

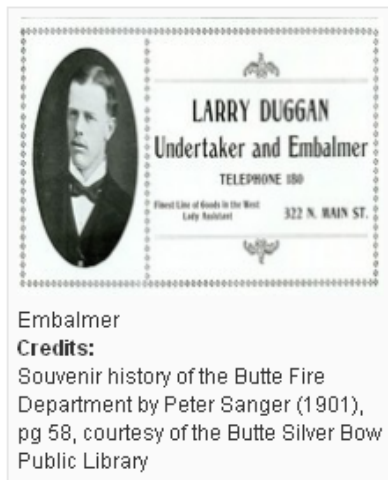


# Cool and creepy careers for kids to consider



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When kids are young, they often take a strong stance on what their career choice will be when they reach adulthood. It's not too often that you hear a kid say, "I want to be an embalmer when I grow up!" If you are cringing at the thought of your child becoming an undertaker or hanging out with the dead, read on. It's really not as bad as it sounds, or is it?

**Ken McKenzie**, of **Long Beach, California** is a licensed mortician, funeral director and co-author of **Mortuary Confidential**. He not only embalms about three-hundred bodies a year, he also drives a hearse. "My father shot himself when I was twelve and I watched my family fall apart," McKenzie said. "...the only person that remained constant was the funeral director. What stuck with me was how she made me laugh at a time when I thought I would never laugh again," added McKenzie when asked why he chose to go into this unique line of work.

**Jeff Turner** of **O'Connor Mortuary** in **Laguna Hills, California** gave us a peek at the special training involved in becoming an embalmer. "In California, you must attend a mortuary science program like the one at **Cypress College** in order to take the state and now national board examination. This prepares you in technical aspects of embalming in a way that the apprenticeship cannot. [This is followed by] a two-year apprenticeship under a licensed embalmer. Upon successful completion of the associate's degree, State and National Board exams and the two-year apprenticeship, an embalming license is issued by the Department of Consumer Affairs."

For kids interested in this line of work, Turner recommended taking a tour of a mortuary. "Interview someone that has walked this kind of a path and get their take on the realities of what it is to work at a mortuary. There are other aspects of funeral service, like operating a crematory, meeting with families, working services, bringing the dead into the care of the mortuary and many other tasks to consider learning."

Curious to know of any weird or creepy things that have happened while among the dead? Of course you are! "One incident comes to mind," said Turner.

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"It was at my first funeral service job. It was about two in the morning and I had just finished embalming someone. As was our practice, I transferred the person from the embalming table to a dressing table, wrapped them in a sheet and positioned their head and arms with black rubber arm and head blocks. I walked across the room and was tending to something else when I heard a noise and simultaneously saw something black moving in an awkward, seemingly unnatural way quickly across the floor. Before I could reason what it was, I was moving in a similarly awkward and unnatural way.

Freaked out? Oh yeah. It was just a black rubber arm block that had fallen from the table because I failed to secure the person's arms correctly with the sheet. Nothing like the combination of sleep deprivation and being in a mortuary embalming room at two A.M. to set you up for a scary moment!"

**For pre-teens and teenagers that decide to get into the mortuary business when they come of age, job security won't be a problem. "They'll be swamped with business because the boomers generation will be dying off and business will be overwhelming," predicts McKenzie.**

McKenzie also echoed the sentiment that it's wise to check out a mortuary environment for a time first, before deciding on this unique profession. "Ask them if you can volunteer. This way you will be exposed to the ins and outs of the industry without investing time or money into a career you may not be emotionally able to deal with."

When asked if he had any freaky encounters, McKenzie lamented, "My friend died and I picked him up at his home. When I got back to the mortuary and I started to embalm his body per his instructions, the proteins reacted with the enzymes within his muscles and his body began to wriggle! I took a few steps back until my brain allowed me to figure out what was happening."

This is Part 1 of a new on-going series. Stay tuned for upcoming stories featuring unique, cool and sometimes creepy careers for kids to consider.