By Corinne Judie
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Not long ago, as I rode in a car in a funeral cortège, an automobile coming from the opposite direction drew off to the shoulder of the highway. I stopped and remained at a halt until all mourners and their friends had gone by. I was astounded. There was a time when stopping in respect as such a procession went toward the cemetery was common. Yet, it had been many years since I had seen such a gesture, the modern practice being for traffic to go whizzing by oblivious to the fact that sorrow and a bit of mankind's history is passing by.

The incident made me remember when death notices were tacked onto telephone poles in the downtown section. The notices were bordered and printed in black and had a black, wreathed cross pictured at top. No one was so busy that he didn't stop and peruse the obituaries.

In State
Funeral homes were rarely used. The deceased was laid in state in the home in which he had lived, under the roof which had sheltered him.

And, everyone knew in which house mourning dwelt, for the doorway was marked with a spray of flowers. Long before that time, people didn't send telegrams or dial long distance to inform friends of a person's demise. They wrote letters on stationery edged in black and addressed black bordered envelopes. When a person picked up his mail with such an envelope in it, he knew immediately that the tidings were not good.

Our mother used to tell us of how mourning was conducted when she was young. Mourning was called "deuil" in the little town where she grew up. There were hard and fast rules which no one dared flout concerning clothing to be worn by the bereaved.

If a mother, father, child, husband or wife of an individual died, the mourner wore black for one year (deuil), black and white for another year ( demi-deuil). Anyone losing a brother or sister wore black for six months and black and white for another six months. For uncles and aunts, the mourning attire was relaxed to black and white for six months. And, if one had particularly liked a cousin who died, one wore black and white for three months in his memory.

Carpenters
Caskets were made by local carpenters and they came in only two colors... black for the aged and white for the young. Clusters of flowers, gathered by relatives and friends, paid silent tribute to the deceased.

Prior to the arrival of a hearse, the deceased was laid in his own bed and was placed in the casket only for the final trip to the cemetery.

And, as the horse-drawn hearse began its journey, mourners followed walking in procession to what they realistically referred to as the graveyard.

It's easy to forget, what with bronze, mahogany, metal, etc. caskets in various colors and adorned with angels and columns and wreaths, that such simplicity existed. Easy to forget, what with the plush interiors of funeral homes, the home customs of that long ago time. How can one remember, what with cortèges of gleaming limousines, the dark clad mourners who trudged behind a hearse? Blotted out by stylized and expensive; floral and funeral arrangements is the thought of that single eloquent rose from a neighbor's bush.

Perhaps, in the area of...