

Hairy Proceedings: A Funerary Event In A Zoo Milieu



Dave McBurnett's life had been marked by his love of animals and safari adventures with his wife, Margaret. So it was fitting for his funeral and burial to take place at a zoo.

Initially, guests met with his family and were served coffee and cocktails under a tent outside the entrance gates. Memorial folders with the agenda and pictures of different stages of Dave's life were distributed. Zoo trains then transported everyone to different sites on the grounds for a series of ceremonial observances.

The first was in front of an outdoor bear pavilion. There, several enlarged photographs of animals taken by Dave flanked a podium. His wife told of his animal devotion and their safari excursions, after which guests were invited to share their own recollections.

The next stop was at a lion pavilion, where enlarged articles about Dave's work were displayed. An exhibit of PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) awards along with donation envelopes were on a table. A close friend introduced someone who spoke of Dave's little-known accomplishments while working on behalf of animal rights. Again, guests were able to add their remarks.

Marriage was the theme at another station, where pictures illustrated the couple's experiences and Margaret reviewed their fifty years together.

The train then took the group to the zoo arboretum where chairs faced a large screen for viewing of an eight-minute slide presentation chronicling the span of Dave's life from childhood to the present, including safari pictures. The final photo, a close-up image of the man's face, was held on

the screen as a telephone rang. The voice of Dave was heard by way of the last message he had left on his home answering machine: “Hi, this is Dave. I’m on a safari, leave me a message and I hope to meet you along the trail somewhere someday.”

Afterward, each person was given an index card to write a message to Dave and/or his wife. As part of the proceedings Dave’s grandchildren acted out a play about his life; they also had constructed one of the stations.

Everyone then had an opportunity to view the casketed body that was positioned amid the arboretum foliage and flowers. Margaret stood by it and greeted the guests, at which time the cards bearing messages were presented to her.

Guests gathered in the parking lot for a procession to the zoo cemetery. The body was transported slowly atop Dave’s beloved, seventy-five-year-old elephant, Tranzago, followed by guests on foot. At the graveside committal service a family friend who was a follower of Buddhism related Dave’s animal devotion to spirituality. Afterward, Tranzago refused to leave the burial site until the grave had been filled with dirt and the process had been completed.



Excerpt from the pre-planning book,
*Pondering Leaves: Composing and Conveying
Your Life Story's Epilogue*
(no longer available)

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