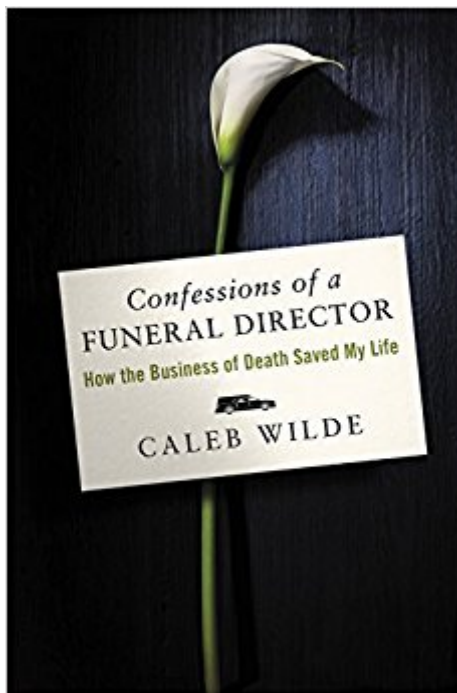




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# Confessions Of A Funeral Director: How The Business Of Death Saved My Life



## Synopsis

The blogger behind *Confessions of a Funeral Director*—what *Time* magazine called a "must read"—reflects on mortality and the powerful lessons death holds for every one of us in this compassionate and thoughtful spiritual memoir that combines the humor and insight of *Smoke Gets in Your Eyes* with the poignancy and brevity of *When Breath Becomes Air*. Death. It happens to everyone, yet most of us don't want to talk about this final chapter of existence.

Sixth-generation funeral director Caleb Wilde intimately understands this reticence and fear. The son of an undertaker, he hesitated to embrace the legacy of running his family's business. Yet he discovered that caring for the deceased and their loved ones profoundly changed his faith and his perspective on death and life itself. "Yes, death can be bad. Yes, death can be negative," he acknowledges, "but it can also be beautiful. And that alternate narrative needs to be discussed." In *Confessions of a Funeral Director*, he talks about his experiences and pushes back against the death-negative ethos of our culture, opening a thoughtful, poignant conversation to help us see the end of life in a positive and liberating way. In the wry, compassionate, and honest voice that has charmed his growing legions of blog readers, Wilde offers an intimate look inside his business, offering information on unspoken practices around death such as the embalming process, beautiful and memorable stories about families in the wake of death, and, most importantly, a fresh and wise perspective on how embracing death can allow us to embrace life. *Confessions of a Funeral Director* is the story of one man learning how death illuminates and deepens the meaning of existence—insights that can help us all pursue and cherish full, rich lives.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“Caleb Wilde shows us how his faith was transformed and deepened as he allowed death to quiet his faith rather than trying to manage death through his religious anxiety. I never thought of a funeral home as sacred space, but I do now. And I’m glad for it.” (Peter Enns, author of *The Bible Tells Me So* and *The Sin of Certainty*)

“Wilde not only helps us rethink our fears and misgivings about death and dying, he empowers us to embrace the end of life fully alive. *Confessions of a Funeral Director* will make you laugh, cry, cringe, and it might just change everything you believe to be true about death.” (Matthew Paul Turner, author of *Churched* and *When God Made You*)

“With wit and warmth, Wilde breaks open the mysteries of funeral directing, allowing a glimpse into that unseen world of chemicals and coffins. Wilde teaches how to cherish the beauty in mourning and honor the deaths. His words guide us past the denials, and lead us to embrace life.” (Carol Howard Merritt, author of *Healing Spiritual Wounds*)

“Caleb Wilde offers a reframing of death that is so badly needed in the world today – one that takes a narrative of loss, despair, and hopelessness, and helps us discover the hope we have been so desperately craving.” (Benjamin L. Corey, author of *Unafraid*)

“To a culture long estranged from its dead, Caleb Wilde provides good guidance towards some rapprochement. By getting the dead where they need to go, a good funeral gets the living where they need to be. Here is good orderly direction towards those ends.” (Thomas Lynch, author of *The Undertaking*)

Caleb Wilde is a partner at his family’s business, Wilde Funeral Home, in Parkesburg, Pennsylvania. He writes the popular blog *Confessions of a Funeral Director* and recently completed postgraduate work at Winchester University, England, in the program, “Death, Religion and Culture.” He has been featured in top media outlets, including *The Huntington Post*, *The Atlantic*, and *TIME* magazine, and on NPR, NBC, and ABC’s *20/20*.

This is a remarkable, very well written, and thought provoking book that is part essay, and part research findings, and and part theology. It addresses death without submerging the reader into darkness and allows them to see the beauty that the defining moment of death adds to the lives of others. My undergraduate work was focused on a death-related discipline. The author touches on some fascinating concepts that I haven’t previously read about such as the empowerment of active remembering and the previously unspoken impact of disenfranchised grief. I have been on the end of the latter multiple times and it is comforting to see it recognized...PERIOD. There are passages

from this book that paint images that will stay with me always, especially the chapter on Front Door Policy and specifically because the author experienced it with a person who suffered from severe dementia and would have been written off at other institutions long before she passed away. The chapter Broken Open is one of the most beautiful concepts that I have read about and so poignantly true. I am in awe that the author could communicate this so seamlessly. Absolutely beautiful. As I wrote this I am the fourth reviewer and the previous reviews have been less than favorable. I do not understand this at all. I started reading this on a Saturday evening and finished the last few pages the next morning. It is riveting and far from boring. This is a book that can bring about personal growth. I am still in awe. If in doubt, PLEASE give this book a try. If I could offer it more stars, I would. Death is one of the few universal experiences that all humans share and it is rarely presented in relation to beauty or living. This book is a rare gem on the topic.

Awesome Book very insightful work by Caleb Wilde about the funeral industry....highly recommended book on .....

This is a melancholy, somber, bromide-filled confession about a man who, overcome with grief, stress, and exhaustion from working as a funeral director, responds to a particularly gruesome group of family members' death from a car crash by having a sort of nervous breakdown. In the hospital, Caleb Wilde has to do some soul searching to decide if he wants to continue working in his family's business. While the job is arduous and often overwhelmingly disturbing and sad, Wilde is drawn to the wisdom death teaches him, and as a result, he decides to stay. As a result, we have several of his haunting adventures in the trade. He comes away with wisdom: Death isn't all that bad; it's a teaching tool; we spend too much time ignoring death; "Let death show you goodness." While I agree with his insights, some seem self-evident at times resulting in too many clichés about death.

Maybe it's a good thing that author Caleb Wilde makes his work as a funeral director sound deathly boring since the undertaker is literally and figuratively the last person we want to meet. From a storytelling perspective, though, that's a problem. How do you engage the reader in a subject no one wants to talk about? Wilde's answer is to turn his slim, large-font book into a meditation on God, fear, and his spiritual connection to the living through his caring for their dead. Sounds more like a sermon, and given that young Wilde

considered a religious calling before turning to the family business, it's one that he delivers to his reading flock (he also has a blog from which this book heavily cribes.) Wilde is not a medical doctor telling tales of heroic cures and sad, but valiant, inevitabilities. He is also not a coroner, investigating causes of death by examining body clues with its air of mystery and thrill of discovery. Even the homogenized title of "Confessions of a Funeral Director" is bloodless and without charm, suggestive more of a cruise ship for the dead than of Charon ferrying the departed across the River Styx to Hades. Now, that is a funeral director. Charmless is the best word to describe this earnest work by a sixth-generation funeral director. At times, especially when he discusses his work with the bodies - preparing them for viewing and the logistics of funeral arrangements - it is an interesting reading. But Wilde lacks the poetic insight of Thomas Lynch or the hard-boiled realism of Caitlin Doughty to make his "Confessions of a Funeral Director" come to life.

This book was nothing what I expected. I thought it would have some insights about death with spiritual stories that were uplifting. The author is from generations of funeral directors on both sides of his family. It doesn't seem like he likes the profession very much. He also uses the word "narrative" a lot. I thought the book was dry, slow and dare I say, lifeless.

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