‘Till Death Do Part

We are born: crying, slimy, and new into the arms of loving care. Our bodies are cleaned for us, and we slowly grow into a member of society, coming to our own conclusions and making our separate decisions. Years grow into decades and those moments fly right past us, a low bird of time that glides overhead. Our breathing, once full of energy and life, comes at a slow pace. Our bones meld together beneath wrinkling skin. Or perhaps, we don’t make it to this state; we are stolen with the youth of life thriving in our veins.

 Nevertheless, at some point or another we are born, and at a completely different point in time, we die shedding our mortal bodies to a spiritual existence. Yet, our bodies don’t just disappear, all the markings don’t fade and all scars on skin remain. It is a lifeless corpse, remaining locked in a box as people try to figure out the next step to take, deciding between all the different methods we have available to us now.

 The ground calls to feed on our bodies, the squirming of life rising to the surface to fill their bellies. The nature around us, aiding us through our lives, is now here to aid us in a different way, into our descent underground. The animals come to feed on what's left and decomposition begins to take place. What could be beautiful about our bodies, which have stayed with us all our lives, decaying and becoming just another fertilizer?

 Decomposition is the natural process of all living things and whether wanted or not, it’s something all of our bodies will go through. Consider natural burials, one of the most *unnatural* burials to have come across. Our bodies are taken from our homes, from wherever we have fallen, shielded from the public in a white van as if kept a secret. We are cleaned and dolled up, poked with injections and makeup to look animated,“lively” again. Then we are tucked delicately into highly manufactured wood, placed in a sealed concrete vault, and concealed from the sun and the warm Earth. Over time, we cannot stop nature from seeping through the cracks in concrete and eventually reaching us, but how long must our constantly decomposing bodies wait for this to happen? There’s no wonder it was popularized in America, home to the meaning of “cover up,” making things look good, silver lined clouds revealing dark thundering storms. The number of people choosing these methods decreases as the years pass; choosing cremation, Tree Pod Burials, and cryonics.

 The reason these kinds of funerals are so common however, is because our society isn’t properly educated on the different kinds of burial practices that we have available to us and the long term effects of it. Today, as a collective community, we are now able to explore more memorial services than those from the past. With ceremonies such as Tree Pod Burials, cremation, cryonics, and endless more possibilities, an increased number of people are beginning to extend their knowledge of burials and choose what’s best for them. However, each burial comes with a different meaning, through spiritual, religious, or psychical standpoint, and it's important to note that each burial has a background and is a reflection of who you are.

 So what are these burials? What do they mean and where do they come from? Where did they originate? What can they tell you about the life a person has lived? There is so much surrounding just the natural keeping of a lifeless body. Beginning with the newest emergence of Tree Pod burials, a method of effectively decomposing your deceased corpse into fertilizer for a beautiful tree, our environmental impact is important to take into consideration. Our corpses are arranged into a fetal position, similar to that of a baby in its mother’s womb, then surrounded by compost and other natural soils in an egg shape. Once it's complete, a hole is dug and the pod is put into the ground, returning our bodies to the soil that we emerged from in the beginning of time. It's one of the key components of our natural elements–earth, water, fire, and air.

 There’s a burial process that is healthy for our Earth found within each of these elements. However, it may not be the one previously thought by most. For example, more than half of Americans had taken into consideration being *cremated* after their passing. This requires natural gasses to be burned at a temperature of around 1400 and 1900 degrees Fahrenheit, emitting an [estimated 360,000 pounds](https://www.nationalgeographic.com/science/article/is-cremation-environmentally-friendly-heres-the-science) of carbon dioxide emissions in the U.S. annually. All of this factual evidence for the negative impact on cremations can be found in Mercedes Grant’s article, “*The Grassy Green Future of Composting Human Bodies.”* The thing that is misunderstood surrounding cremations is that after your body has turned into ashes, by spreading it around the earth, you are somehow nurturing it or just innocently being released into nature. However, during the burning process, any natural resources and helpful nutrients also fade into the unhealthy emissions. In the end, we do more harm than good to our environment. Fortunately however, there is an alternative method to this that is “aquamation”, an even newer method being brought to light alongside Tree Pod Burials. The process of breaking the body down using *water* , rather than fire. Intriguing, to say the least.

 Relating back to Mother Nature, we are taught that death is a universal occurrence, something happens to everyone and everything. There is no such thing as immortality, only the putting off of the inevitable. You’d think, knowing this, we wouldn't be spending so much time trying to put off death with our fancy medications and routines, and rather begin enjoying the time and freedom we have with the bodies we maintain. Still, with all the dangers presented to us, mostly by the hands of society; car accidents, shootings, ignorance, and so much more, we have lost ourselves in what we consider to be comfort.