



# Greenhaven PRESERVE

by Ann Minton

**B**etween 1990 and 1995, there were three funerals in my family. So, before I turned 40, I knew way more about funerals and burial alternatives than the average American. However, that isn't saying much, since most people, regardless of age, in the United States know very little about such topics. As a culture we don't talk much about death and dying unless we have to.

The first of those three funerals was for my dad, a forester. I think he would have liked the idea of a green burial. When I talked with Tara McCoy, of Greenhaven Preserve, a

natural burial cemetery in Eastover, SC, I couldn't help but think of him and his opinion that a traditional cemetery was a waste of good real estate. His attitude had a tremendous influence on the family.

All three of my family members chose for their bodies to be cremated and their ashes scattered for environmental reasons. Purely and simply, they didn't want to be embalmed and put in an expensive coffin and vault, then buried on land that could be used for something else. While it was important for those of us left behind to honor their last



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wishes, I have often wondered how my grief experiences would be different if I had a specific place to go and visit them. Sometimes I feel a sense of envy when my friends mention going to the cemetery or columbarium. When I found out about green burial options, I wanted to learn more.

So, what exactly is green burial? A green burial—or natural burial—is defined as a practice, or technique, that allows the body to be returned to the earth without the use of toxic embalming fluids, metal caskets and concrete vaults. In my opinion, it is the most natural recycling program ever! As an environmentally friendly alternative to a conventional burial, green burials are about conserving, sustaining and protecting the land. They use less energy and create less waste than conventional burials, and can often cost less, as embalming fluids, concrete vaults and non-biodegradable caskets contribute to a large portion of their cost.

Embalming fluid is a chemical preservative that contains formaldehyde, which has been linked to an increased chance of health risks for embalmers, including heart disease and cancer. Most states, including South Carolina, do not require embalming before viewing or burial. There are several non-toxic and noninvasive methods, such as dry ice or refrigeration, to preserve bodies for three to five days before burial.

At Greenhaven Preserve, there is a requirement that all caskets consist of strictly biodegradable materials. These may include locally harvested woods, wicker or cardboard. There is also an option to be buried without a casket, by being simply wrapped in a shroud or blanket. Vaults are not to be used at all. Furthermore, grave markers don't intrude on the landscape. Options for natural markers include shrubs and trees or an engraved flat stone native to the area. As in all cemeteries, there are careful records kept of the exact location of each interment,

using GIS (geographic information system).

The mission of Greenhaven Preserve is to protect and restore the land as a place of peace and natural beauty for generations to come. A conservation easement guarantees that this 360-acre preserve will remain a natural area and never be developed. There is work underway to restore the long-needle pine forest to provide cover and food for wildlife.

Greenhaven Preserve is located on 10 acres of rolling hills and pine forests, situated within the Cowasee Basin, an area that covers more than 215,000 acres and includes the Congaree, Wateree and upper Santee Rivers. Part of the basin is the 24,000-acre Congaree National Park, the largest old-growth bottomland hardwood forest in North America. Greenhaven Preserve is part of the Congaree Land Trust, which was established in 1992 to promote voluntary conservation of scenic lands, open spaces, farms, forests, natural areas and significant habitats in central South Carolina.

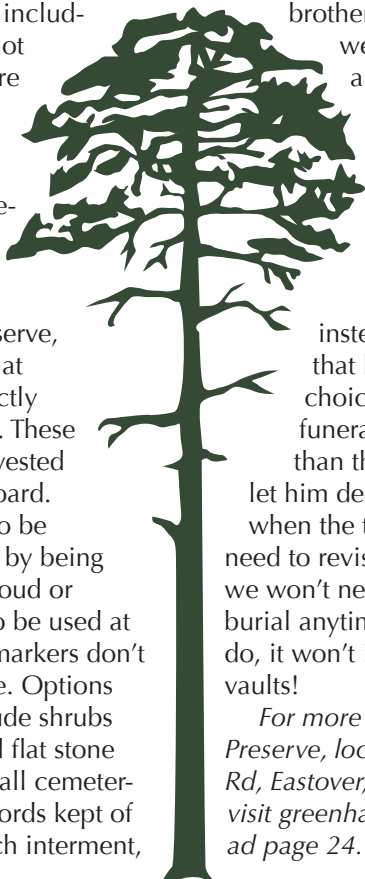
I think my dad would have liked that idea...maybe my mom and brother, too. But their decisions were made a long time ago and can't be changed.

At the time, my son did not like the idea of cremation. He was just 9 when his grandfather died, and mentioned then that he would prefer that we be buried

instead. I explained to him that he could make his own choices. I also told him that funerals are more for the living than the dead, and that I would

let him decide what to do for me when the time comes. Perhaps we need to revisit that issue. Hopefully we won't need to plan a funeral and burial anytime soon, but when we do, it won't include chemicals or vaults!

*For more info on Greenhaven Preserve, located at 1701 Vanboklen Rd, Eastover, SC, call 803-403-9561 or visit [greenhavenpreserve.com](http://greenhavenpreserve.com). See ad page 24.*



## Cremation vs. Green Burial

Many people choose cremation over burial because they think cremation is better for the environment. While it is true that cremation does not take up any space, it is also true that cremation creates air pollution. Ponder this: A typical human body plus a cremation casket will weigh somewhere between 200 and 300 pounds. After cremation, just 1 or 2 pounds of ashes remain. Where did all the other material go? The answer is quite literally up in smoke.

Some of the pollutants from crematoria smokestacks include nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide, particulate matter, mercury, hydrogen fluoride, hydrogen chloride, NMVOCs, and other heavy metals, in addition to persistent organic pollutants. NMVOC is the abbreviation for non-methane volatile organic compounds. It is a generic term for a large variety of chemically different compounds, including benzene, ethanol, formaldehyde, cyclohexane, 1,1,1-trichloroethane or acetone.