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'Six Feet Under' buries misconceptions

MY VIEW

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HBO brings humanity with all of its frailties to life with its new hit show, "Six Feet Under." I can relate even more directly with the character of the funeral director, David Fisher, because I also lost my father (and business partner) prematurely. Not only did we both have to take care of our own death in the family, we still had to take care of the other families we serve.

Very few people understand the daily emotional drain that the typical funeral director faces. Questions relating to loss in our own lives and dealing with the loss for others. The funeral director is there to help, guide and console families at a time when they feel lost and in dire need of help. The death of a loved one is one of the most difficult times in our lives.

The Fisher family is constantly trying to balance the business aspect of the funeral home with the human element. But there are outside forces, such as big conglomerates applying pressure to sell or be put out of business. The Fishers lose a valued employee because they cannot compete financially with the big chains. They have to work at maintaining a business through all of this and yet keep the trust they have built up.

This is no different for the local, independent funeral director. Chains have been purchasing funeral homes in the area for the past several years. There are no individually owned funeral homes in some of our towns.

Cemeteries have been merging and hiring high-pressure sales people to increase their personal interest in the so-called "death care industry." All the while, your local funeral director is trying to keep his head above water and maintain the dignity and caring that neighbors have for each other.

People have to remember that funeral directors are human, too. We are a part of your communities. We have grown together, shared together and lost together. The families we serve are truly part of our own family.

Throughout the show, Fisher is visited by the memories of his father. A funeral for someone else will trigger an emotion or a memory that brings his own loss to the forefront. I face this daily with the loss of my father. I try to live up to the principals he taught me and continue that practice of compassion to those I serve.

The funeral industry has been under the microscope. Jessica Mitford's book, "The American Way of Death," was reintroduced to the public in 1998. This prompted a litany of articles and stories critical of funeral homes and their directors.

They focus on the sterilization of death and treat it as if it is just a process that people have to go through. They do not take into account the depth of the relationship or the love that one person has for another.

As people of love and compassion, the worst thing we can do is to try to control our emotions and ignore our grief. One of the most difficult times in anyone's life is losing someone. Grief can manifest itself in a number of ways if we do not address it.

For example, we can become physically sick if we try to bury the pain that we are feeling emotionally. We must embrace the memory of the ones we have lost and share our feelings with others. By honoring the deceased's memory, we acknowledge that their life had meaning for us.

Thank you HBO for a true representation of the independent funeral director. The public can now see what has traditionally been shrouded in mystery and misunderstanding in a new light. They can see the human side of the funeral business while having a good laugh at the same time.

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