

Basil Eldadah Interview

Karen Wyatt: [00:00:00]

Today I'm very happy to welcome my special guest, Dr. Basil Eldadah. He is the [00:01:00] founder and executive director of Reflection Park Natural Burial Ground. Basil was motivated to help start Reflection Park after going through an unpleasant experience with his father's burial. His professional training is in internal medicine, clinical pharmacology, and neuroscience, and he recently retired from a career in biomedical research administration.

And we'll be talking all about Reflection Park today and natural burial trends in our country, and you can learn more at reflectionpark.org. So Basil, welcome, and thanks so much for joining me today.

Basil Eldadah: Thank you for having me.

Karen Wyatt: I'm excited to just talk a little bit and update people on natural burials and why they're so important, but I was hoping you'd fill in your background story a little bit more for us and what inspired you to start Reflection Park and how that came about.

Basil Eldadah: Yeah. thank you [00:02:00] I've always just felt drawn to what happens to us at the end of life. and it's, just, I'm not sure where that came from. probably it had something to do with my father, who had a, a, a similar calling. and it was actually his story that, led to the creation of Reflection Park.

in... He was a very simple and humble man and, he believed that when our work in the world is done that our bodies should just go back to the earth in simplicity from where they came but in 2012 when he died, we did not really have that option for what I now know is called a natural burial.

I just assumed that, the options were whatever the conventional cemeteries [00:03:00] could offer, and, like most conventional cemeteries, we ended up burying his body in a concrete vault. And, the best that they could do was to add a little bit of soil at the bottom of, the vault, but of course, a couple inches of concrete may as well be a million miles.

and the whole process just from start to finish was, just not the kind of natural and, wholesome experience that I think he would have wanted and certainly not what any of us had wanted. it was a little more, you might say, industrial, with

the backhoes kind of backing up and beeping and, lowering the concrete lid on the vault and the pouring of the...

and really the dumping of the dirt back into the grave. it was just so unceremonious, and it's not what [00:04:00] he had envisioned for himself or what he, would have, I think, wanted for any of his family members. and so that whole process just left me unsettled and, thinking that maybe, there might be an opportunity in the future for, creating, what now is, something I now know is called a, a natural burial, so that others who want that might, might benefit from it.

So that was in 2012, and, you could say that the seed was planted at that time, and it just... it lay dormant for many years. And I'd spoken about this to various friends and, family members. and then, fast-forward to 2019, a very good friend, of mine who now is the, president and treasurer of Reflection Park, was approached by a family that was trying to raise funds [00:05:00] for a funeral for one of their family members And, being the, the generous person that he is, , this friend, said, "Just raise whatever you can and I'll be happy to pay the difference."

And in his mind he's thinking the difference might be, oh, maybe \$400 or \$500. And, He hadn't had any direct experience with a funeral before that, so he really had no idea how expensive funerals could be. So when he got the call, later that, they were still short about \$4,000 or \$5,000, he was, very surprised and angry.

wondering why it should cost so much for a burial And shortly after that he called me and he knew that I'd been thinking about this idea. And, that's when we really started, working in earnest to, m- figure out is this even possible in [00:06:00] our area. And we very quickly set about looking for a piece of land.

, We found, actually quite readily a, a 40 acre parcel that, that is now, where F-Reflection Park lives. And we're j- we were very fortunate to find that. And, we moved quickly. we established a non-profit organization 'cause we knew that we wanted to do this as a non-profit.

And we purchased the property, and, that was in 2020. And then we spent the next several years going through all the permits and approvals with the county and the state, working with lawyers and engineers and landscape architects, to develop the plans that eventually, became, Reflection Park.

And we're very grateful to have finally opened our gates in November of last year.

Karen Wyatt: I, love the story that the seed was [00:07:00] planted a long time ago. I think that's true for so many of us in the work we end up doing. We don't know it at the time, but it's, all the groundwork is being laid early on for something that will one day blossom.

And it's amazing that parcel of land became available at the right time, 'cause it seems like that could be prohibitive in a lot of areas just trying to find land for a natural burial ground.

Basil Eldadah: Yeah, absolutely. I think that you could say that this whole project has just been a series of, the right timing, right place, right time, just, things falling into place.

And, some of the, some of which maybe, was under our control, some of which was not at all. yeah, we're, just very grateful that, things lined up to, to get us to where we are.

Karen Wyatt: Yeah. And you mentioned, there being [00:08:00] regulations and permits and things that you had to overcome.

Was there resistance at all from people around the idea of a natural burial ground?

Basil Eldadah: We encountered a little bit of resistance. It really was only from, I would say, a handful of people. By and large, we had a lot of support. A lot of people wrote to us with expressions of support and interest.

maybe it's just a function of where we happen to live in the country where, there's a, a large community of people who are, environmentally aware and, perhaps thinking about their own end-of-life plans and, this, this idea really align with a lot of them. but we did, encounter a little bit of resistance from a, a couple community members who were worried about the environmental impact of a natural burial ground, and [00:09:00] particularly around, the impact on water quality.

And in, in talking to other colleagues in the natural burial field, we, came to understand that this, comes up 100% of the time, that, whenever you talk about natural burial and the idea of, oh, burying a body directly into the ground and w- without a vault or, a casket, that must surely do something to, the water, quality.

and yeah, there are, general, I think, I would say kinda impressions or perceptions in the natural burial field to the contrary. That's that natural burial really does not have a significant impact on water quality because of, the natural filtering effects of soil, the, the typical practices of natural burial grounds to ensure adequate buffers with water table and other, [00:10:00] groundwater sources.

And so at the time, all we could really say was, if you're running a, a natural burial ground according to best practices, then it shouldn't be, an issue. but we came to understand that, there are nuances to that, and every natural burial ground is different because, each one is sited in a different place that has different hydrogeologic features and topographic features.

And so it-- while you could say in general that natural burial grounds are, generally, safe, it behooves one to, do a m- perhaps a, a more thorough analysis of the specific conditions of the burial ground, and that's what we ended up doing. [00:11:00] so we, we hired a hydrogeologist, who, turned out was exactly the person that we needed for, doing this kind of analysis.

She used to work at the EPA, analyzing their Superfund sites, so she was uniquely qualified in, analyzing what happens to the decomposition products from natural burials, as they move through the ground And, we also, consulted with a toxicologist who was able to, analyze, what happens to any, drugs or chemicals that might be, in a, body after death.

and, between the two of them, they concluded that, w- where Reflection Park is located and, the way in which the groundwater flows, there really [00:12:00] would be, very little impact on the surrounding water quality. And in fact, their conclusion was that the impact would be, as much or less than, than a septic field.

And, we all, accept septic fields as, acceptable ways of disposing of our waste, when, public sewage isn't available. And so that really gave us the reassurance that, what we were doing was going to be environmentally sound because, of course, en- environmental stewardship is a core value of Reflection Park and really of, all natural burial grounds.

So the last thing that we wanted to do is, launch into a project that was going to have some adverse impact on the environment. so that was very helpful to, to have the kinda like the science and the data to back up what we kinda thought and intuited but, but now we actually could really point to numbers to, [00:13:00] to say it with, certainty.

but yeah, aside from that, that was really the only main issue we encountered. There are also, issues about, worries about traffic, Maybe worries about, impacting on neighboring wells. but, a- again, those, those analyses that we did, were able to assuage a lot of those concerns,

Karen Wyatt: Okay. and you mentioned the, your father's conventional burial is one of the things that motivated you to wanna do something different. But let's talk about how a natural burial differs from that conventional burial with the casket and the vault.

Basil Eldadah: Yeah. there are a few differences. one of them is, just the simplicity of a natural burial.

and, w- often, people talk about natural burials in comparison to conventional cemeteries as if [00:14:00] conventional cemeteries are like the standard or, m- the standard b- against which we should be comparing burials. But in, in fact, natural burial is the way that it was for thousands of years.

It really was only until the 19th and early 20th centuries when things really started to change. and now what's common, is what we see at, in, in conventional, cemeteries. but by no means, I would say, normal. the, the traditional burial, the natural burial really, the way that it was, is what we're just getting back to.

And it's just, a, a simpler process of returning to the Earth what came from the Earth, and leaving out of the Earth what didn't come from the Earth or what, may be harmful to the Earth. and so that, just, it functionally is [00:15:00] what really defines a, a natural burial.

So what does that look like? that means that there's, that bodies are returned to the Earth, contained in a shroud and/or a casket, or a, a carrier, which is a, sort of a, a casket without the lid and shorter, walls, that are made out of biodegradable materials entirely there is, no embalming.

so the, the body should not be embalmed. and we can talk a little bit about, green embalming. quote, unquote, this is a, a kinda newer form of embalming that, uses, fluids derived from kinda natural sources that are thought to be more environmentally friendly. and, and then and then the body goes directly into the earth without a concrete vault or a liner, [00:16:00] just directly into the ground.

And the point is to just, get out of the way of the natural return of the body to the earth. the earth has given us over its, four plus billion years of evolution, this

great recycling system, and it works really well. And natural burial simply just, takes advantage of that system and is in harmony with it.

So that's the simplicity part of natural burial. There's also a community part of natural burial, that most natural burials invite the participation in the burial process. So that means friends and family who are in attendance at the graveside service have the opportunity to lower the casket or the shrouded body into [00:17:00] the grave using lowering straps.

Or sometimes they just get into the grave itself, and then the, the body is handed from the ground into the grave to those waiting in it. and then there is the invitation to return the earth into the grave with, that might be just a few handfuls or shovel fulls, ceremonially, or it could mean returning all of the earth back into the grave and filling it all up.

And there's something really meaningful, for people when they're able to participate in those burial rituals in that way. It, it creates a connection with the loved one, and an ability to, to work out grief, physically. For a lot of people, that's really important. [00:18:00] and just being part of that whole process of burial and saying goodbye is something that we've lost along the way and, we're just reclaiming that, that space.

And there's probably something very important about it for those who are left behind and their ability to continue the grief journey in that way And then there's also a sustainability aspect of natural burial, which is that when a body goes back to the Earth without, interference from things that would, get in the way of natural decomposition, then all that, the biodegradable matter just returns to the Earth and fuels new life.

And there's just something so beautiful about being able to affirm life through, the, the burial of someone who has [00:19:00] died and perpetuate that, that continuous cycle of life and death and renewal. so it's, w- we see natural burial as something as just being in harmony with nature and, who we are as humans living on the Earth.

And, it really is such a privilege to be a part of that.

Karen Wyatt: It's so beautiful. I've never had the privilege of attending a natural burial. I've only heard about it and imagined it. but I was thinking about how as we've, in our society, we've industrialized, in a sense, medicine and medical care being removed from the home, and death care, and then burial as well, we have experts and other people who handle all of those things.

And no wonder we ... Because we're so separated from the death process, it makes grieving harder because we haven't been, as you said, participants, like hands-on participants in what's [00:20:00] happening. And I've been part of the hospice movement and seeing that example of hands-on care, for your loved one.

It seems like hands-on burial falls right in line and fits really well with that philosophy.

Basil Eldadah: Oh, absolutely. A- and, it's ins- it might be counterintuitive, there might be some kind of notion or perception that kind of keeping a certain distance away from, someone who has died or the, the process of burial might somehow protect us or insulate us, from, , some, adverse, reaction.

But, it, seems to be that just the opposite is true, that when given the opportunity to be a part of that process, it actually facilitates, the grieving process. and of course, this is not something that is, forced on anyone. It's always an invitation. It's an offering to [00:21:00] participate.

And we've, found that some families very readily jump in and want to be very hands-on. We've also found that some families are a little more reserved and reluctant, but when they see what it's all about and they see that it can be normal, w- we've actually found, to our surprise, that some families just, jump right in.

And we've had families who were, reluctant to fill the grave, for example, but once they started, they just kept on going, and they ended up filling the, entire grave. And, you could just see the change in comfort level, as family members started to open up and tell stories as they were working and it was really, so inspiring to, to be able to, see and witness that [00:22:00] transformation of people and, to see right before your eyes kind of this grieving process moving in its own unique way.

but it was, moving, and, in, in both senses of the word. The process was moving, and it was moving for us to witness. and so yeah, you're right. having this connection with our loved ones who have died is something that we've lost, and, we're, just trying to reclaim that.

Karen Wyatt: And, you mentioned before the community aspect of it, of coming together, family, friends, the, the people who have cared about the person who died, all working together in a sense to put the dirt back into the

grave and, sharing that work together, and that kind of bonding and support around grief I think is so valuable.

Basil Eldadah: It really is. and it really underscores how we all go [00:23:00] through the grief journey in different ways. there are some people who are, who have a facility with words, and, their words will convey their grief and sense of loss, and they'll use their words to process, that grief.

And then there are others who maybe not, as much, , comfortable with words, but But actions and physical labor is the way in which they process grief. And, it's, natural burial just allows a space for all of that. it, it's a, it's an opportunity for everyone, regardless of how they process their own sadness and sense of loss.

It- There, there's a place for, everyone to do that.

Karen Wyatt: Yeah. I'm curious about how people make arrangements. If someone has a loved one who, dies, are they able in the, at the last minute to arrange for a natural burial [00:24:00] if it wasn't chosen in advance? Or is pre-planning necessary?

Basil Eldadah: Pre-planning is not necessary.

We certainly accommodate, situations that are at need, where someone has died and, the family is looking for a, a, a natural resting place. and, but pre-planning, or advanced planning is, always a good idea whenever possible because, for a couple reasons. One is because it just relieves the burden on family members, after the death of, their loved one.

If they know what that person wanted, for their end of life, and, a- and after life care, it just makes everything so much easier. There's already so much burden, after someone has died that, just being able to [00:25:00] remove the, questions about what this person might have wanted and how do we go about, finding the cemetery and all the logistical matters that are involved, after death.

it's, a lot. and so it really can be a gift to one's family when we can, express our preferences and, get all arrangements in place. And, different, burial grounds and cemeteries have a, maybe slightly different processes around how you do that. but, most offer that opportunity because, they, know that it, it just makes the whole process smoother.

and, but then, yeah, there-- we also have, families who, come to us at need who haven't planned before. And, we hear from a lot of, people who, who will say, I wish that I [00:26:00] had kinda planned earlier because there's just so much that I have to think about now," or, "I wish that, such and such person, told me what they want to do, because now, I have to decide for them."

And, one of the biggest worries that we see among families who are, trying to make arrangements for their loved one who's died is, is worrying about whether this would have been okay or whether, my loved one would have wanted this for themselves. and yeah. it, it, But, we will accommodate, everyone, and we understand everyone is where they, are in, in, in the journey, in the process, and we try to be just, as supportive as possible and to ease the journey for everyone.

Karen Wyatt: And it seems to me like when plans haven't been made in advance, sometimes grieving families get swept up in the conventional way of doing things.

If their loved one dies in the [00:27:00] hospital, and then a, a funeral home or mortuary is called, and the body's taken away, and suddenly the family kind of loses control over some of the decision-making, including embalming, which it seems like it's really important to know in advance if, they want natural burial and won't be embalming

Basil Eldadah: Yeah, absolutely.

It can be traumatic i- in many cases. And yeah, there are just, so many details to attend to. And, w- who, goes through this process in advance to know what to expect, It's not buying a car. for, so many people, this is a first experience for them. And, there's, there really isn't that, experience to know what's important or what to ask for or what to avoid.

It just kinda happens. There's this inertia as you you describe that, just kinda takes over. [00:28:00] so yeah. Again, it's so important to think about this ahead of time, and I, really acknowledge and, and applaud the, families that come to us who are thinking about this ahead of time. And at the same time, everybody is where they are.

and for a lot of people, they'd rather just not think about, what to do at the end of life. I'd rather talk about politics than think about what- ... what to, do at the end of life. and that's another part of our overarching mission, and I think it is for many other natural burial grounds as well, which is, it's really more of kind of like a social and educational mission of helping to just make this process a

little more normal and a little more, comfortable, and, providing the, tools and the support so that it doesn't feel like such an [00:29:00] onerous, activity to just think about and express one's, end of life wishes.

I... There's, probably something, kinda, deeply rooted in our society that kinda prevents, a lot of us from wanting to really think about, how we want our end of life to look like. and so I think that's where we have, a, a lot of, work and, opportunity.

Karen Wyatt: Yeah, and it's what really makes this conversation we're having as part of the podcast important so that people can just hear about it and maybe think of, an idea that might not have crossed their minds before, but something they'd like to know more about and like to plan for. But I have a technical question.

What about, cremated remains? Can they be buried in a natural burial ground?

Basil Eldadah: Yeah, so different natural burial grounds have different policies around, cremated remains or cremains as they're called. [00:30:00] at Reflection Park, we've, taken the, stand that, we will accept existing cremated remains.

And, there is a bit of a, a, journey to, where we, got to with that, policy. So initially when we started very early on, we, were really purists about natural burial and we said, we're just going to do just full body natural burials. That's, really like the, essence of natural burial and we wanna stay true to that.

And as we thought about it further and as we talked with different people who were helping us think through, developing, Reflection Park, some people told us, people cremate for a variety of different reasons and it may be that, they just didn't have a choice or, financially it just seemed like the best thing to do at the [00:31:00] time.

Or, maybe there was a cremation because, families want to continue their connection with their loved one in some way and having those cremains available, allows for that. And, you might wanna reconsider your stance on, cremains burial. And so that, we thought that was really very sound advice.

And so where we came to was that we still want to encourage, full body natural burial because we believe that is the most environmentally, friendly way to, care for our loved ones after their death. and, we do-- we also accommodate burial of existing cremains, even though, and we're talking about flame cremation.

cremated remains, they don't really do anything [00:32:00] to nourish the earth in the way that our bodies do. cremated remains, contrary to, w- what they're popularly called, they're not ashes. There's actually no ash in cremains. All the organic material has, been burned away. What remains with cremated remains is bone powder, essentially.

And bone powder is very high in salt and phosphate, and it's very alkaline. And, it can be very toxic to the ground if you just, s- scatter it on the ground. we actually worked with a soil scientist to help us think through how can we, treat the cremains in a way that can reduce their toxicity, with burial.

and there are commercial products available to help do that as well. but, but what we found is that, there are, simple things that you can do. and one of the most important things is just burying them deep [00:33:00] enough below the, the, the root lines so that, they don't impact on, tree roots.

and then you can also, add some materials like bentonite clay, which helps to reduce the, the release of phosphate into the soil. and so that's what we do. we-- So that's-- we accommodate, the burial of existing cremains in that way. we also will accommodate the burial of, existing cremains with a full body burial.

So we encounter many people who are opting for full body burial for themselves, and they, want to take a loved one with them, say like a spouse, for example, who was cremated, and take those cremains with them. And so we accommodate, for that at, no additional cost because, again, we want to support and, incentivize, natural body, burial

Karen Wyatt: and I [00:34:00] was also wondering, do some families have the actual funeral service right at the grave site, or do they have a, a funeral elsewhere first and then bring the body to the grave site?

Basil Eldadah: We see both. we see, families who have a, a larger funeral service maybe offsite, at a place of worship or perhaps at the funeral home, and then they'll come to Reflection Park and have a graveside service that may be, the same people or maybe it's a smaller group, maybe only close family and friends.

and then we have others where all they do is a, a graveside service, and that's it. and, perhaps similar to other cemeteries, it's, there's such a diversity of ways in which, families want to honor their, loved one. And really so moving and inspiring is to, see the [00:35:00] diversity of ways in which families wish to

honor their loved ones and also the degree to which these services kind of unfold naturally.

we have some families who have a highly planned, highly scripted service involving, you know, celebrants and officiants and, maybe, song or, poetry readings or s- readings from scripture, maybe some music, musical instruments. all of which is, wr- written out and the service just follows the, the, script from start to finish.

And then we see other services that just unfold organically. There isn't really anything planned. f- family and friends, they might just get up and speak, from the heart and whatever moves them. and, it's just, all of it is [00:36:00] so beautiful. and- and w- it's, just one of the most gratifying parts of this job is to be able to just hold space for families to be able to participate in whatever way feels normal And natural.

And, and, when you can create that kind of space, it's, just moving, and inspiring to see what, what unfolds in the moment.

Karen Wyatt: And you mentioned before that one of your, the values for Reflection Park is, I think, equity around funerals, that everyone deserves to be able to bury their loved one with dignity and respect and to hold a funeral.

And yet the costs of funerals, these days it seems are really prohibitive for so many people. So are you able to actually lower the cost u- using the natural burial ground?

Basil Eldadah: Yes. So in [00:37:00] general, natural burials cost a bit less than conventional burials simply because of what's not going into the ground.

So there aren't concrete vaults or liners. and so that just m- makes it a little less expensive. But, natural burial grounds, by and large, they're also focused around the mission of, making things simple and affordable and sustainable. And so all of those things also, lower cost.

w- we operate as a nonprofit, that helps us also with lowering our costs and, we, can raise, money through charitable contributions. And we have a burial assistance fund, that's intended specifically to go towards, defraying the cost of burial for families that may not be able to afford the full cost.

and we have, a lot of, [00:38:00] generous people who have donated into that fund, and so there, there is that, support available to us, in order to kinda e-extend discounts, to, to families that may not be able to pay the full price. Yeah.

Karen Wyatt: And then I wanted to ask about, headstones or markers for the graves.

That just came up to me too 'cause I know some families spend huge amounts of money on, headstones. but it seems na- in natural burial cemeteries, those usually are not used.

Basil Eldadah: It can vary. so at Reflection Park and, other natural burial grounds, there are memorial stones. but they sit flush to the ground.

And generally, they're smaller stones. They may be more naturally appearing stones. they're, they may not be kinda, the same polished look, or, m- the metal kind of bronze, stones, and plates that you might see at conventional cemeteries. [00:39:00] But there is some memorialization, at Reflection Park and, other cemeteries.

but you're right. some other natural burial grounds or conservation burial grounds, they may only use, a GPS tag, or maybe a small little marker, more for operational reasons than, for ac- for the, location for, families and friends. so it really varies.

but what we all have in common is the desire to try to Keep the landscape more natural. And, and our memorial stones are smaller, than, what you might find at conventional cemeteries. We want them to blend in more with the surroundings. we're going for, more park-like and less cemetery-like,

Karen Wyatt: Yeah. Do you anticipate families coming [00:40:00] back, to visit the graves and maybe have memorial celebrations or rites or rituals in the future as time goes on?

Basil Eldadah: Oh, yes, absolutely. Absolutely. we, see it already, in the days and weeks after a burial. family and friends come and, they visit.

And, and we do want Reflection Park to be a place of community and for people to come and just feel normal and okay and, we want it to be inviting and, welcoming. so we have the burial area of the park that's intended to look, park-like. And we also have a wooded area with a hiking trail that really is very park-like.

Yeah. And so these features are all intended to, again, just create a feeling that death is something that we're all gonna [00:41:00] go through, and it's a part of life. it's normal, and, we just want to make it feel a, a little more normal.

Karen Wyatt: And it seems to me that I'm hearing about more and more natural burial grounds, coming up around the country.

Are... Does it seem to you that it's trending and there's m- much more interest in natural burial now?

Basil Eldadah: Yes, for, sure. compared to, maybe, 10, 20, 30 years ago, yes, we have many more natural burial grounds coming online, throughout the country. and yeah, there are probably a couple reasons for that.

One is I think that there is just, w- with more recent generations, this kind of greater appreciation for the preciousness of the Earth and the need to care for our Earth and, be more environmentally conscious. I think that there's also [00:42:00] another driving factor, which is that there's this growing recognition that there is something that has been taken away from our grieving rituals, and there's this kind of greater desire to try to reclaim, those, that connection with the dying process.

So I think both of those have fueled a greater interest in, desiring natural burials or for, those who are developing natural burial grounds to actually go ahead and, do that work. Yeah. And what's very interesting is that, from what I have, seen of, my colleagues at sister n- natural burial grounds, none of us really were trained, cemeterians.

We weren't, we didn't really, grow up thinking to ourselves, when I grow up, I wanna, run a natural burial ground." everyone has come to this work from a [00:43:00] different, path in life, Everybody is... This is, a second or third or fourth, career for, so many people in the field.

And I think that just speaks to, the, just the, the, the fact that, there is some sense that we have that there's something missing that, we want to be able to contribute to as part of, our grieving rituals, as part of supporting families going through the loss of a loved one or just m- making the planet a little friendlier.

Yeah.

Karen Wyatt: And I wanted to mention, I know, Reflection Park is certified by the Green Burial Council, and is that a good place for people to go if someone

listening is interested in green burial but they don't know if there's one nearby? Can they... Is there a directory there they can look for?

Basil Eldadah: There is, absolutely, yes.

If you, can just Google Green [00:44:00] Burial Council, and then they, maintain a directory of all the burial grounds that are certified. and there are, different levels of certification, different standards, so we're a natural burial ground, and so that comes with, certain characteristics and, a certification.

There's also, something called a hybrid, burial ground or a hybrid natural burial, and that's, conventional cemeteries that have developed a green section in their burial ground that, where the burials are offered in a way that may more closely align with green or natural burial standards.

so yes, the Green Burial Council website, has a directory, and you can look to see what's close to your area, anywhere in the country. they also maintain a listing of certified funeral [00:45:00] homes, because that's another question that comes up all the time, "Do you work with funeral homes, and which funeral home should I work with if I want to have a natural burial?"

And so our response to that is we'll work with all, all funeral homes. and, there are many that are certified by the Green Burial Council, and that just makes the process easier because they already, know what to do. they already know there's not gonna be any embalming. They already know that, the choice of a casket or a shroud is going to, be limited to those things that are, biodegradable and are able to return readily to the earth.

but there are other funeral homes that, may be aware of natural burials and may have even participated in, some, y- although they're not actually certified by the Green Burial Council. And that's been our experience actually with a few funeral homes. even though they don't have that kind of [00:46:00] stamp of, a- approval, that certification, they, knew exactly what to do.

and so for those who, don't, who-- funeral homes who haven't done a natural burial, before, there are resources, to help, support their work. On our website, we have a funeral professional's guide that goes through the, kinds of things that, we would require at Reflection Park and, how to prepare the body, what things to, avoid, what things that can be included.

so you know, it's not rocket science. it's, it, just requires a little bit of, advanced planning to know what needs to do, what needs to be done.

Karen Wyatt: And I noticed you have a lot of other information, just answering questions that people might have on your website, and then, a guide for planning ahead for a funeral or burial.

So just tell us a little bit about what else people will find on the [00:47:00] website.

Basil Eldadah: Yeah. so that's right. We have a, a burial planning guide that, can help, families think through, their end of life choices, and what they want their natural burial to look like, from how the service is going to proceed to thinking through, do I want, just a shroud or do I want a, a casket or do I want, something else?

and then, what f- funeral home, do I want to work with? Or, there's also the option for a home funeral. So there are many states around the, the country where you don't have to involve a, a funeral home, and those arrangements can be taken care of entirely by the, the family or the, community.

w- we, certainly encourage that where families are motivated to do so. [00:48:00] we would, just say it's not the kinda thing that you wanna embark on at the type, at the time of need. it's something that you certainly wanna be thinking about ahead of time because it does require, certain, logistical details to attend to.

so one of them is, for example, how will the body be preserved, if you're not embalming? One of the questions that we get a lot is, if you do, if you're doing a natural burial, you have to, you have to do it right away because if you're not embalming, then, you really need to make sure that body gets into the ground quickly.

and actually, that's not really the case. it's, entirely possible to preserve a body for weeks, simply through cooling or refrigeration. And, most funeral homes are well-equipped to do that themselves. and but it is also possible to do it at home, without a, a re- refrigeration unit.

You can cool a body using, [00:49:00] cold packs or with dry ice. there are techniques to, do that. It's a little more involved. so yeah. So there, there are those, resources available on our website to help families think through all the different details that, you need to consider when con- when opting for a natural burial.

Yeah.

Karen Wyatt: Yeah, and for people like me who are really interested in this and would really like this, I would really like that to be my eventual resting place, a natural burial ground. But I see how important it is to plan ahead and then talk with family members about it, 'cause I can imagine some family members might be taken by surprise who didn't know that's what their loved one wanted and find out suddenly, that maybe plans have even been made and the family didn't know and, they, it may take them a while to adjust to the idea

Basil Eldadah: Yes.

A- absolutely. there is no greater gift, I think, than being able to just let people know what you're thinking. [00:50:00] and, we found, most of the time, friends and family, they can get very much on board with it. they, just need to, know what you want.

Karen Wyatt: Yeah. Yeah.

Exactly. that's one thing we emphasize all the time in conversations on this podcast, is we need to talk about all of these issues more often with our family and friends and neighbors, and we need to think about it and choose what we would like for ourselves and, get past some of our fears so that...

so that we could actually plan ahead and make good decisions.

Basil Eldadah: Yeah, absolutely. And one of the, the most important things is, just being aware of all the different options. we've encountered many families who have opted for cremation simply because that was really just the only option they, knew of.

Or it's, maybe a family member or a, a parent was cremated, [00:51:00] and therefore, I guess that's what I'm gonna do too. And so knowing that there are alternatives, like natural burial, is news to a lot of people. And we have a, really, tremendous educational opportunity here to, let people know that natural burial is an option.

and, and it can serve individuals and families in a way that maybe some of the, the other, alternatives do not. yeah.

Karen Wyatt: So I'll, remind people, we're talking about Reflection Park Natural Burial Ground, which is in Maryland, so people who live in that area. Is it possible to come and visit and just see the, burial ground?

Basil Eldadah: It is, absolutely. We are open seven days a week from 8:30 AM to sunset. We welcome people to come and visit. Even if you have no interest in making, burial plans for yourself, simply visit it, and [00:52:00] consider it, an outing in the park.

Karen Wyatt: Oh, I think that would be a beautiful idea. And also, other people not nearby can go to reflectionpark.org, look at the resources there, learn more about green burial, and, then maybe find out if there's a green burial ground in your area.

Basil, thanks so much for talking with me, about Reflection Park and telling me the story of it. And, I really, appreciate what you're doing there.

Basil Eldadah: thank you so much for having me. I, really enjoyed our conversation.

Karen Wyatt: Yes. Yes, same here. And best wishes.

I, I hope all continues to go well f- for you at Reflection Park.

Basil Eldadah: thank you so much. We're ... We feel, very honored and privileged to be able to serve our community in this way.