

Community News

Preplanning is a Gift to Your Loved Ones

By Kelly Reed Keeling

Recently my step-sister died. I travelled across the country to be with her when the doctors suggested she opt for home hospice. I was there in her final hours,

along with her husband and friends, at her home, to provide care and to hold her hand. She was only 50 years old. She had been extremely sick for over a year, and she was in a lot of pain. Her pass-

ing did not come as a surprise. But what did surprise me was, the morning she died, the nurse thought she would live another two to three weeks. Furthermore, her husband did not know her

final wishes for burial. They had not discussed it. I was stunned.

How many times does this scenario play out with families? How many discussions do we mean to have about end-of-life decisions, but avoid? The whole situation with my family made me think how fortunate the Charlotte Jewish community is to have an institution like the Hebrew Cemetery, a wonderful, caring person like Sandra Goldman as its director, and a beautiful Memorial Building for smaller funerals.

The funeral provides a time for family and friends to gather to remember and honor the deceased and to take a critical step in the process of healing. A Jewish funeral is respectful and simple.

Yet sadly, when one does not preplan one's own funeral, there is nothing simple about planning a funeral and burial in 24 to 36 hours. Rather, a bereft spouse, child, or friend is left, albeit with some help, to pull together all the details. It's a time where emotions and stress are at an all-time high. This state of agitation and grief is hardly the best one for making the numerous decisions involved.

As the winter holidays approach, many families will gather



Hebrew Cemetery Board Member, Jenny Rosenthal (right) pictured with Patricia and Ted Johnson at the September 28 Annual Memorial Service and Building Dedication.

had and actions are taken to make preplanning a reality. In a 2010 survey conducted by the National Funeral Directors Association, 66% of adults would choose to arrange their own funeral service, but only 25% have already made them, according to Jessica Koth of the NFDA (USA Today, May 29, 2013).

2) Preplanning helps prevent family confrontations. Decisions that are not made in advance by the deceased themselves have the potential to be contested by various family members. This atmosphere causes unnecessary heartache.

3) Preplanning can save money. By paying in advance, you may pay less for plots and funeral expenses when you pay in current dollars.

4) Preplanning ensures that your wishes are recorded and honored. When you fill out the preplanning documents with the Hebrew Cemetery, you have the opportunity to record your wishes for your funeral. Your funeral plan can be as general or as detailed as you like.

In the end, my step-sister's husband created a lovely service that honored her memory and allowed friends and family members to begin the healing process. He had the benefit of time, as his tradition allowed. Furthermore, my mother shared some of her end-of-life planning with me shortly after my step-sister's death. It was a great relief to me, as an only child, to know that she had put some structures in place so that I will not have to make every decision about her funeral on my own.

So as the holidays approach, don't be afraid to open the door for conversation. Preplanning your funeral can be an easy process that will give you and your loved ones peace of mind. For more information about preplanning, making a legacy gift or honoring your loved ones with a memorial plaque at the Hebrew Cemetery, please contact Sandra Goldman at 704-576-1859 or email director@hebrewcemetery.org. ☆



A few of the Levine JCC Girl Scouts who helped with the Memorial Service, pictured in front of the former Temple Beth El ark, now permanently in place in the Mindy Ellen Levine Chapel at the Hebrew Cemetery.

to spend time together. With a great cacophony of laughter, stories, and games, family reunions offer joy and new memories. So, too, do we note the passage of time. Grandchildren get older, advance in school, and maybe even launch careers or start families. At the other end of the continuum, parents age and their children may have to confront their parents' declining capabilities.

Why let another holiday go by without broaching the much avoided topic, preplanning one's own funeral? While it may not be in our comfort zone, there are many benefits to preplanning before the need is imminent.

1) Preplanning your funeral reduces your loved ones' stress at the time of your passing. Plan ahead. What a relief it can be to loved ones when this discussion is

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