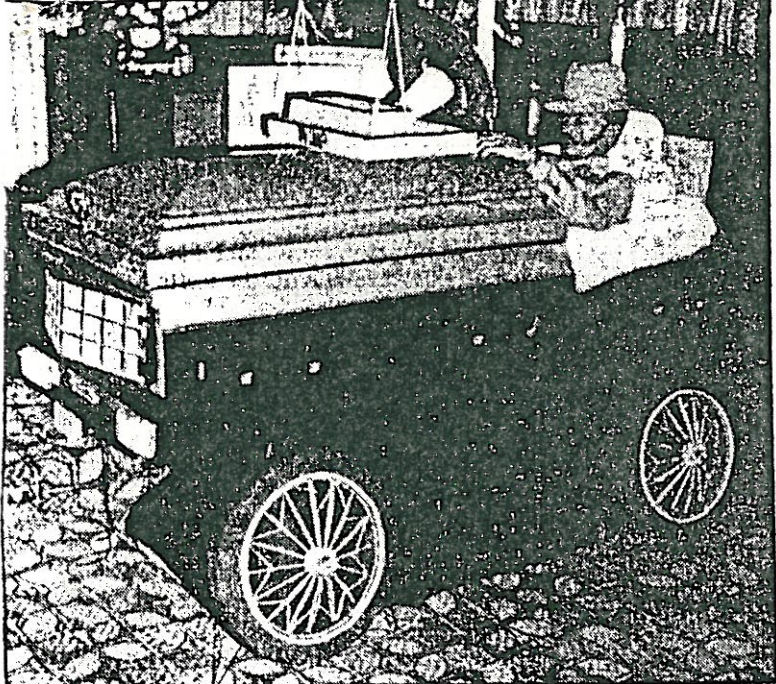


Janet -

- each to  
their own".

P.O.W.



Shooting victim Willie M. Stokes Jr. reposes in his custom-made coffin in a funeral parlor on Chicago's South Side. AP PHOTO



**MIKE BARNICLE**

## Going out in style

Are you tired of getting hit over the head with bad news? Are you sick of reading sob stories and of hearing how the country is going to hell in a handbasket?

handbasket?

Maybe you've had your full of political updates. Perhaps you're fed up with dissertations on the New Hampshire primary results.

If so, consider for a moment, the light-hearted tale of Willie M. Stokes Jr., formerly of Chicago. His friends used to call him just plain Willie. Now, however, they call him dead.

Last Friday, Willie Stokes Jr. got shot in the head. Police in the old Windy City think the killing may have been drug related, but that's not the point of the story.

Willie went to his eternal re-

grille and trunk design. The family wanted to make it as close to a Seville as possible."

In addition to being laid out in a casket with four on the floor, Mr. Stokes was dressed in a red-velvet suit and pearl grey fedora. The undertaker, on instructions, placed a number of diamond rings on his fingers and a stash of money in one hand. The jewelry and cash were removed before burial.

Now, please remember that every one of us is going to pass from this earth at some point; it's inevitable.

And when you take into consideration the fact that wakes and funerals are sad and tearful events, the family of Willie Stokes Jr. may have come up with an idea worth thinking about: Make the wake a reminder of the deceased's most memo-

er of the deceased's most memorable moments.

For instance, what about someone like Walter Mondale? It is hoped he will live a long and fruitful life, but when he passes on, what about burying him in a casket shaped like the state of New Hampshire?

Or Kevin White? No cost would be spared in order to have him waked in something designed like the Parkman House.

Howard Cosell? What about a mouth-shaped coffin?

Eddie King? No doubt about it: A lobster sandwich - to go.

Mike Dukakis? A very, very small coin nurse



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Last Friday, Willie Stokes Jr. got shot in the head. Police in the old Windy City think the killing may have been drug related, but that's not the point of the story.

Willie went to his eternal reward in a custom-built coffin that looked pretty much like a Cadillac Seville. Really.

The coffin came equipped with nearly everything except air conditioning and a stereo tape deck. It had flashing head and tail lights, a steering wheel and chrome grille as well as the Cadillac insignia.

It was so nice that it probably could have gotten a state inspection sticker. It even had a license plate that carried the word "WIMP," the very same name Willie had on his car while he was living.

"Was it equipped with cruise control or directional lights?" Spencer Leak, vice-president of the A.R. Leak Funeral Home in Chicago was asked.

"No, it wasn't," he answered. "We didn't know which direction he was heading.

"This is what the family wanted," the undertaker said. "His family told us that Mr. Stokes was very car conscious. We took the casket to a body and fender factory in Indianapolis to get the authentic Cadillac

were removed before burial.

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Mike Dukakis? A very, very small coin purse.

Richard Nixon? A tape recorder.

Fred Salvucci? A traffic jam shaped like Neponset Circle.

The idea is to think of death as something other than the end. Think of it in terms of taking the first step - or next long drive - toward a better existence in the great beyond.

So, with those guidelines, Brendan Behan could have been put into the ground in a cast iron-shaped bottle of Bushmills, Jimi Hendrix could have been stashed in a facsimile of a marijuana bale, William Loeb in a headline, and "Trigger" Burke in a violin case.

Yet there are probably a lot of you out there who, like Willie Stokes Jr., are in love with your Toyotas, Ford Escorts and Pontiac Trans-Ams. Maybe you, too, want a casket that looks just like your car.

But if you live in or around Boston, leave instructions for your next of kin to think twice before going ahead with having an automobile-shaped casket. It probably would be ticketed and then booted on the way to the cemetery.