

Society members get self-selected funerals

By DONNA SZATKOWSKI

One of the most vital concepts of life is death. Based on this concept, the Greater Detroit Memorial Society (GDMS) has taken death out of the dusky closet to provide guidance during a most profound, emotional experience.

According to Carrie Peebles, president of the Detroit organization, many families are so torn between sorrow and revulsion at the time of death that they have neither the presence of mind nor the physical ability to arrange the kind of funeral service suited to the deceased.

"The members of the Memorial Society fill out a Final Registration Form stating what type of an arrangement they prefer," said Mrs. Peebles. "Hopefully, by pre-stating their wishes families will abide."

MEMBERS of the society strongly advocate simple arrangements.

"Many times families are high-pressured into buying the very best," said one new member of the society and long-time member of the Birmingham Unitarian Church in Bloomfield. "But he would love this casket for \$1,000—when it's put to you like that, it's hard to turn down."

The Detroit Memorial Society, along with similar societies all over the country, does not buy this pitch.

REPRESENTATIVES of area

churches which sponsor the non-profit, democratically-operated memorial society said at their recent annual meeting that a simple service where the body is buried or cremated immediately is preferred.

"Traditionally, people are prone to go overboard with funeral services," said Jan Williams, representative for the Emerson Unitarian Universalist Fellowship in Troy. Mrs. Williams added that it is important to state one's wishes beforehand to relieve survivors of guilt feelings when left to plan a service. "Many families feel as though it's the last farewell, so we better do it good," she said.

ACCORDING to Ruth Sercombe, representative for the Northwest Unitarian Universalist Church of Southfield, tradition is still a stronghold in elaborate funeral services.

Although a "fair number" of people have responded to the guidance offered by the society, there are those who believe simplicity is contrary to custom and refuse to join.

"Many people make their wish for a simple procedure known. But when their families react negatively to the idea, they drop it themselves," said Mrs. Sercombe.

THE DETROIT MEMORIAL SOCIETY sees alternatives to the expensive tradition of caskets and flowers. One is cremation, which returns the body to the elements. Another is

bequeathal of one's body to a medical school, or parts of one's body to a tissue bank.

Even immediate burial is considered an option to long, three-day ceremonies performed around dead bodies, according to the society.

THE REPRESENTATIVE to the society for the First Presbyterian Church of Farmington, Mrs. Helen Cope, said the real value of the memorial society is its knowledge of the options to a traditional funeral service and its ability to guide families during a particularly rough period.

"The GDMS knows what services are available and what funeral directors will cooperate with a simple memorial service," said Mrs. Cope. "But the families ultimately make their own decision."

THE MAIN THRUST of the "simple service" as advocated by the GDMS is in holding a memorial service or meeting after the death and away from the body. The emphasis is placed on the personality of the deceased.

Growing membership figures in memorial societies indicate, as one member said, "More and more people are asking friends and relatives to remember them as a life—not a corpse."

Other area GDMS sponsoring organizations include the Birmingham Friends Meeting, Birmingham and the Farmington Unitarian Universalist Church, Farmington.



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Treatment costly

Spine injuries disable many

Spinal cord injuries will disable between 5,000 and 10,000 Americans this year, many in their teens and early 20s. More than 75 percent of them are males.

Automobile accidents cause most spinal cord injuries but motorbikes and sports, particularly diving into shallow water, also claim their share of victims.

Unless the spinal cord is completely cut, a patient can improve, usually during the first six months. Generally, present treatment tries to prevent complications and teaches the patient to live with his handicap.

THE SPINAL cord is a bundle of nerve fibers and cells which connect the brain with the muscles, skin and internal organs, carrying messages back and forth.

When the cord is damaged at the level of the chest or lower back, both legs and the lower parts of the body are paralyzed. When the injury is at neck level, the arms also are paralyzed.

Treatment is time-consuming and costly. Initial hospitalization may last six months. During that time, patients encounter many special problems such as loss of bone mineral and the

formation of kidney and bladder stones caused by prolonged bedrest.

A COMPONENT of the National Institute of Neurological Diseases and Stroke (NINDS), supports four acute spinal cord injury research centers where work is directed mainly toward minimizing or reversing acute injury to the spinal cord.

NINDS intramural scientists are conducting research on the possibility of regeneration within the central nervous system — the ultimate hope for patients with severed spinal cords.

Research on goldfish and salamanders, which regenerate a cut spinal cord, lend new insight into processes which may eventually play a part in treatment for spinal cord injuries.

SOMETIMES THE spinal cord is damaged by a blood vessel abnormality. NINDS scientists, working with radiologists, devised a way to diagnose and surgically correct such disorders — one of the rare instances where spinal cord injury may be prevented by early diagnosis and surgery.

Many injuries can be prevented by adhering to safety precautions. For those injuries which do occur, the emphasis is on rehabilitation.

Party celebrates 50th anniversary

Mr. and Mrs. Louis P. McGowen of Birmingham celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary at a party recently at the Delray Beach, Fla., home of their daughter-in-law and son, Mr. and Mrs. Neil McGowen, formerly of Birmingham.

The party was also hosted by the couple's daughter and son-in-law,

Mr. and Mrs. Frank Brandemihl of Livonia.

ATTENDING THE party were the couple's 13 grandchildren and one great grandson.

Other friends and relatives from Michigan and Florida honored the McGowens.

The couple was married Jan. 31, 1924.

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