

Does This Mean You'll See Me Naked

Robert Webster

iUniverse (November 2008)

Softcover \$14.95 (152pp)

978-1-4401-0017-8

Ten years ago Ohio funeral director Robert Webster would have had a hard time publishing a book packed with lurid biological and gossipy details about his business. People would have considered the subject too ghoulish or shocking. But with the rise in popularity of realistic television crime dramas mystery novels featuring crime-fighting coroners and bestselling books about cadavers like Mary Roach's *Stiff* readers are ready for Webster's dishy and entertaining memoir about three decades in a funeral home or as he likes to call it the "death care" industry.

In the opening chapters Webster describes the oddest body art adorning his subjects the nicest and nastiest funeral guests the strangest items placed in caskets and the surprisingly commonplace "death by defecation" that befalls many elderly and obese people. The author writes with polite demeanor one minute and switches to the earthy language of a jailhouse brawler the next but the style works for this collection of vignettes.

Webster is not afraid to disparage the seamier side of his profession like the sleazy high-pressure salesmen who foist expensive funerals on vulnerable families or the prurient creeps that molest dead bodies. He has plenty of tales about shameless relatives too and discloses that he and many of his colleagues must be expert bill collectors since many customers skip out on payment once the funeral flowers have wilted. He may also unintentionally convince readers to forego the funeral home process in favor of body donation or cremation to save on short-term body preservation and to avoid having loved ones become the butt of morticians' inside jokes.

The book offers fascinating insider secrets glimpses of black humor behind the scenes and all anyone might want to know about the body restoration process which involves lots of wax Plaster of Paris sharpened mop handles for those pesky decapitations agricultural lime and heavy duty cosmetics. The poignant side of Webster's profession is also relayed with many thoughtful insights on life's meaning and the dignity of the grief and burial period.

The book will likely appeal to a broad audience but many readers may find its frank and sometimes irreverent tone off-putting. The lighthearted treatment of this somber subject is appropriately evident from the front cover shot of a large pair of feet with accompanying toe tag.

The book provides an uncommon look at an unusual profession. While Webster's prose may not be as elegant as an experienced writer's this book is recommended for anyone interested in an unsparing look at a "mysterious and fascinating vocation."

(August 21, 2009)

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