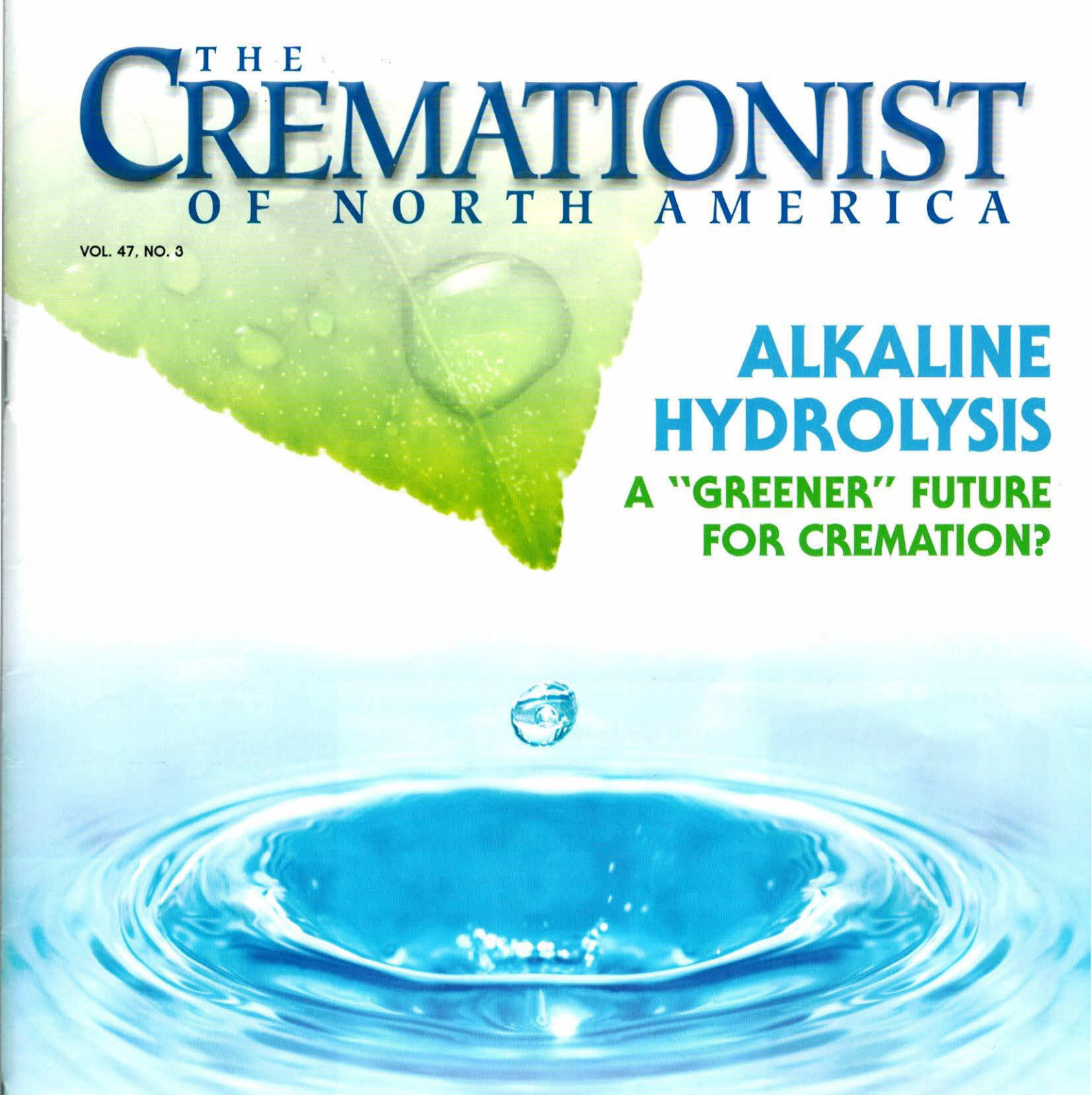


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Unique Trends in Personal Memorialization

By Cara Terreri

In today's era of constantly evolving technology and innovation, the age-old funeral or memorial service remains the most popular way to honor the deceased. In fact, a 2010 study by the Funeral and Memorial Information Council (FAMIC) found that 95 percent of Americans believe funeral and memorial services are a critical part of remembering the life of a loved one. But beyond the service, how do people continue to commemorate a loved one? For many, burial or acquiring cremated remains provides sufficient closure in the healing process of death. Yet others seek more unconventional ways to celebrate, release or hold close a family member's remains.

From transforming cremains into a pendant to inserting them into a fireworks display, the market for memorialization products is popular, diverse and growing. As the popularity of cremation has risen more than 50 percent in the last 20 years, companies and artists have developed new ways to preserve and display remains. A recent Google search for "unique memorial products" revealed more than 37 million results.

"In the memorialization process, people seek ways to share a person's story and at the same time, keep their own history alive," said FAMIC President Linda Sempstrot. "How our industry responds to consumers' wants and needs plays a vital role in the future of memorialization."

Alternative memorialization products fall into two distinct categories: ways or devices to release remains; and products that contain or are made from cremated remains. The first category builds upon the tradition of scattering cremains over a designated area. One of the more common practices is for family members to scatter the ashes of a loved one over a body of water. Newer concepts allow for a similar "water burial" scattering but do so by way of



Passages International uses cremated remains and hair to design one-of-a-kind keepsake pieces, such as pendants.



a biodegradable urn. Sea Services, a maritime funeral provider, offers a biodegradable OceanUrn™ that dissolves after resting on the ocean floor. The cremains are released at the bottom of the ocean, which some believe is a more respectful way to handle the remains than allowing them to float at the surface.

For those who want to scatter ashes in a more extravagant way, Heavens Above Fireworks, a company based in the United Kingdom, will pack a loved one's cremains into fireworks and subsequently arrange a display for family and friends. The company's motto is "A happier way to say goodbye," and Heavens Above Fireworks believes a person's death should be commemorated by a "celebration of life."

"Clients leave the display—or more likely continue with their memorial party—with a big smile on their face, and oftentimes, tears are streaming too," said Heavens Above Fireworks managing director Fergus Jamieson.

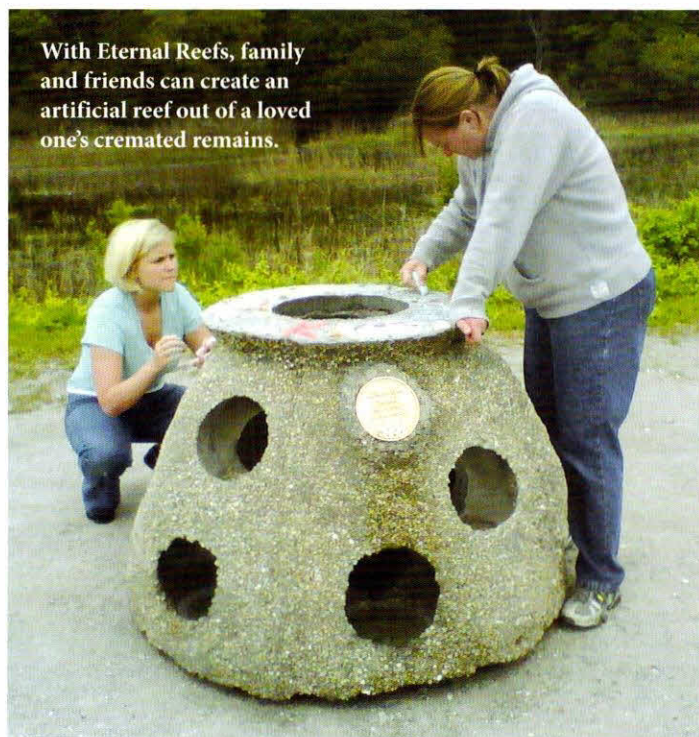
Heavens Above Fireworks is also part of a growing group of companies offering memorial space flights, wherein a symbolic portion of remains are launched into space via specially designed spacecraft.

If letting go of a loved one's remains feels too final, there are many products that allow the bereaved to literally hold their loved one close long after they have died. Cremation jewelry represents a huge portion of the alternative memorialization product market. Many artisans create pendants designed to hold a small portion of cremated remains. Other companies, like the well-known LifeGem®, create a pendant or stone made directly from cremains.

On a similar note, Passages International, Inc. creates jewelry, frames and plaques using cremated remains and hair. The keepsakes, which are part of the company's Sentimental Connections product line, are each crafted by hand and are one-of-a-kind. Cremated remains create pieces that have a granite-like look, and hair is gently hand-laid into each piece, according to a company press release.

Other items that hold remains include teddy bears and pillows wherein remains are stored in a secure pouch or vial.

Newer, more innovative items on the market are products made from cremated remains. Eternal Reefs promises to offer a "true living legacy" by incorporating remains into a specially patented artificial reef that is then placed on the ocean floor to rebuild marine life.



With Eternal Reefs, family and friends can create an artificial reef out of a loved one's cremated remains.




The reef is placed on the ocean floor to help rebuild marine life.

Another option is Art in Ashes, which creates one-of-a-kind paintings (usually oil on canvas) that incorporate cremated remains into the paint. The company also produces glass sculptures made with cremains.

One artist, Nadine Jarvis, has taken the concept of memorialization products to a new level by incorporating remains into everyday, impermanent items.

"I started to think about death in terms of grief and how the degradation of materials could be used to aid that grief, and imagined how the deceased could be reincarnated through the design of memorial objects," Jarvis said.

Among Jarvis' more notable items are a bird feeder made from a mixture of remains and bird seed, and a pencil box. Pencils in the box are created using carbon from the cremated remains in place of the standard graphite in pencil lead. The pencil box contains several pencils (the average remains can yield 240 pencils) that are released one at a time. The pencils are sharpened on one end of the box, which then becomes an urn that holds the remains of the pencils.

As the popularity of cremation continues to rise, so too will the ways in which cremated remains are preserved, released or contained. While a funeral service remains the standard, there are many people seeking additional, alternative ways to celebrate and extend the memory of a loved one. 



A bird feeder created by Nadine Jarvis from a mixture of remains and bird seed.

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