



**Mind:** Keeping Our Voice – Part 1 – End of Life Planning

**Body:** Whole Body Donation

**Spirit:** Seize the Day

## Keeping Our Voice – Part 1 – End of Life Planning



*She stood at the gravesite on a cold November day in the prairies. The memorial service for her aunt was traditional and tasteful. The minister spoke of a life that was long lived, dedicated to education, family, and community – a life lived quietly, in the comfort and familiarity of the small farming community. She watched as the brass urn that held her aunt’s ashes was placed between the graves of her aunt’s mother and father. Her aunt had never married, and being the closest next of kin, the niece took care of the final arrangements, and mourned not only for her aunt, but also for the end of an era, as her aunt was the last to ‘pass on’ from that generation. Her private thoughts and memories were interrupted by the piercing words of a distant cousin, stating, “She wanted to be buried, not cremated.”*

It is about keeping our voice – in life and in death, and it is one of the greatest gifts we can offer our

family. It is more than just identifying who gets the china and Uncle Harry’s golf clubs. It is giving our loved ones the ability to do what is right – to honour our wishes in life and in death. It will probably be one of the most difficult and potentially important conversations we can have with our loved ones. Don’t put it off – we don’t want anyone to feel what I was feeling that cold November day at my aunt’s gravesite.

We may need someone to follow through on our wishes regarding our End-of-Life Plan; Health Care, Personal Care, and Medical Directives; Power of Attorney for Financial Purposes; and ultimately, our Last Will and Testament for the distribution of our assets when we die.

It all starts with taking some time to reflect on our values, beliefs, preferences, fears, and wishes. We must first gain clarity on what we want before we can communicate our wishes to others. I have noticed that folks tend to plan their future life needs with the same level of detail they apply to their current life needs. Some people live their life with detail and precision – they will likely plan their end of life and health care directives with the same specificity. I tend to approach my life today at the 10,000 foot level, so I first considered my health care and end of life planning at the same level. I initially shared with close family and friends a list of 5 principles and beliefs – if you know this about me, this will guide you in making personal, health,

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residential, and medical decisions on my behalf. And by the way, I am a registered organ donor and I want my body to be cremated – do not put me anywhere near bugs! I have since come to learn that a bit more detail would be helpful.

## End-Of-Life Planning

Had my aunt prepared an End-Of-Life Plan, had a conversation about her wishes with a trusted friend or close family member responsible for her final arrangements, or had written down her wishes and stored them in a known place of access, we would have known that she preferred to be buried close to her parents. Had she known that there were no more plots available within that small cemetery, we could have explored her next best alternative. By the time we recognized that we needed to initiate these conversations, her dementia was too advanced. So, it is never too early to start the conversations, and remember that that these plans are always open for change and amendments.

Your plan could include, but not be limited to:

- Details about a death notice or obituary – what you want said, where you want them published, written by whom, and any pictures you want shared.
- How you want your body dealt with – burial, entombment, cremation, donation for medical research.
- Type of services, (visitation/viewing, funeral, gravesite service, memorial, celebration of life, receptions, etc.,) costs, donations and charities.

- Details about the service (religious, spiritual, secular, formal, traditional, non-traditional, speakers, music, messages, flowers etc.)
- Pre-paid arrangements, or instructions regarding how the final arrangements and services will be paid.
- Make sure you share the details of your plan with family and friends, and ensure they know where it is stored.

Keep your voice in life and death. You have the opportunity to write the closing scene in the play of your life. Script it well as a final testament and statement to the unique gift of you.

Rhonda Latreille, MBA, CPCA  
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## Whole Body Donation

‘Whole Body Donation’ refers to a growing trend of donating your body to a medical school for research and training. Typically, these schools will cover the costs of collecting the body, cremating the remains, and returning the cremated remains to the family. Taking care of these arrangements prior to death takes away the burden of considering this option from your surviving family members.

## Seize the Day

“When you arise in the morning think of what a privilege it is to be alive, to think, to enjoy, to love ...”

*Marcus Aurelius*