

**Cody Anderson and Nancy Burban**

<http://www.funeraldirectorschat.com/2011/cody-anderson/>

Nancy Burban: Hi, I'm Nancy Burban, your host of Funeral Director's Chat, a podcast providing funeral professionals with insight, the current industry topics, news, and trends. Today, my guest is Cody Anderson. I'm very happy to have Cody Anderson on board. We've been trying to connect for a while. We speak a lot on Facebook and we've chatted before. And I'm happy to report that he has just graduated from his mortuary science degree at Piedmont Technical College in Greenwood, South Carolina. Welcome, Cody.

Cody Anderson: Thank you, Nancy. It's an honor to be talking to you today.

Nancy: Oh, that's so sweet. And also, Cody, you are an apprentice at Hatcher's Funeral Home, is that correct?

Cody: That is correct.

Nancy: One thing I wanted to touch on... So don't let me forget to ask you about this. I want to ask you about what your opinions are about how early in the process you should be seeking funeral home employment. But before I get to that, I want the audience to hear a little bit about yourself. So tell me a little bit about yourself.

Cody: OK. I'm a lifelong resident of Bath, South Carolina. I'm 24 years old and, like you said, I just graduated from Piedmont Technical College last week. I'm currently serving my apprenticeship at Hatcher Funeral Home in Langley, South Carolina.

Nancy: And Cody, let me ask you, when did you first decide that, "I think I want to go into the funeral services profession."?

Cody: That's very interesting because, if you would have asked me three or four years ago if I'd be in the funeral industry, I would have laughed at you.

Nancy: Really?

Cody: Yes. I never would have pictured myself in this industry. What caught my attention and drew me to this industry is when Hatcher Funeral Home handled the service for my grandmother who played a big part in rearing me throughout my life. The way that they handled everything, the professionalism they demonstrated really inspired me, and it really touched my life.

Nancy: That's a beautiful story. Thanks for sharing that, Cody. And so, after your grandma's funeral, you decided... So what did you do? Did you go to the folks at Hatcher and say, "I think I would really like to join your crew and I'd like to be part of this experience"?

Cody: That's very interesting that you said that because that's almost how that happened. A few months after my grandmother's funeral, her sister, my great aunt, passed away. I wasn't going to be able to come to the viewing that night of her visitation so I came by the funeral home early to pay my respects. I worked up the courage to ask Julie, who was an employee of the funeral home, that I might be interested in this. We talked and I asked if I could come and see how everything was done and work a few services. She said that she would pass that along to Mr. Hatcher, and she did. A couple weeks later, Julie called and asked if I could work a service. Here we are from there. Now I work here full time.

Nancy: That's wonderful. Getting back to the question I had asked previously... As you know, a lot of young people on Facebook are complaining that they can't get a job. You see this all the time. My advice to them, as you know, is get involved early in the process. As soon as you know this is something you want to do... Even before mortuary school, go to engage with a funeral home and do anything. Wash their cars, work at the front desk. Do whatever they need to do, Xeroxing, whatever the case may be, and engage in the process with them and gain their confidence and their respect. And then, go to mortuary school and hopefully they'll take you on as an apprentice.

Cody: I couldn't agree with you more, Nancy. I believe that's very important. If you're interested in this career, I would say go to the funeral home, try to get your foot in the door. Have as much experience as you can.

Nancy: And you're a classic example of somebody who did that. You went right into it. Now, did you go... Were you working services and working as an apprentice before mortuary school or at the same time?

Cody: I was doing it concurrently while I was going to school, and I did a little bit of it before, because of how their semesters work out. I had probably six months of my apprenticeship completed before mortuary school started. So I had a lot of experience, hands on experience, before I even started mortuary school, which I think helped me out tremendously. I would suggest to anyone that was going to go to mortuary school to start working in a funeral home observing and know the funeral home from the front door to the back door.

Nancy: Exactly. And Cody, let me ask you a question. Did you ever work in or around the prep room before you actually made this decision to go to mortuary school? Or was that later?

Cody: Oh, no. That was right from the beginning. I wanted to make sure that I was able to handle the prep room and make sure that I was capable of that. Because, when I first talked to Julie, that was the farthest thing from my mind. I thought that I could not handle that at all. But luckily, I had a lot of great help at the funeral home by the two funeral directors here. They took me under their wings and it's no problem at all.

Nancy: That's wonderful because, what I hear is, a lot of times people get all the way, halfway through or all the way through mortuary school without every seeing a deceased. And then, when they enter the prep room, they're just not prepared to deal with that. They're doing all the book learning and all the educational experience but they don't really have a lot of hands on experience. It's not exactly what they thought they were going to get into. Do you agree?

Cody: Exactly. I agree 100 percent. Like I said before, I would suggest to anyone going into this or thinking of going to mortuary school to start working at a funeral home, even if you have to volunteer your time, just to observe and make sure it's the right thing for you.

Nancy: Good advice. I hope everyone listening on this podcast really takes Cody's advice because this is the exact way that you should go into your funeral services career. You should find out if it's the right thing for you to do. You should associate yourself with the funeral home and then go to mortuary school concurrently. Great move, Cody. Now, what is the single most thing, or one of the aspects that you find is the best, about being employed in the funeral industry? Because everybody has their preference.

Cody: I love working with the public. That's something that I've always enjoyed. In high school, I was president of my class, editor in chief of the yearbook. And throughout college at USC, I was involved with various organizations. I love working with the public and helping people. I felt that this is one of the most crucial times of someone's life. You can help them out so much in this industry and that's what I like the most about it.

Nancy: That's beautiful. That's really the reason that people should go into the funeral services industry. Although it is a business, it should be a caring, compassionate business and you should really bring that to the table. Now, you went to Piedmont Technical College in Greenwood, South Carolina. What did you think about that school? There's so many schools for people to choose from. Give us a little information on why you chose this school and how this school was in teaching you the mortuary sciences.

Cody: I actually had the opportunity to choose between going to Gupton-Jones in Atlanta or Piedmont Technical College. I chose Piedmont Technical College because of its location, how convenient it was to where I live. I could drive there for class and be there in an hour. And then, after class, be back home in an hour. They have a state of the art prep room. It's all modern, brand new, top of the line, OSHA compliant. It's a great facility and perfect for learning. They have great staff, also.

Nancy: That's great, thanks for sharing that with us. Because a lot of people try., that are going into this field... They don't know how to make that differentiation. "Why would I choose this school over another?" Having an up to date prep room and having modern facilities is really important. You don't want to go to a school that's got outdated facilities and that is not really relevant to you when you actually get a position.

Cody: Exactly.

Nancy: Now, let me ask you, Cody, now that you're a brand new graduate... Tell us what you think about the role of the funeral director in your community. You live in a small town in South Carolina. Is that a good assumption?

Cody: Yes, that's very correct.

Nancy: OK. Now, what do you think is the role of the funeral director in a small town such as yours?

Cody: I think it's a vital role to the community. We provide a service in a time of need. People call us because they trust us. They expect to see us. When someone passes away, they turn to us because they trust us and they know that we will do what's necessary.

Nancy: That's a really good answer, Cody, because trust is a very important component. If they don't know you and they don't have that trust, they likely will just go on the Internet and Google their hometown.

Cody: Exactly right.

Nancy: Now, what are other ways do you think that you can engender trust in the community before the actual time of need?

Cody: I think being visible in the community and doing charity organizations, volunteering, and showing people that you're there, that you care and that's what you're here for. Working visitations and being on services, people will grow to... In my town, they'll expect to see you there. When you're not there, they'll want to know why you're not there.

Nancy: OK, and also letting them get to see who you are as a person. A lot of people really don't think about death a lot until they're at need. Then they're really in the grieving process, they don't really have a lot of understanding of what to do or where to go. So if they meet you at, say, a softball game or some association that you're doing charitable events for... I'm going to get to know you. Then they'll say, "I think Cody is working at Hatcher's, so I feel really comfortable about calling Cody."

Cody: That's exactly right.

Nancy: Let me ask you, since you're new in the industry and you have a fresh perspective or a fresh eye, where do you think funeral service is going in the future, and what changes that you, as a young funeral director, may see in the future?

Cody: I think, as most can see, that the funeral industry's going very virtual. Everything is moving online. People go online to sign the registry book, to view a service that they've missed. We can stream them online. I believe that this has revolutionized the funeral industry.

Nancy: And do you think... What does the role of the funeral directory play in all this new online and virtual realities?

Cody: If you're not taking the steps to have a website, to have yourself online, I think that you're going to get left behind. The role of the funeral director is going to change drastically.

Nancy: How is that?

Cody: Whereas, families used to come in to make arrangements, now you're seeing that people are emailing back and forth and never even coming in to the funeral home.

Nancy: Now, do they ask for price lists and things like that by email or by phone?

Cody: We've actually moved all of our price lists onto our website so that they can see everything from their desk at home. We have the philosophy that, if they can walk in the front door, then why can't they see everything online? We're not ashamed of our prices. Why not have them online so that, when they're pre-planning or pre-selecting a funeral home, they can see all of our prices, pictures of all of our caskets, and our packages. They're all there right there in front of them.

Nancy: That's wonderful. So you're giving them the convenience of, while they're grieving or while they're anticipating a death... They're able to look at the caskets, look at the pricing, and make decisions from the comfort of their own home.

Cody: Exactly.

Nancy: Well, that's a great service. I guess when you are as transparent as Hatcher is, that people also see that as a trust factor. They wouldn't put their prices online if they were really out of line with the rest of the industry.

Cody: You're right, Nancy. That's the philosophy that we have.

Nancy: I know that you and I see eye to eye on green services. What is your point of view on green services?

Cody: I think that green services are very important. I think that as a funeral home, we have to be able to accommodate people that would like green services. A lot of funeral homes are opposed to green services, or they don't want to offer them, or they don't want to associate with green cemeteries. But I think, as funeral professionals, we need to associate with green cemeteries, we need to have that option available. Because there are a lot of the environmentalists that are now going away from cremation because of the harmful effects on the environment, the mercury put out by crematories. That are drawn to the aspect of green services because of their green appeal. I think, as funeral professionals, we have to be able to offer that to the public.

Nancy: Absolutely. And in South Carolina where you're located, for some reason, there's a lot of interest in green burials and there are green cemeteries.

Cody: Yes, that's exactly right. There's still some opposition to green services, which I don't understand as a professional. I think that option needs to be there for families in their time of need.

Nancy: From your perspective, working at a funeral home and also going through mortuary school, where do you think this objective to green services is coming from? Is it coming from funeral directors that you've met along the way? Is it coming from staff at mortuary school, students? Where is it coming from, client families?

Cody: I think most of the opposition is in the funeral profession. A lot of people aren't embracing this service and this option to families in their time of need.

Nancy: Why do you think that is?

Cody: I think because it's just another form of change. And this is an industry that isn't very keen on change.

Nancy: Very true, very true. And do you think, as I do, that if they don't get on board with green services, they're going to be left behind?

Cody: I believe that, Nancy. If someone were to choose a green service, from our perspective, that's just another type of service that we can provide.

Nancy: Absolutely. Now, we've all seen a real rapid increase in direct cremation. That's really an industry term. When consumers, when clients' families, come in and say they want direct cremation, they don't really understand what they're saying. How do you handle that, Cody?

Cody: Nancy, you nailed that right on the head. As funeral professionals, we have to educate the public about cremations. We've had many people come in that say, "Oh, we just want our loved one cremated. That's all." But there's a lot more to cremation. We have to educate the consumer, families, about the options that we have with cremation. Then they can still have a viewing and a full service and cremation afterwards. I tell people that we can have a cremation just like a funeral. The only thing different is, we don't go to the cemetery after the service.

Nancy: Absolutely. Also, I think when you are grieving, you don't realize,... "Well, we're not going to put grandpa or grandma in a burial plot. She's being cremated. Did we arrange for an urn?" No one wants to carry home that little box.

Cody: Exactly.

Nancy: When they do, they're not going to put that in any place of honor in their home. They're going to stick it in the closet. Who knows when they're going get around to it? Very often, they don't know where to get an urn. They don't know what size urn to get. They really don't have... They're not educated in how to select that piece of merchandise. Do you follow all the way through and say, "Well, would you like an urn? Would you like to do scattering ashes? How would you like to dispose of the remains?"

Cody: Yes, that's one thing that I find very important. This goes back to our service. That's what this industry is about, it's about service and serving our client families. A lot of times, with cremation, it's all about cost to a family. A lot of times, they've exhausted their resources and they don't have a lot of means to pay for final expenses. I think, as funeral professionals, we know, if they come and they're honest and they don't have a lot of resources, we can make some adjustments on our end that add value to the service of just the direct cremation.

Nancy: OK, and how do you do that, usually?

Cody: We can adjust our prices. We can offer a limited family viewing and use of our rental caskets and things like that that add a little bit of value along the way to just the direct cremation. One thing that we do is, we don't just give someone a box back, the plastic box, like you said. If they don't have any money or they don't select an urn, our temporary urn that we give back is a nice wooden urn. And it doesn't cost a lot, but it adds a lot of value to the family that they're just not getting that black plastic box back.

Nancy: Right. I think that, since people don't do a lot of research in this area... Because, why would they? They don't understand that you could secure them an urn for \$100, which is a huge difference from their perception of how much a wooden casket is going to cost. They're thinking thousands and thousands of dollars for the casket. They can't afford the casket, they want to get their loved one cremated. They don't realize that you can secure them an urn for under \$100.

Cody: You're right. Nancy. That's very affordable, and then they go home with something that... They can have an engraved plaque on it. They go home and they have something they can... They can have their grandmother, or whoever their loved one is, at home with them. They have a permanent remembrance of that person.

Cody: That's right.

Nancy: And it's important to have closure, and it's important to know where in the world your deceased is.

Cody: You're right.

Nancy: If they're not in the cemetery, you don't want them in some little box that so many funeral homes dispense. You're absolutely right.

Cody: That's right. And like I said, it's about adding value to the family.

Nancy: And remembrance, and helping them secure closure so that they have a positive experience, that they go through the process and it ends on a positive note. Not that a death is ever positive, but they feel like their loved one was well remembered.

Cody: You're exactly right, Nancy.

Nancy: What do you think about the technology that we have in funeral services? How do you think that's going to change the whole way we do business?

Cody: Like we touched on earlier, technology is revolutionizing this industry. We're seeing that funerals are being broadcasted online to relatives that are in the Philippines, that people go online to price shop and compare funerals and funeral homes, and crematories. Everything is moving virtual. We have guest books online and, like we've said, price lists. I just believe that technology is revolutionizing this industry. You look at the cell phone, just how that has revolutionized this industry, where funeral directors can now be away from the funeral home and can transfer calls to an answering service, and have the phone calls forwarded to their cell phone, or transferred to their cell phone from an answering service. You no longer have to stay overnight at the funeral home anymore.

Nancy: Right. And being a young person and knowing as much about technology as you do, I think you would be a breath of fresh air to a funeral home. Because you know so much about these products and services that, when the client families come in and they don't necessarily know what their options are, you can explain it to them in a way that they can understand and make some really educated decisions.

Cody: Yes, Nancy, that's my goal.

Nancy: OK. So, Cody, what are your goals as a newly graduated funeral professional?

Cody: My goal is to continue and serve my community through the funeral industry and have a great career, a lifelong career in this industry. And hopefully, see where it goes from there, and maybe one day, even own my own funeral home.

Nancy: That's a worthy ambition. Are you going to continue on at Hatcher?

Cody: I would definitely like to continue on at Hatcher. I hope that once my apprenticeship is completed that there will be a position available here for me.

Nancy: I hope so, too. So, Cody, is there anything else that you'd like to contribute that might help? We're kind of focusing on the young people today. We're kind of focusing on the people in mortuary school, trying to give them some guidance on what they should be doing while they're going to school to secure either an apprenticeship or to secure a job in the near future when they graduate.

Cody: Yes, Nancy. Like we talked about earlier, I believe that it's very important that if you're thinking about going into this great industry and serving the public, I believe that it's important that you get an idea of what you're getting into, that you visit a funeral home. You experience the working, the long hours, being on call, going out in the middle of the night, working an 18 hour day.

Nancy: I understand, Cody. It's just as important to do removals and to do embalming as it is to do arrangement conferences. Arrangement conferences are pretty well taught in school. It's a learned process, but when you go out and you do your first removal, when you do your first embalming, that's a whole different thing. You either take to it or you don't.

Cody: That's right, Nancy. And that's why I think it's very important that you get the hands on experience and then make the decision if this is right for you or not, and then go forward with schooling and apprenticeship.

Nancy: And when you did your first removal, Cody, how did you feel about that?

Cody: I was terrified. I went on a call to a nursing home. It, luckily, was someone in the community that I knew. I knew the family, I went to church with the son and daughter-in-law, went to high school with the grand-kids. But still, I was very, very nervous. And I remember pulling up to the nursing home in the hearse and going through the doors and just shaking. But I told myself, "I cannot let these people know that this is my first time, that I'm nervous." And it went smoothly, they were very happy to see me. I was very happy to realize that it, who it was there and that I knew them. And it made me very comfortable.

And when they came back to the funeral home the next day to make the funeral arrangements, Mr. Hatcher told them that that was my first time going on a removal by myself. And they said that they couldn't believe that that was the first time that I'd ever done that, because they said that I was very professional and did everything very courteously and they were very happy with everything.

Nancy: Oh, that's really nice to hear. Now, tell us a little bit about your first embalming.

Cody: Well, that's very interesting because they... I was actually working in a restaurant when I was still thinking about coming to work in the funeral industry, and I was working a few services every now and then. And they called me one evening, I had just gotten off work at the restaurant. They said, "We have a call, and they're going to be embalmed. Would you like to come see it?" And I was very, very nervous. And of course, I rushed down here, because I wanted to get the experience. And I remember coming in the funeral home and they started the procedures. And I remember when they made their first incision in the embalming, that my knees buckled, I was pouring sweat, and the next thing I knew, I was on the ground.

Nancy: Well, that's pretty common.

Cody: Yeah. I didn't... I knew that it was going to be something that I wasn't used to, and now it's no problem. It's very funny because, when I graduated last week... The funeral director that was in the embalming room, he wasn't doing the embalming but he was there observing, also, because he was going to help us out some before he moved to a different area. Well, he learned through Facebook that I graduated, and he sent me a message on Facebook, saying, "Congratulations. I remember that first time that you were in the embalming room, and how nervous you were." And he said, "Look where you are now." So.

Nancy: And now, it's fine, right?

Cody: No problem at all.

Nancy: No, and that's really good insight and good information to give to people, because everybody thinks, oh, if your stomach turns or your sweat or pass out or whatever the case may be, that you're the only one that that's happening to. And you're not the only one it's happening to, it's a very, very.

Cody: No, it's very common.

Nancy: Very common response. It's just like if you work in a hospital, the first time you see a procedure, it's not something you're really used to.

Cody: That's right.

Nancy: But now, you've done pretty much everything that there is to do in the funeral home.

Cody: Yes, that's right. No fear, very comfortable now.

Nancy: Oh, that's great. Cody, I want to wish you all the luck in the world. Let's stay in touch. I hope that you do get a job as a funeral director. I don't see why they wouldn't hire you. And if you're comfortable with it, to give the audience a little bit of information so they can contact you.

Cody: Yes, Nancy, again, thank you very much for having me to chat with you today. It's been an honor. And I appreciate all that you do and contribute to the funeral industry.

Nancy: Thank you. It's a pleasure.

Cody: And if anyone would like to get in touch with me, they can do so either via Facebook, Cody Anderson, or my email address is clanderson2234@yahoo.com.

Nancy: OK, great. And I hope people do connect with Cody because, out of all the young people that I talk to, you exemplified the perfect student, the perfect new funeral director, because you're so ambitious and you're so hopeful and optimistic, and you've got great technology skills along with great people skills. And I just think you're a role model for the up and coming funeral director in 2012.

Cody: Thank you very much, Nancy. I'm very excited about the future.

Nancy: I thank you. And thank you for being on this broadcast, we appreciate it.

Cody: Thank you, Nancy. [musical outro]

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