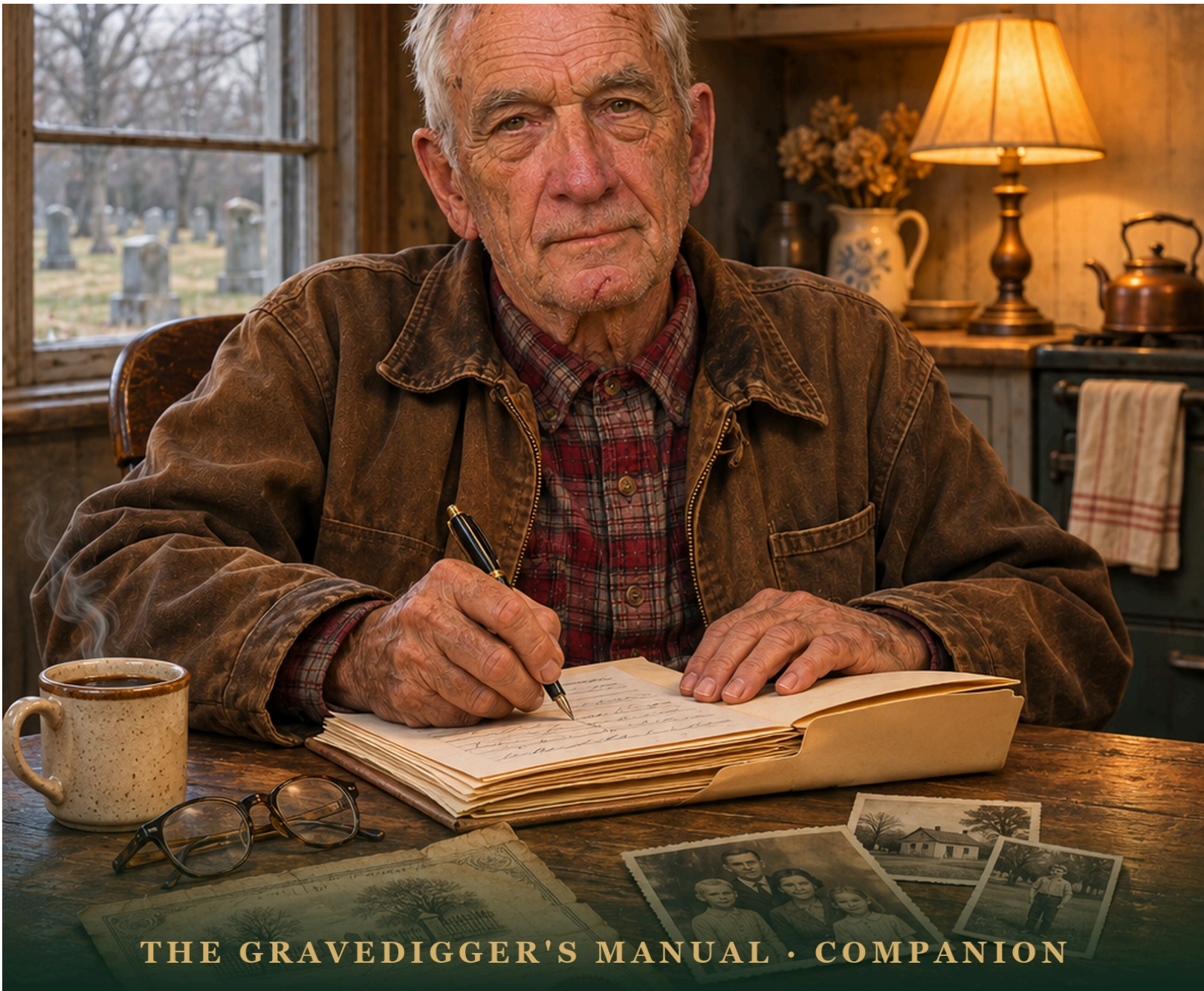

THE GRAVEDIGGER'S MANUAL · COMPANION

The Family Grave Folder

Your Wishes, Your Plot and Your Papers, Written Down So Your Children Never Have to Guess

LYLE DOBBINS

Printable fill-in pages · keep it in the kitchen drawer

Why This Folder Exists

The hardest arrangements I ever saw weren't the expensive ones. They were the ones where a son and a daughter stood at the edge of a grave and couldn't agree on what their mother wanted, because she never wrote it down.

And the saddest calls I ever got, years later, were from grandchildren who couldn't find where their people were buried. Cemeteries close. Records burn. Churches get moved. I moved a lot of them.

This folder fixes both. Fill it in by hand, a section at a time. Print as many copies as you need. Then tell one person where it is.

How to use it: print it, put it in a three-ring binder, and keep it in the kitchen drawer, not the safe deposit box. Your family will need it on a Sunday night when the bank is closed.

Lyle Dobbins

SECTION 1

This Folder Belongs To

> *Fill this page in first. Then tell one person, out loud, where this folder lives. A folder nobody can find is no better than no folder at all.*

Full legal name _____

Date of birth _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Where this folder is kept _____

The person I told _____

Date started _____

Updated on

Date	What changed	Initials

SECTION 2

My Decision

> *Darlene and I settled this at the kitchen table in one evening. The hardest part was starting. Tick one, then tell your family why, in your own words.*

☐ Traditional burial

☐ Burial without viewing (immediate burial)

☐ Cremation with a memorial service

☐ Direct cremation

☐ Green / natural burial

☐ Water cremation (if legal in my state)

☐ Body donation (backup plan below)

Why I chose this

Backup plan if my first choice isn't possible _____

Most I want spent, all in _____

Viewing

☐ Open casket

☐ Closed casket

☐ Private family goodbye only

☐ No viewing

SECTION 3

What I Do NOT Want Bought

> *In forty-three years I watched families buy things out of guilt that their loved one would never have wanted. Tick everything you don't want. Then they'll know it's all right to say no.*

☐ Embalming (unless the law requires it)

☐ A sealed / gasketed casket

☐ An expensive casket

☐ A premium vault (the basic liner is fine)

☐ Viewing at the funeral home

☐ Limousine / family car

☐ Funeral home flowers

☐ Printed folders and video tributes

☐ A showroom urn

☐ A weekend burial at overtime rates

☐ Headstone from the cemetery office

Anything else I don't want

To my family: it is all right to say no to anything on this page. Signed: _____

SECTION 4

My Plot and Cemetery Record

> *Most families can't find the deed when they need it. I've seen people buy a second plot because they couldn't prove they owned the first. Write it all down here.*

Cemetery name _____

Address _____

Office phone _____

Section _____

Row / lot _____

Plot / space number _____

Deed or certificate number _____

Where the deed is kept _____

Plots owned next to mine (whose) _____

Vault or liner required? (in writing) _____

Opening & closing quote (date) _____

Perpetual care included? _____

Notes

SECTION 5.1

Family Grave Record

> *One page for each relative already buried. A great-grandchild with this page can stand at the right grave. Without it, they may never find it.*

Name _____

Born _____

Died _____

Cemetery _____

Town / county / state _____

Section / row / plot _____

Casket / vault type (if known) _____

Ground: sandy / clay / wet / dry _____

GPS or directions from gate _____

Sketch of the location

SECTION 5.2

Family Grave Record

> *Another person in our family, so they're never lost.*

Name _____

Born _____

Died _____

Cemetery _____

Town / county / state _____

Section / row / plot _____

Casket / vault type (if known) _____

Ground: sandy / clay / wet / dry _____

GPS or directions from gate _____

Sketch of the location

SECTION 5.3

Family Grave Record

> *Another person in our family, so they're never lost.*

Name _____

Born _____

Died _____

Cemetery _____

Town / county / state _____

Section / row / plot _____

Casket / vault type (if known) _____

Ground: sandy / clay / wet / dry _____

GPS or directions from gate _____

Sketch of the location

SECTION 5.4

Family Grave Record

> *Another person in our family, so they're never lost.*

Name _____

Born _____

Died _____

Cemetery _____

Town / county / state _____

Section / row / plot _____

Casket / vault type (if known) _____

Ground: sandy / clay / wet / dry _____

GPS or directions from gate _____

Sketch of the location

SECTION 5.5

Family Grave Record

> *Another person in our family, so they're never lost.*

Name _____

Born _____

Died _____

Cemetery _____

Town / county / state _____

Section / row / plot _____

Casket / vault type (if known) _____

Ground: sandy / clay / wet / dry _____

GPS or directions from gate _____

Sketch of the location

SECTION 5.6

Family Grave Record

> *Another person in our family, so they're never lost.*

Name _____

Born _____

Died _____

Cemetery _____

Town / county / state _____

Section / row / plot _____

Casket / vault type (if known) _____

Ground: sandy / clay / wet / dry _____

GPS or directions from gate _____

Sketch of the location

SECTION 6

The Headstone

> *Get it right the first time. I've reset a lot of stones that had to be re-cut because a date was wrong.*

Name as it should appear _____

Dates _____

Words / verse _____

_____

_____

Symbol (cross, flag, etc.) _____

Material & color _____

Flat or upright _____

Who orders it _____

Veteran marker requested? _____

Two people who proofread it _____

SECTION 7

Cremation Instructions

> *If I'm cremated, these are my wishes. Ask for the ID disc number and write it here. It's how you know it's me.*

Provider _____

ID disc number _____

Implants / pacemaker to remove _____

Jewelry to keep (list) _____

_____

_____

Urn (bought where) _____

Where the ashes go _____

Who keeps them _____

If scattered, where & who _____

SECTION 8

The Service

> *This is the part your family will remember. Make it yours.*

Church / place _____

Officiant _____

Songs or hymns _____

_____

_____

Readings _____

_____

_____

Who should speak _____

Clothing I want _____

Items to bury with me _____

Items that must come home _____

Pallbearers _____

_____

_____

SECTION 9

Who to Call, in Order

> *In the first hours your family will be on the phone. Make the list now so nobody forgets anyone.*

#	Name	Relationship / role	Phone

SECTION 10

Where My Papers Are

> *Never write passwords here. Write where they're kept.*

Paper	Where it is	Notes
Will / trust		
Plot deed		
Life insurance		
Veteran DD-214		
Pre-paid funeral plan		
Bank accounts		
Social Security card		
Birth & marriage certificates		
House deed / car titles		
Safe deposit box & key		
Pension / union / lodge policies		
Where passwords are kept		

SECTION 11

Price Comparison: Funeral Homes

> *Three phone calls. That's all it takes. Funeral homes in the same town can charge very different prices for the same service.*

Item	Home 1	Home 2	Home 3
Name / phone			
Basic services fee			
Direct cremation			
Immediate burial			
Embalming			
Refrigeration / day			
Viewing			
Least expensive casket			
Hearse			
Death certificates			
TOTAL quoted			

SECTION 12

Price Comparison: Cemeteries

> *The second bill nobody counts. Ask each cemetery for its own prices.*

Item	Cemetery 1	Cemetery 2	Cemetery 3
Name / phone			
Plot			
Opening & closing (weekday)			
Weekend extra			
Vault / liner rule			
Basic liner price			
Marker setting fee			
Perpetual care			
Urn burial			
TOTAL quoted			

SECTION 13

A Letter to My Spouse

> *Some of the most precious things I ever saw come out of a family's papers were letters. Write what you'd want them to hear.*

SECTION 13

A Letter to My Children

> *Some of the most precious things I ever saw come out of a family's papers were letters. Write what you'd want them to hear.*

SECTION 13

A Letter to My Grandchildren

> *Some of the most precious things I ever saw come out of a family's papers were letters. Write what you'd want them to hear.*

SECTION 13

A Letter to Anyone I Need To Make Peace With

> *Some of the most precious things I ever saw come out of a family's papers were letters. Write what you'd want them to hear.*

SECTION 14

The Obituary I'd Want

> *Write it yourself. Nobody knows your story better.*

SECTION 15

Signed and Told

> *The last page. Sign it, and tell one person where this folder is.*

These are my wishes, written in my own hand. They are not a legal will. Where the law requires something different, my family should follow the law.

Signed _____

Date _____

Witness (optional) _____

I told this person where the folder is _____

"The ground always tells the truth. Make sure your papers do too." — Lyle Dobbins