



Why I Need Weapons At A Wake

by Patrick Alexander

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Death.

It's the only thing in this life that's a sure thing.

Well, death and taxes. Those are the only sure things.

Make that death, taxes, and losing eyelashes. Those are sure things.

Okay, wait, make that death, taxes, losing eyelashes, and having to expel a wet, mucous-filled sneeze in an embarrassing public place with no Kleenex, like on a bus or in an important meeting.

Maybe a meeting with your boss, who is on the brink of furthering your career if only you can pull this off and make him forget about that time you fucked a hottie co-worker in the coatroom at the Christmas party and accidentally spooGED all over that expensive leather trench coat that turned out to be his, staining it noticeably, a stain which oddly enough resembles the creamy boogers now making a ectoplasmic bridge between your face and hands.

In my attempt to make a dramatic opening to this piece, I realize that there are a lot of sure things.

Okay, so back to death. It is something everyone in life must face. You can do it the poet's way, with calm, mature lucidity. You can also do it the traditional way, with screaming, childish, pants-shitting defiance. Humans have struggled with the mystery of death and the afterlife for millennia, along with the mystery of why men have nipples, or why *Reba* has been on for seasons (plural).

This year a good friend of mine has had to watch her mother battle cancer and lose. She passed away this May, leaving behind a husband, six children, and an unborn grandchild. To me, this is a terrible and painful part of life. Is it a tragedy? No. Tragedy is what takes place once the funeral arrangements have been made and people start to show up to pay their last respects. Funerals are never easy, but what makes them harder is the general stupidity and baffling social retardation some people exhibit at them.

Strike one falls under the category of etiquette. People, if you're going to a funeral, here are a few etiquette lessons. Upon entering the funeral home, before the service begins, SHUT the FUCK up. No one wants to chitchat in front of a corpse. I had one blue-haired churchgoer—who had a very faint connection to the family—go out of her way to obnoxiously save seats in the funeral home with her purse and coat, loudly announcing she was waiting for two friends.

Is this fourth grade? Or is she just bitter she didn't get coffin-side tickets?

Aghast at her shocking display of rudeness and chair-hogging, I decided to sit right beside her to witness this phenomenon at close range. She proceeded to yak about bullshit to her other equally brain dead cohorts, with topics ranging from "Do you remember the last time we were here?" to "How do you know that girl in the black coat?" to "Guess how I got this steam burn?"

Even the priest looked like he wanted to punch her. When everyone else around you is quiet and reflective and you are the only one describing in detail how great your parking space is, God himself should just open up the ceiling and piss on you.

Strike two comes under the heading of fashion don'ts. I don't care if you were raised by wolves, EVERYONE should dress formal or semi-formal for a funeral. Jeans, golf shirts, the color magenta, dollar-store knit dresses, and running shoes should get you banned from entering and an Indian burn (hey, fight fourth-grade fire with fourth-grade fire).

Being impoverished is one thing, but at least TRY to look presentable. Oh, and being poor due to crack use is not a good reason, which leads me to my first example. I witnessed one disheveled crack maiden (yes she was on crack, facial scabs don't lie—they exaggerate stories about their kids, but they don't lie) and her fellow diva of impropriety clip-clop in, wearing dresses that make my dishrags look like Dolce & Gabbana.

The larger of the two was wearing a black and white sundress from 1972 that was ugly even by '70's standards. Underneath, she featured a very visible, much yellowed monster bra and two of those rubber "Live Strong" bracelets (irony I suppose). She topped off this ensemble with "white" flip-flops and faded, almost-grey tattoos up and down her legs.

Bad tattoos too, not cool ones; we're talking "Indian chief on horseback with wolf baying at the full moon" type of crap. Top it all off with summer teeth and you had a vision in mourning. At this point, I was the one who needed to blaze a rock.

Strike three falls under the heading of "Why I miss pay phones." This final straw came when another equally annoying lady (and I use the term loosely) decided that she was so important, she couldn't possibly turn off her precious cell phone even for a funeral. During the eulogy it rang so loudly, I thought the building was on fire. Not only did it ring, a louder mechanized voice came out of it and said, "The CALL has been LOST" as our hapless heroine rummaged through her purse in embarrassment.

Now, a smart person would have shut the phone off. The embarrassment would fade, and a well placed "sorry" would

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smooth over the potentially horrifying and disgraceful situation. Not this asshole. She kept the phone on and the phone rang again about twenty seconds later. It was the same droning and cold machine voice splitting the respectful silence of the home. I wanted the corpse to sit up in her coffin and say, "Will someone turn that fucking phone off and roll that bitch!" At the very least, I wish I had brought my crossbow.

My message is simple: funerals are awkward, sad and terrible, but like everything in life, one can either do them with style and class or one can embarrass themselves and everyone they know and love by acting like a complete asshole. Common sense, manners, and etiquette should have their own funeral, because it seems like they're long dead.

And don't smoke crack.

Excuse me. I think I hear my cell phone ringing.