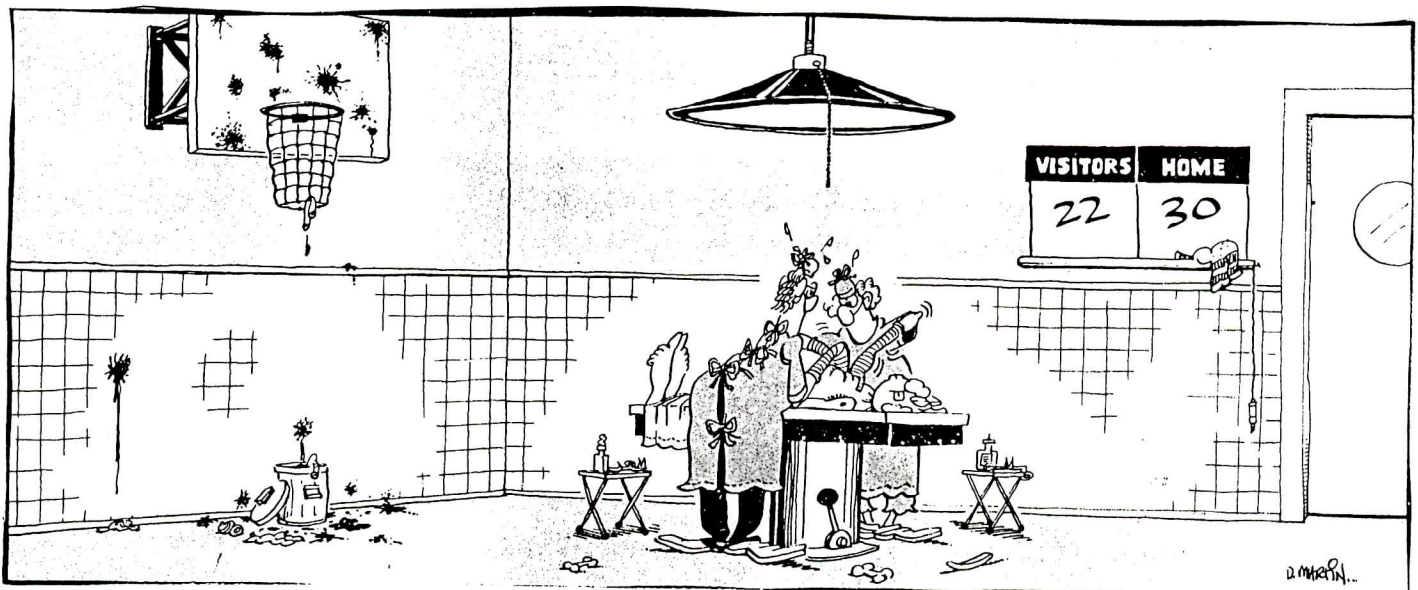


BURIALS

by Brett Nelson



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(oops)

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"Preservation, restoration, and sanitation."¹ Sounds like a household cleaner, doesn't it? Close. This quote from Doug Misiuk of the Misiuk-Morse funeral home in Chesaning, MI. summarizes the three basic uses for embalming fluid. Embalming fluid is pumped into a dead body to take the place of the blood which is removed in the same process. This is one of the few things pertaining to burial that hasn't changed over the years.

One of the things that has changed drastically is the actual burial and some of the methods used in the burial; for instance, there were no funeral homes until the late 1930's, so most services and wakes were held in the home of the deceased. A black wreath would be hung on the front door to symbolize a wake. Since there were no funeral homes, the undertaker had to do his work on the body at the house, which was sometimes difficult, because he had to try not to disturb the family by carrying around such decorative things as blood bottles or by making dusting noises when removing the blood. "This was especially hard, because the family would sometimes actually put their ears to the door just to hear what was going on. Most families were extremely curious, which only made the undertakers job that much harder."² However, the undertaker would usually be left alone with the body to do his work. An undertaker's work would usually consist of making a small incision (about 1½ inches) on the neck, below the collar of course, to pump out the blood and pump ~~out~~ the embalming fluid. This was a lot of hard work, especially using

only a hand pump. Sometimes the cheeks would have to be massaged to close the eyes, men shaven, and other small things to prepare the body for burial services. Today there are electric machines to do most of the work and the work is much more thorough. After the body was ready for burial, a service would be held, and the grave dug and filled by family and friends of the deceased, as this was considered a sacred act.

Corpses during the early 1930's were usually buried in a simple pine box and placed directly in the dirt. This did not provide much protection, and the body rotted and decayed very quickly; whereas today, the coffins are placed in a cement box, and never actually touch the dirt. The coffins were usually built by a cabinet maker or a carpenter and shaped vaguely to the body. They were made out of Poplar, Pine, Oak, or Chestnut. During the late 30's, with the arrival of funeral homes and large, elaborate funerals, coffins were decorated more and more. Soon it became prestigious to have a metal coffin instead of wood. However, with World War II, and a shortage of metal, this became impossible. "Some families would actually have a wooden coffin painted grey to simulate metal."³ Today, wooden coffins are considered more beautiful and a nice cherry coffin could cost upwards of around 1500\$.

As you can see, burials and corpse preparations have changed a lot over the years; but, maybe now you will take notice of the time and hard work that goes into a presentable corpse and a nice funeral.

ENDNOTES

1. Misiuk, Doug, Misiuk-Morse funeral home,
Chesaning, Michigan, May 17, 1988.

2. Ibid, Misiuk, Doug

3. Ibid, Misiuk, Doug

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Cover art taken from Mad magazine