

The Afterlife: Creative Ways to Keep Your Body Around

The desire to leave behind a mark on the world is an intensely human one. The questions of death and dying are important, heavy topics, and not everyone agrees on what we experience once that happens. What people have come up with is ingenious and creative ways to leave your mark – to cement your impact. Today, there are multiple ways to ensuring that your lifeless body sticks around a little bit longer.

There are services that allow for, forgive the pun, literal “objectification”. The company, “Heart in Diamond” allows for your ashes to be turned into diamonds. The company gives new meaning to the popular phrase “diamonds are forever”. The company further allows you to customise what lies enclosed in the diamond, allowing you to choose, for example, a single lock of your hair in the heart of the “you” diamond.

“Andvinly” provides the option of letting you “play on”. Pressing your ashes to a playable vinyl record, your voice outlives you. For £3000, one gets up to 30 discs, each with 24 minutes of audio. The company goes so far as to suggest the redistribution of the self in this form – through record stores around the world, although that might take a bit more time to catch on.

For people looking for a louder example, opt for something a little more explosive. “Holy Smoke”, a company based in Alabama, USA, converts ashes to shotgun shells and pistol cartridges for your loved ones. Or maybe, explosions of a different type are what you are after. Today, getting ashes turned into fireworks is also a viable option, with companies like “Heavenly Stars” helping you go out with a literal and figurative “bang”.

For the artistically inclined, Kevin Fulton is here – the glassblower converts your pets remains to glass sculptures in their likeness. Along the same track, we have the options of getting your ashes converted to paint, pencils or even tattoo ink – helping your loved ones create something new with your remains.

If being “objectified” is morbid, do not worry. There still exists a world of flexibility even while sticking to the regular burial or cremation. Starting with cremation, there exists a plethora of options for what your ashes are contained in. From something that is simple like an urn with your photo on it to something a bit more poetic like an hourglass, you can definitely experiment with your final resting place, so to speak. Options like having ashes contained in a ring with your fingerprint on it can provide a heartfelt tribute.

For those who are looking to scatter your ashes – it can be done from anywhere. From a helicopter to a drone, you can scatter your ashes along your favourite river, sea or ocean. To literally leave earthly realms, there are provisions to be launched into the stratosphere using a balloon (Eternal Ascent Society), and even have your ashes released into space (Celestis).

For the environmentally inclined, there always exists the option to have your ashes raked into a garden. There exist companies that help provide urns that double up as potential trees. “Eternal Reefs” combines your ashes with a special breed of concrete – once placed into the ocean floor, these mimic coral reefs and allow sea life to attach to it.

For those more inclined to burials, flexibility comes in many forms. From a classic sea burial to being incorporated in a compost heap – your body thrives on in different geographies. Eco-friendly options call for being buried in a woven willow casket, or even in a pod that later grows into a tree. Stylistically, you can explore mausoleums or gothic style stone crypts.

Different cultures employ different traditions – from the pyres of our motherland to the Tibetan sky burial (leaving the body atop a hill to be devoured by vultures), it seems we all process death a little differently. A “burial tree” was a historically relevant practice amongst Native Americans and aboriginal Australians – a tree to support dead relatives.

The candid discussion of life after death may seem a little morbid – but the existence of these specialised services betrays humanity’s innate curiosity and draw towards the unknown. These companies are all indicative of a market built on satisfying an especially human need – the need to express oneself. The need to establish an identity. To stand out. To leave a mark. The intense human need to extract meaning, even in death, is what drives us to constantly do better. In the end, what one does with their body after death is of little consequence – what matters is what you do with it when you are alive.