



A NON-TECHNICAL EXPLANATION OF EMBALMING

Modern embalming got its start during the American Civil War in the 1860's. Families of soldiers killed in battle wanted to have their bodies returned home. Dr. Thomas Holmes found a way. His system was the forerunner of today's arterial embalming.

Mortuary science students now undergo specialized college training. They must demonstrate an advanced level of embalming skills, a biological science background, and a knowledge of human anatomy.

Funeral homes today include an area called the preparation room which resembles a hospital operating room. It's equipped with an operating table, surgical instruments, special lighting, and ventilation.

The disinfection and body preservation achieved by embalming permits the delay of services until a time convenient for family members, including those who must travel considerable distances.

The process of embalming is begun by spraying the body with a topical disinfectant. Then the body is cleansed with a germicidal soap and then, out of respect, covered up to the shoulders with a sheet.

Now begins the arterial injection, which is somewhat like an IV procedure in a hospital. A small incision is made to allow access to a major artery and vein. A small tube is then inserted in the artery, and another in the vein. The arterial tube is connected by rubber tubing to the reservoir of a motorized injector. This machine holds the arterial chemical. From the circulatory system, this chemical permeates out through all the cells of the body. To avoid swelling, some of the blood in the system is displaced and removed via the tube connected to the vein. The incision is sutured closed when the injection is complete.

After the arterial process, the embalmer moves on to the second major set of procedures: cavity preservation. Following death, there's often a buildup of liquids and/or gases in the abdominal and thoracic (chest) cavities. In order to remove these and replace them with cavity preservative chemicals, another incision is made in the abdomen. Into this is placed a long tube, and through this tube liquid and gaseous wastes are aspirated or suctioned off. Then, through the same tube, preservative chemicals are introduced using simple gravity pressure.

Next the deceased is dressed, placed in a casket, and cosmetized. Cosmetics are used sparingly and in accordance with family wishes. This procedure is not an attempt to disguise reality, but to create a pleasant image for the bereaved individual.

Every mortuary science student and every licensed embalmer has one thought uppermost in mind when entering the preparation room: every deceased body will be treated with the utmost respect at all times.