

Navigating the to-do list after a loved one dies

By Irene Bowers
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BAYSIDE

It lacks a plot, but "Death For Beginners" offers readers a chance to plan their own. Burial plot, that is.

Written by local author and broadcast journalist Karen Jones, "Death For Beginners: Your No Nonsense, Money-Saving Guide to Planning



Karen Jones says humor helps people deal with death. "Who can resist a story about a guy who blew up in the crematorium?"

for the Inevitable" was published by Quill Driver Books. The after death how-to guide, released this month, simplifies the overwhelming array of choices that people must face eventually.

Jones advocates that "eventually"

comes sooner rather than later; prudence suggests planning for it well ahead of time.

"Death, even an expected death, renders most of us dim-witted; we just want someone else to make the decisions," she said. "Those decisions needlessly can cost thousands of dollars, and some even ruin family relationships. Why compound grief or deprive loved ones the chance to celebrate a life?"

Years ago, Jones watched a close friend struggle with the after-death issues that accompanied the unexpected loss of a loved one. She found herself ill equipped to offer any helpful advice, and the experience frustrated her deeply.

"It absolutely would not leave me alone," she said. "I was compelled to write a book that saved people from unnecessary hardship."

Jones approached the topic with research skills honed in feature reporting for WVEC-TV 13 and organizational skills acquired as an educator.

"I set out to learn exactly what happens when we die, and then explain it to everyone else," she said, smiling wryly. "I had no idea it would take me five years and make me an occasional dinner pariah."

The effort paid off. At 226 pages, "It's snappy and won't kill you to read it," Jones said.

"Death for Beginners" covers every issue from body disposal, burial and cremation to obituaries, memorial services and wills. Jones, who is married to a retired military officer, also included an abundance of material for military members.

Her key to making the difficult subject readable is a flair for the absurd. "Humor makes death easier," she admitted. "Who can resist a story about a guy who blew up in the crematorium?"

The book includes definitions, pros and cons, costs, and pertinent resources. In addition to worksheets to facilitate planning, the book's companion website offers links to resources, updated for the next five years.

With several books already published, including "Kingdom of Hearts" and "Up the Best Seller List," Jones is now on the familiar publicity push. In addition to a lecture at Sentara Beach General, local book signings, and the Brian Lehrer Show in New York City, she heads out for a West Coast tour in August.

"I never got over being a Girl Scout," said Jones, who grew up in Thalia and graduated from Princess Anne High in 1969. "My mother was a troop leader and always told us to leave each place better than we found it. That is what I want this book to do."

"Death for Beginners" is available at bookstores, online booksellers and www.QuillDriverBooks.com. To view the website, visit: www.DeathForBeginners.com.

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