

Burial Decisions Unfathomable

Religion Among Concerns of Kin

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The Associated Press

NEW YORK — On the day of her daughter's 6th birthday party, Kathleen Buckley was notified that the medical examiner had identified part of her husband's body.

About a month later, when more of Dennis Buckley's remains had been found among the World Trade Center ruins, they notified her again, as she requested.

Buckley's excruciating decision — whether to be notified each time remains are found — is one that many families will face, as the city medical examiner's office works to match more than

14,000 body parts to fewer than 3,000 victims.

"I should get as much together as I can," said Buckley, 36. "It can't be any worse — I already know. It's really not sheltering me from anything."

Families already reeling from the loss of loved ones in the Sept. 11 terrorist attack have had to make unfathomable burial decisions — whether to bury an empty casket, whether to open the grave if remains are someday found, how to make decisions conform with their religious beliefs.

Buckley held a funeral Mass for her husband, who worked at the bond firm Cantor Fitzgerald, on Sept. 28 — six days after she was notified of the first identification, which was made through dental records. The remains were

cremated and held at the funeral home. More remains were added to the urn in October.

"I'll bury it at some point, I can do that whenever," said Buckley, who has three daughters. "I'm just going to wait now until they say everyone has been identified or that they've done all they can."

When the medical examiner identifies a victim, the family is notified and given a form with three choices. If they do not wish to be notified, they check box No. 1; if they wish to be notified each time remains are found, they check No. 2; and if they want the medical examiner to notify them after all additional remains are found, they check No. 3.

"It seems like the overwhelming majority of people do want to be notified each

time," said Ellen Borakove, a spokeswoman for the medical examiner. She did not know how many families had selected each choice.

As of Sunday, 712 victims had been identified. Body parts continue to arrive at the morgue daily.

Buckley, like many widows and family members, wanted to do what her Roman Catholic religion deemed proper for the treatment of remains. Although Catholics are traditionally buried, they may be cremated. She consulted her priest to determine the best option.

Families who choose not to be told when more remains are found authorize city officials to dispose of the remains. Borakove would not speculate on what the city would do with those remains.