

[Page 38 - How we Buried Our Dead](#)ISSUE : [Issue 18](#)

Published by Ronald Caplan on 1977/12/1

Peter Willy Murphy, New Waterford: Here's what I'm going to tell you, and this is a terror, this one. I used to like the grave? yard so much, I don't think I told you. I wasn't a young man then. I was married. My domestic career blew up. And it was in 1931-32 • and boy, they were hungry years. Hungry years. Father coming home with 10- dollars, 9 dollars, 8 dollars a week to a family • 8 to a family • no damn wonder. They were bad years. And there were no undertak? ers here then. LeDrew was the appointed government man to bury you. Pick you up and bury you • unless you had money like to go to Sydney and hire Curry, Fillmore, and an? other that were in the undertaker business with parlours and embalming systems and whatever. But in New Waterford the early system was just they'd get the body and they'd wash it and they'd stick it in the box and bury it and that'd be it. And I was around the bodies • I shaved a dozen people for heaven's sake • and there was something about a body I didn't seem to mind • I still don't • and the graveyard I didn't seem to mind. This friend of mine • he was for years a TB. That's before the sanitorium was popular. My uncle was the one to introduce the san? itorium • the TB treatment • into the hospit? al. You either went to the woods and died or stayed home and spread it in the home. Anyhow in this case this boy died at home. My friend, Charlie. And there was an up? stairs in the house and the stairs were less than 2 feet wide. You get what I mean? A narrow stair with a turn in it less than 5 feet up because it was a low house. About k feet up and a turn in it • a square turn • and Charlie was over 6 feet tall. Ummm. A tall man. His mother kept boarders. There was a big husky man there but he had no wind. And there was another fellow there, stuttering • de-de-de, he-he-he wouldn't have anything to-to-to do. Wouldn't touch the corpse at all. That was it, by god. However, LeDrew was called up. LeDrew waited for years for me to die and I didn't die. My middle age was a life of sickness. So he got to know me pretty well. When he took me home from the hospital he said he thought he'd be taking me home in a box • so we got to know each other. So they called for a coffin, for Charlie. Well the house was way down by the shore. They couldn't get up with a coffin. And I was down at the wake. I was down to get Charlie washed up and fixed up • the others got him shaved • I was going to do the rest. Well, damn it, there was nobody to get the casket in from where 12 pit is now down to the body at Lane Street, where that dump is • was the route you have to go. And the snow that year was the kind of snow that was drifting 8 feet, 10 feet, banking and things'like that. So LeDrew made it to 12 pit with the casket and he couldn't come any further. Down that far the roads in town were shovelled • not plowed • shovelled. He came that far with a truck. So this boy's mother, she said somebody'll have to go show 'em how to get in here. I went, out in the storm. I didn't mind weather. Tough as nails. And sure enough, the lights were beaming in the snow. The big rough box with the casket and every? thing on the back. Well, I couldn't handle the goddamn rough box. They said don't you worry about that. We'll get the rough box to the graveyard when this storm clears a- way. How are they gonna get the grave dug? I said let us worry about that. That time you dug your



own grave, neighbours gathered. Pick and shovel. Frozen ground. Oh, yeah. I could give you another story about that. But anyhow, I haven't got any rope. Took a rope from the truck. Took the casket out of the rough box, and out on the snow drift. Put the rope through the handles of the casket and put it over my shoulders like a dog sleigh. And I pulled that casket down to the house. By the time I got to the house the bottom of the thing was worn pret? ty near smooth, almost like a sleigh, dragging it. Dragging it. Only a little over a quarter of a mile but I almost wore the bottom out of the casket dragging it • on the snow and the crust and over hills and banks--and a storm blowing. This was a man? ufactured casket, not homemade. Got to the house and my gosh, everybody was \*Se seillean a'phosas daoine ri lusan F1