Mary

A traditional funeral is like  
**a lonely, lifeless tomb**



No  
**TRANSFORMATION**



**This is THE END**



**The setting:** Stuffy, cold, confining

**The mood:** Cold, dark, hard to "see"  
the real person

**How I feel:** Alone, uneasy, controlled

Survivors remain sad  
and disconnected

Forced to accept that  
this person's life is over

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My end-of-life service is  
**My Crowning  
Performance**

**I am  
the Writer**



**I am  
the Director**



**I am  
the Star**



# I am the Writer

THIS IS MY STORY



## I am the writer | It is my funeral, and my story

---

They're **closing the Book of Life**. Just the life you've lived. **Every day is a different page.**

*(What are the different chapters?)* Your childhood, teenage years, get married, have a family, the marriage of your kids, and then your grandchildren.

Marilyn H.

It's the **end of that chapter**. [The chapter is] common experiences, shared beliefs, words that were memorable, occasions that stood out – a good evening, a good time, a good dinner. It's sort of **the Book of People Known**. Each person has a chapter, small or large and [when someone dies] that chapter has come to an end.

John

It's **closing the book**. We all have books, we all have chapters. We have **our history** and experiences. It's a summation of events.

Al



# I am the Director

I decide:

The mood

The setting

The soundtrack

The props

The “costumes”



## The mood | True celebration, not grief

---



Celebrate life. It means to **recognize who I was**. Recognize what I did. Let's not dwell on the fact that the body, the soul, the spirit is not here. The person will always live on in our memories. **It's not going to be sad.**

Mary



**Put the 'fun' in funeral.** I want it to be a celebration.

I want people to have some food, I want them to be able to talk and laugh and maybe have balloons. **I don't want it to be solemn.** I want them to make it event they would enjoy. **Celebrating your life,** things you did, things you accomplished. **It makes you look good.**

Marilyn H.

# The mood | True celebration, not grief

---



Mary



Becky



Carole



John



Arlene



Jay



Marilyn H.



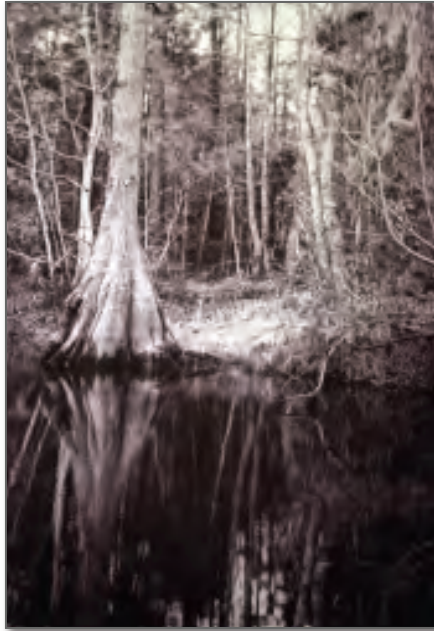
Rick



Marilyn B.

## The setting | A location with symbolic meaning

---



[This is] where I grew up fishing. It is **a place that has meaning for me.** That would be **a good place to plant me** if it was available. I would be happy there any day of my life or any day not in my life. I have had good memories fishing in that spot. I have good memories of my grandfather in that spot. Lots of good things there. **I always want to get back to that spot.**

So it must have a powerful draw.

Lee

## The soundtrack | Music that represents me

---



We definitely have to have some Beatles music. I want some music that's not funeral music. The Beatles **symbolize the era I grew up in.** I think I grew up in a good time. I think it was a good time to be a teenager and to grow up and to get married and all those things. **It personalizes the deceased person.**

Marilyn H.

[Earth, Wind, and Fire music at my service] would represent me as a person who loves to dance, who loves music. **Earth, Wind and Fire has been part of me** ever since junior high/high school all the way through college and even up until adult life. Their music has always been there.

**It represents me and who I am.**

Arlene

## The props | Meaningful objects from my life

---

When [my friend] died his wife asked us to come and celebrate his life by sitting in a room [with] **the possessions that had a lot of meaning for him.** His fly rod, his tobacco pouch, his pipe, flies that he tied, his fishing vest were all on the table and we talked about Jim in a circle. His kids were there, his dog was there. I read a poem that I dedicated to him. So **we celebrated his life rather than marked his death.**

Lee

## The “costumes” | Clothing that sets the proper tone

---

The end-of-life service I went to, it said **no black is to be worn**. The family was like **a rainbow** in the front of the room because they all had on **bright colors**. They handed out balloons and inside there were coins with a favorite saying or favorite scripture...Her sister's in this orange suit, and there's teal and blue and green and red. But they did it for a reason. Because she did not want to be mourned. And **I don't want to be mourned. I want to be celebrated.**

Mary

# **I am the Star**

An improvisational performance

A real, true story about me

My life is on display

My values are on display

The theme: **I MATTERED**





## An improvisation | No scripts

---



You have **the freedom to imagine** whatever you want. Choice is what we all live for. I want people, when the **celebrate the end of my life**, to choose to do it in whatever way they see fit. They're not going to feel like they have to follow a manual, but in a way it will be a manual because **I'll express my wishes.**

Becky



They're going to a place they have chosen to gather, maybe **have a drink, sing a song, smoke a bowl**, whatever. And say, all things considered, he was a pretty good guy.

John

## A real, true account | My friends and family will share their personal stories

---

My dad was a real pacifist and this preacher got up there and started talking about how her was a war hero in the Battle of the Bulge. The truth is, he was with mop-up forces and didn't see any action at all. She's glorifying him and **it's a bunch of B.S.** It didn't have a lot meaning, did it, if it wasn't accurate? It makes me want to steer away from the traditional type [of funerals]. If several people were to get up and just **talk about their own experiences**, it's more reality, not something fabricated to sound good. Very candid. Good or bad. I think everybody walks away with **a little better interpretation of the person's life.**

James

## My life will be on display | Friends and family will “see” the whole me

---



These are people from all walks of life. It's just sort of **another window** into that person's life. You get to talk to people and hear about their experience with that person. They have stories. That was another important part for me. I live here, so I [got to] meet people that my mother worked with and neighbors and **got to know her through their eyes.** I hope people come and say things about me for my daughter. It's a way to be **connected.**

Carole

## **My values will be on display** | They will see what was important to me

---

I've been to 50-100 funerals and I'll bet there have been only two where **it was clear what God requires of you**. People muddle their way through life. I would like, when people leave my funeral. To be **given a little booklet or a Bible** so they can read it at home, when they're by themselves and with their God. If just one person finds his or her way to God, **my time on Earth would have been a success** in God's eyes.

Marilyn B.

## The theme | I mattered

---



I think **everybody wants to be remembered** to a certain extent. Some people do great things and they're remembered that way. Other people are remembered by their family and friends.

When you have a celebration of the end of life, **it gives your life that last little bit of credence.** You've touched people. There should be something that everybody should look back on and feel good about. **You've made a difference.**

Bob

# “I mattered” | A lexicon

---

It gives the person significance because **there was no one else like me**

Arlene

The life that I lived **meant something** to someone.

Mary

I would like to leave a **positive legacy.**

Jay

I'll know I **made a difference** in this world.

For however long I'm going to life, I want to

know **it was worth it.**

Jody

Something that **people remember you** by.

Marilyn H.

Every person has a **unique contribution...**

They will know what my life meant to others.

John

I've **made a difference** in some way.

Carole

**A desire to be known** as having a certain

creativity and a certain goodness in me. We

do **leave a legacy.**

Lee



My end-of-life service will

# Transform

both my loved ones and me

## A good service is Transformative | The deceased comes alive

---



I want plenty of **dancing and laughing** and having a great time. When we left [my friend's funeral] everybody was laughing and talking about the person because we saw all the happy moments on DVD, **the person moving around live**. When we went to the party afterwards, everybody was in a festive mood. We were talking about the person **like they were still existing**. We didn't grieve her life. We celebrated her life. **I didn't leave heartbroken**. [My heart] was sliced, but it wasn't broken. When I walked away from there, **I thought they were sort of still with me**. I [was] **basking** in her achievements and her friendship and what she meant.

Arlene



# A good service is Transformative

Survivors connect with the deceased...and each other

---



This is a family. A memorial service is about celebrating someone's milestones and accomplishments. You don't want to dwell on the failures, but that might come out, too. For the survivors, **it's good to rehash it all**. If they're in a grieving state, misery does love company. The **companionship**, the camaraderie. **It's kind of a support group**. If someone is really grieving, it **helps them cope** with it better by sharing these common experiences.

James

# The Journey continues



## The Journey continues | My service will help my friends and family move on

---



People have to pick up the pieces. After this sense of closure, life goes on. **Life doesn't stop when I die.** Maybe people can take a little bit of my enthusiasm or happiness or words of wisdom with them. **Do away with their grief** and know that I went to a better place.

James

## The Journey continues | My family can move ahead without financial burdens

---



Putting a financial burden on my family is how I think of this [picture]. You see that with a lot of people they spend all this money to say goodbye and **it leaves them financially kind of strapped**. It can be a burden for a lot of people. **I don't need to have a fancy casket** that's got a Royals logo or Chiefs logo or whatever...I also wouldn't want to throw in \$10,000, \$20,000, \$30,000, \$40,000 in funeral expenses...Some of it is me feeling like **I have to protect [my wife] even when I am gone**. I take my responsibilities as a husband pretty seriously.

Jay

## The Journey continues | My death is just a milestone on my Journey

---



You're born, we celebrate. Every year, we celebrate another birthday. **That's just another milestone.** It's the circle of life. It should be a celebration when you die. It's a new life.

Rick



This is a picture of **prom night.** [My service] would be **my rite of passage.** I will be going out beautiful. I'm getting ready to dance my way right on over to the other side. I want to go out in style.

Dianne

## The Journey continues | I will live on in memories

---

Something non-traditional would [mean] **the topic of me would never have to stop.** I want to know that my life meant something. At a traditional service, it's almost like someone dies and they're gone and they're **never spoken of again.** No one is talking about what they did, what their life meant. You should **let them live on** in your thoughts and your actions and in your life.

Mary

## The Journey continues | I will live on through my deeds

---



This china is non-traditional. **I hope my friends will continue taking their paths**, even if it's not the more traveled route...I've spearheaded things through the years to get things for children and people who otherwise wouldn't have them. I want them to continue the things I started. [I hope] **it'll go on for generations**. I will know I made a difference in this world and that my life was really worth it and other people learned from the example I set. I've accomplished something. [That would make me feel like] **the journey has been worth it**. That I'm **not just another person** who fades into the woodwork.

Jody

Summary:

Traditional vs. Non-traditional services



A traditional funeral is like  
**a lonely, lifeless tomb**



**The setting:** Stuffy, cold, confining  
**The mood:** Cold, dark, hard to "see"  
the real person  
**How I feel:** Alone, uneasy, controlled

No  
**TRANSFORMATION**



Survivors remain sad  
and disconnected

This is **THE END**



Forced to accept that  
this person's life is over

My end-of-life service is  
**my crowning performance**



**I am the  
Writer**

My funeral,  
my story



**I am the  
Director**

Celebratory  
mood  
  
Meaningful  
setting, music,  
props,  
"costumes"



**I am the  
Star**

My life and  
values on  
display  
  
**Theme:** I  
mattered

**TRANSFORMATION**



The deceased comes alive  
Survivors heal each other

The **JOURNEY**  
Continues



My friends/family move on  
I move on to the next phase  
I live on

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Our pilot study in 2011 suggested  
that funeral industry executives see  
themselves as **CARING CREATORS**



**Healing** wounds

Helping to **write** the story of a life

**Building** foundations and bridges  
to the future

**Weaving** and mending the fabric  
of a community

As we have shown, these consumers  
see non-traditional services as a  
**CREATIVE process**



My crowning **performance**

I am the **director** and **star**

I want the **freedom** to design a service/  
ceremony that is appropriate  
to me

The service/ceremony is a vehicle for  
**self-expression** (who I am, what my  
values are)

However...

Consumers do  
**NOT** see funeral  
directors as  
**CREATORS**

Consumers see  
funeral directors as  
**RULERS**



## Funeral Directors are Rulers | At best, they are cool and impersonal

---

They are there to make everything run efficiently. They've done this so many times [that] they are tough, emotionally. They have to switch on to their **remote, automatic, robotic** – “This will be done in two hours and on to the next funeral. Hope they all get out of here so we can clean it out, and another funeral [can come] in.”

**I don't relate to them well as people.** They're trying to be nice and I know they can't get to be buddy-buddy and gush all over you because they're supposed to be doing their job.

Marilyn B.

## Funeral Directors are Rulers | At best, they are cool and impersonal

---

*(What smell would represent how you feel about funeral directors?)* Nothing. They fade into the woodwork. They do their job and orchestrate everything. They're just there to **get the process done.**

Jody

[They remind me of] some sort of **machinery**. Not loud, but repetitive. They have a job to do, there are things that need to be done and they guy is doing it.

John

## Funeral Directors are Rulers | At worst, they are bullies

---



A lot of traditional funerals are **financially depleting** to the family. They get **guilted** into costly decisions. When we planned my sister-in-law's funeral we were with a man part of the time, then we were with a woman, and then he would come back. It felt like we were buying a car. **Then they put us in this room** and on every single wall there was stuff you could buy. It was awful, like **[when] you go to a carnival** and they have all the prizes. It made the funeral home look like **they didn't care** about the family.

Marilyn H.

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## Seizing an opportunity

---

Although the majority of today's end-of-life services are traditional funerals, **that may be changing.**

Boomers tend to be **more individualistic** than previous generations...and looking well down the road, Gen X and Millennials may be even more individualistic than Boomers.

The **environmental movement** has implications for attitudes toward traditional burials.

A more open discussion of end-of-life choices and spirituality suggest a **changing attitude toward the meaning of life and death.**

In the minds of the people we spoke to, traditional funerals are about **death.**

However, these consumers want their ceremonies to focus on **their life story,** and the Journey forward.

A person wearing a long, white, lace-trimmed dress is seen from behind, standing on a stage. A microphone stand is positioned in front of them. The background is dark, and the scene is lit from above, creating a dramatic atmosphere.

**Implications:**

**Messaging to consumers**

# Surface differences...

---

We spoke with **a diverse set of consumers.**

Equal mix of men and women

Age 50-70

Geographically diverse locations: Atlanta and Overland Park, KS

Racial/Ethnic mix represented: Caucasian, African American, Hispanic, Biracial

Religious affiliations represented: Agnostic, Non-denominational, Protestant, Catholic,

Mormon, Jewish

All of these consumers had **different** jobs, **different** experiences, and **different** life stories.

## ...but deep commonalities

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Despite the surface level differences, these consumers' thoughts and feelings about funerals are shaped by a set of **shared Deep Metaphors**.

Death is a **DESTROYER**. A good end-of-life service is a **CREATOR**

Traditional funerals are a closed **CONTAINER** (like a tomb)

A desire to share **KNOWLEDGE** (so mourners can learn more about why I mattered)

A need for mourners to **CONNECT** (to each other and to the deceased)

A good service creates a **TRANSFORMATION**

The deceased **“comes alive”** again

Family and friends regain some **emotional balance**

Awareness of the continuation of a life **JOURNEY** (beyond my life on earth)

## Thinking about messaging | Rebranding the funeral director

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Consumers **do not** see funeral directors as the kind of **creative resource** they are seeking.

Based solely on the small ZMET pilot study in 2011, it is not clear that the funeral industry sees itself this way, either.

In those interviews, industry professionals emphasized the idea of Creation – but it was in the context of helping consumers **build a bridge to the future and to heal**, as opposed to devising creative services and ceremonies.

Funerals directors should begin to see themselves as **imaginative Creators**, and should communicate that vision to consumers.

More about being a “director of funerals” (a title that suggests openness and options) rather than a “funeral director.”

A person wearing a white, long-sleeved, floor-length dress is standing on a stage, facing away from the camera. A microphone on a stand is positioned in front of them. The background is dark, and the scene is lit from above, creating a spotlight effect. The image is semi-transparent, allowing text to be overlaid.

**Implications:**

**Creating a non-traditional service**

# Creating a non-traditional service

The diverse roles of the funeral director

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Phase 1:  
“Starting  
the Conversation”



Consumer as **WRITER**

Funeral director  
as **RESEARCHER**

Phase 2:  
“Details, Details”



Consumer as **DIRECTOR**

Funeral director  
as **MUSE**

Phase 3:  
“The Service”



Consumer as **STAR**

Funeral director  
as **STAGE MANAGER**

A person wearing a white, long-sleeved, floor-length dress stands at a podium in a dark room. The person is seen from the back, looking towards the right. A microphone is positioned in front of the podium. The scene is dimly lit, with a spotlight effect on the person and the podium.

**Implications:**

**Funeral home design**



# Implications for funeral home design

## Design goals

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The goals of the funeral home design should include:

To **minimize** feelings of physical and psychological **confinement**

To provide consumers and mourners with a stronger sense of **control**

To encourage **creative thinking** in the planning process

To highlight that the funeral home is an area where a **transformation** takes place

# Redesigning a confining space | Pittsburgh Children's Hospital

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A key insight in our study for Children's Hospital in Pittsburgh was that patients and their parents felt **trapped, confined, and out of control**.

The new hospital incorporated **open public spaces** with whimsical themes and plenty of natural light.



The MRI and CT/PET scan rooms were redesigned to resemble **theme parks**. This has led to a 97 percent reduction in the number of children needing medication before a CT scan.

# Making the funeral home come alive

## Encouraging interaction

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A **“man cave” area** where mourners can relax after the service and share their stories of the deceased.



**Outdoor mourning spaces** with campfire areas, grills, and portable bars.



A chapel with a **living-room floor plan**, which replaces rows of hard-backed chairs with overstuffed sofas and recliners.



A room with **writeable walls**, where friends and family can inscribe tributes to their loved ones.

# Reducing psychological and physical confinement

## Incorporate nature in the design

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Incorporating **outdoor areas** like healing gardens can emphasize the transformative nature of the service.



More **natural light** can imbue the funeral home with openness and life.

# Reducing psychological and physical confinement

## Comfortable, open spaces

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Inviting, comfortable-looking **furnishings** with rounded edges can make the funeral home feel **less intimidating**.



**High ceilings** provide a sense of **openness** and are also correlated with higher levels of **creative thinking**.

# A specific design idea

## “Life’s Road”

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A **nature-inspired path** that lets friends and family walk through the Journey of someone’s life.

Photos from youth to adulthood

Awards and honors

Memorable moments

Areas along the path that would **inspire guests to reflect** on their own experiences.

For example, write-able walls with questions/topics like:

“How did you meet Dave?”

“If there was one thing I learned from Dave it was...”

“I always admired Dave because...”

The final result could be **captured electronically** for close friends family.

Also an opportunity for **personalized merchandise**. For example, responses could be made into plaques, memory books, inscribed on urns, etc.

# Implications for funeral home design

## Possible sources of design inspiration

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Places that heighten **the experience of nature:**

National parks  
Botanical gardens



Places designed for people to **gather and interact:**

Bars  
Coffee shops  
Family rooms/living rooms



Places designed to stimulate **creative thinking:**

Art studios  
Interactive museums  
University campuses and buildings

# Summary of Implications

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## Messaging to consumers

Focus on **deep commonalities**, not surface differences

Tell **powerful stories** about the role of the funeral home in people's lives

**Rebranding the profession** of funeral director

## Funeral home design

**Minimize** feelings of physical and psychological **confinement**

Provide consumers and mourners with a stronger sense of **control**

Encourage **creative thinking** in planning

Emphasize that the funeral home is a place where **a transformation occurs**

## Creating a non-traditional service

### Phase 1 – “Starting the Conversation”

Consumer as Writer  
Funeral director as Researcher

### Phase 2 – “Details, Details”

Consumer as Director  
Funeral director as Muse

### Phase 3 – “The Service”

Consumer as Star  
Funeral director as Stage Manager

## Possible new services

**Meeting unmet needs** of consumers and their friends and family. For example:

Oral history interviews

Video biographies

Interactive “living memorial” websites



A sunset over the ocean with a starry night sky above. The sun is low on the horizon, casting a golden glow across the sky and reflecting on the water. The sky transitions from deep purple and blue at the top to bright orange and red near the horizon. The water is dark with some ripples.

# This person seemed to say it all:

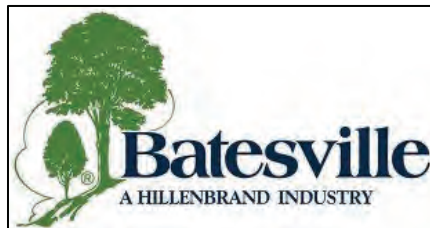
When [my friend] died his wife asked us to come and celebrate his life by sitting in a room [with] the possessions that had a lot of meaning for him. And we talked about Jim in a circle.

His kids were there, his dog was there. I read a poem that I dedicated to him.

**We celebrated his life rather than marked his death.**

# Funeral Foundation

Our thanks to these fine companies for cosponsoring this research



Alan Creedy  
Business Advisors

