



Art Casket of Jun Tupas in Carcar City

Ornately crafted caskets now a must-see in Carcar

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CEBU CITY -- Carcar City is known for its shoe making industry, delicious "chicharon" (pork cracklings), ampaw (rice crispies), bukarilyo (coconut candy) and now, the "art casket."

Five years ago, a funeral parlor in Carcar City experimented in making coffins of different shapes with unique hand-painted designs.

Tupas Memorial Services in Carcar City is not just known for the good service to its loyal patrons, but to its uniquely crafted caskets that are on display in its shop.

"Carcar City has so many artists and is the center of arts and culture in Cebu. This gives me the idea of incorporating arts in making coffins. And so far, this has changed the public's perception of coffins," said Eleazar Tupas Jr., managing director of Tupas Memorial Services.

Tupas's ornately crafted caskets have become popular not just in Cebu but globally, after they were featured many times by various media networks.

In fact, Tupas's art caskets are becoming a tourist attraction, with a lot of visitors -- students, tourists, photographers and media people -- coming to his shop just to view the customized coffins.

Tupas believes that death is one of the certainties in life, but Filipinos, he added, are still very traditional in managing the burial ceremonies and practices.

The Filipinos observed quaint beliefs and traditions in taking care of their departed loved ones. These traditions and practices vary from region to region considering the country's multi-cultural orientation.

Henrylito Tacio of Sun.Star Davao reported some Filipino ways of burying their dead loved ones.

In Cavite, some rural folks use trees as tombs. The B'laans, a tribal community of Southern Mindanao, reportedly wrapped their dead in the bark of a tree and hung from the treetops.

An Ilongot is buried in a sitting position, and if a woman, has her hands tied to her feet, that is to prevent her "ghost" from roaming around. Ilongots belong to a tribe that inhabits the southern Sierra Madre and Caraballo Mountains in Luzon island.

The Itnegs of Abra bury their dead under the house, while the Apayaos under the kitchen.

An ancient custom in the island of Palawan is placing their dead in burial jars known as Manunggul jars and burying them in caves.

Another unique and ancient funeral norm is the hanging of coffins on the mountain cliffs of Sagada, Mt. Province, an Igorot indigenous culture and burial tradition.

Igorots believe that the higher the body is laid, the closer it is to heaven. The coffins are made of hollowed out pine tree logs.

These practices, quaint as they are in these times of modernization, are still being observed by a minority.

Today, when a person dies, the body is cleaned and embalmed, placed in a coffin and is displayed in the house of the deceased or at a funeral home for a three-to-seven-day wake.

Public and private cemeteries now exist to ensure a safe place for the dead. Other forms of handling the dead also exist, like cremation.

Tupas said one of the most misunderstood ideas in handling the dead is the embalming.

When a loved one dies, the family usually is in a hurry of having their dead immediately available for viewing by relatives in a wake, he said.

"Embalmers are artists and ang canvass namo is ang tawo gyud," Tupas said. He explained that embalming has three purposes: disinfection - to safeguard the public health, preserve, and restore the last physical look of the dead.

Filipinos should understand that embalming is like placing the dead in a spa. They may be dead, but they have to be cleaned, disinfected, and pampered so they will look good during the wake, Tupas said.

Disinfecting, preserving and restoring the dead should at least take three to four hours. The procedure is not something that has to be hastily done, he added.

Tupas's father started the funeral business in Carcar City in 1968. In 1990, he assumed the business after his father died. (with Laureen Mondoñedo/Sunnex)

Look also here: www.burial.philippineculture.ph