

Fade up from black

Broll: Trees with bare branches, front of building

OWENS: There was always people like me. They might not have had a name, but they kind of just took care of the dead.

Title card: Peralta Pictures, POV and ITVS

Broll: Owens doing make-up on an anonymous body

OWENS: When I was a child I created make-believe funerals.

Title card: in association with Final Cut USA

OWENS: People thought that I was strange because I was having this love affair with funerals and I guess death and dying.

Title card: a film by Christine Turner

OWENS: Of course no one understood it and death always made people very, very uncomfortable, especially my mother. Now, they just realize that I was just born to do what I'm doing.

Title card: Homegoings

Broll: Exterior of funeral home; Owens and staff members load hearse

OWENS: *These flowers, they got delivered too early, they're wilted.*

Broll: Owens driving hearse on highway

Lower-third: Isaiah Owens

OWENS: In this life it can get so rough that you want to go someplace to get some rest.

Stills: Old photographs of African American funerals

OWENS: When it comes to death and funerals, African American people, we have our own way. It has worked for us throughout the ages, it has kept us balanced, sane and everybody know that it's going to be a sad, good time.

Broll: Pastor speaking at podium at funeral

PASTOR: *I know my brothers and my sisters we are sad on today, but I'm not gone let you be sad while I'm standing here. Because we're here for a celebration. Not a celebration of death, but a celebration of a new life.*

OWENS: We sometimes fall out and faint, shout, get everybody all fired up, we have a way of releasing what is within us.

Title Card: Kathlena Wilson, 1950-2010

SELESTE: This is my mom, back in 1955-56, so she was about five or six years-old, in first grade.

Broll: Inside Kathlena's funeral

SELESTE: She was 59 when she passed away and she was diagnosed with multi-myeloma, which is a cancer of the bone marrow.

Broll: Pastor speaking at podium; people listening

PASTOR: My grandmother was blessed on my mother's side to live to be 109 years-old. Homegoing service was going to be at her birthplace in Alabama, and we took a bus to Alabama and to my surprise my cousin Kathleen was on that bus. She was -- and no mistake about it -- was a glamour girl. She would be on the front page of every model magazine, because she just had that look about her, she was a fly girl. And I knew somewhere along the line I'm going to see the real Kathleen. I made up my mind I'm going to see the real Kathleen. And every stop we made her hair was intact, eyelashes didn't move, no smear of her make-up, and I would look at her and she said, "Now you go and tell that!" Am I right?

Broll: People clapping and laughing

OWENS: In our culture the person that does your eulogy usually can stir people up and make them get really, really excited, so it gets them over that threshold of grief and sadness into the point of feeling like celebration or celebrating because usually there's a good message for the people.

Broll: Seleste standing and listening to eulogy

PASTOR: As Kathleen laid in the hospital bed, she was afraid of where she was going, she don't know what it's going to be like, she know what surroundings like now, but she doesn't really know, what her future's going be like, but she made prior preparation, she is going, we're going, up to yonder to see my lord. Can I get a witness. We're going up to yonder to see my lord.

SELESTE: My moms is gone. She's gone and I think that the reality hasn't set in.

WOMAN: (singing) Wherever you are, whatever you've been going through...

SELESTE: I'm still thinking she's in the hospital and I going to go see her. It was a long two-month journey.

Broll: Owens putting final touches on Kathlena's body in casket

OWENS: Home. No more cancer. Home. No more pain pills. Home. No more sleepless nights. Home.

Stills: Kathlena family photos

Broll: Seleste crying over casket; a person runs out of the funeral, etc.

Broll: Establishing shots of Harlem, Owens Funeral Home, etc.

Lower-third: Harlem, New York

PHONE: Thank you for calling and welcome to the Isaiah Owens Funeral Home conveniently located in the center of Harlem. Our hours are Monday through Friday, 9am to 8:30pm. Isaiah Owens Funeral Service, where beauty softens your grief.

Broll: Owens spelling out name on blackboard; working with family

OWENS: I've been in the funeral business now for over 42 years. Here at the funeral home I work with my wife Lillie; My daughter, I call her Dee Dee, but her name is Shaniqua Princess, and my son, Isaiah Christopher.

CHRIS: *It's free, just when you come in for the remains, whoever's here, just ask for them and they'll give you them.*

Broll: Owens in smock running up stairs; draws fluid into syringe.

OWENS: It's called "liquid tissue," probably, a first cousin to Botox that you get when you're living, except you get this after you pass away. And what it's doing, what I'm doing now, is this lady is 98 years old, I'm trying to make her look like this (points to picture) um, I need some crazy glue.

Broll: Owens working on woman with pink dress (Irene Evans)

OWENS: In the 80s, you had -- If it was 10 people downstairs that, that had died, there were probably four homicides, four people or five people with AIDS. Now, most of the people that come are, are people that die from natural causes. Heart problems, cancer, hypertension, especially in our community. We have a lot of death from strokes.

Broll: Montage of various beautiful bodies, then gravestones

OWENS: I've been called to do this work by a higher power so at the end of my life, I might have failed in a lot of things when I have to stand before God, but I can check off one thing and that's well done for the bodies. 'Cause every body that he gave me, I gave it back to him splendid and good and I never slighted anybody, so the work that he put me here to do I did 100%. Other things I probably came real short.

Title card: Linda Williams-Miller, 1954-

Broll: Owens is seated across from two women at his desk.

LINDA: *You know I been red head all my life. You know that.*

OWENS: *Huh? But what happened?*

LINDA: *Nothing, I just been sick a lot and I didn't want to put the family through it.*

OWENS: *Okay, yeah.*

LINDA: *Especially my children.*

OWENS: *Yeah. You got a budget you want to stay with within?*

LINDA: *Yeah, I don't want to spend too much.*

OWENS: *See, the 1800 ones, the 1800 dollar plots, you can put this kind of a stone, the one for 1650 you got to use this kind.*

DENISE: *Flat like this here. The marker on the ground.*

OWENS: *So you gotta walk all the way right up to it in order to see it, but with these you can see it--*

LINDA: *--From a distance. Oh yeah I like those.*

OWENS: *It's just 150 dollars difference.*

Broll: Owens starts filling out paperwork.

OWENS: *This is a pre-arrangement. L-I-N-D-A?*

LINDA: *Uh-huh.*

OWENS: *Any middle name or middle initial?*

LINDA: *D.*

OWENS: *Devil.*

LINDA: *In the red dress (laughing).*

OWENS: *How old your kids now?*

LINDA: *My son is 33*

OWENS: *Uh-huh*

LINDA: *and Mona's 17.*

OWENS: *Oh, okay*

LINDA: *My daughter, she getting ready to go to college.*

OWENS: *It's good you're doing this, cause they would be in a tizzy.*

Broll: Owens filling out paperwork

LINDA: *When I talk about death, I talk about it like living. I don't know if that's the way I was raised in church, but there was a time that I would have been like, "Oh, I don't want to talk about it, too." The more you go on as life, you see that you have to say, "Let's prepare for this." It's going to happen eventually.*

OWENS: *Now let's get this hair color done. Just in case you don't get a chance to get your hair done before the time come. What is the color of this rinse you got?*

LINDA: *Red on Red.*

OWENS: *Red on Red? By who?*

LINDA: *Can I call you and give you back that information?*

OWENS: *Call me and give me your hair color, 'cause you know how particular you are. Red on Red.*

DENISE: *Yeah, you gotta have your red.*

LINDA: *Yeah. And you saw this top I showed you --*

OWENS: *--and that's a rinse or a dye?*

LINDA: *Dye.*

DENISE: *--A dye.*

LINDA: *Yeah. Cause he know I want Red.*

OWENS: Yeah

LINDA: He know I want a red outfit and I was showing her this top last night.

DENISE: And how much embalming fluid can we get in the boobs?

LINDA: Cause they ain't standing up that high. That's, we gotta pump em' back up! (laughing)

DENISE: I want 'em up!

OWENS: The Botox boobs.

DENISE: I want 'em up talking to you.

LINDA: Alright.

DENISE: She said, "Ooh, she look beautiful, ooh, her boobs is nice."

Broll: Owens holds up a plaque

OWENS: You can get it if you want it.

LINDA: Well you know I have to get that to say my name and he gone put aka Redd, R-E-D-D.

OWENS: That's what they call you for real?

Stills: Linda as a young woman

LINDA: Since about '74, '73, mostly everybody calls me Redd. So if somebody comes to the funeral, they have to have "A-K-A Redd," because a lot of people don't know me as "Linda," some people just know me as "Redd."

LINDA: And even if you don't make it red-red, you can make it clear like this and put the red in it. OK. You see?

Broll: Linda's nails, etc.

OWENS: Yeah.

LINDA: Like that.

OWENS: Like the red tips where the green is?

LINDA: Yeah, something like that.

OWENS: Are those called French nails?

LINDA: *No, these is my nails in silk wrap.*

LINDA: *I didn't know you do all of that? You ask all of that Owens, I didn't know.*

OWENS: *You can't talk after you gone.*

Broll: *Linda flips through binder of casket options*

LINDA: *I ain't trying to spend a whole lot of money.*

OWENS: *You, you doin' this for you. And that's why you're doing it. You ain't got nobody to try to second guess, and figure out what you want to do.*

LINDA: I know one day it's gonna happen. And I don't want it to happen, but it's gonna happen. So I had to deal with the talking about it. There will be times I would say to myself, "Why am I doing this?" But it's something that I have to do to alleviate the pain from my family.

Broll: *Owens punching calculator*

OWENS: *Your total comes to \$9734.*

LINDA: Homegoing. A happy occasion. Now they're going home to be at peace. If you're sick, you're at peace. Okay. If it's your time to go, you're going home to meet the ones that went on before you and they're there waiting for you. I don't wanna leave my family, never, but it's a homegoing and I'll be home waiting for them when they come.

Stills: *Montage of Linda as a girl, Linda getting married, Linda with baby, etc.*

OWENS: *That's it.*

LINDA: I don't have the answer to everything. I just want to be when I go, just be happy that I spent the time that I spent with you and try not to cry too much or grieve too long, but remember the time we shared together.

Broll: *Weather vane, Branchville Scenics*

Lower-third: South Carolina

OWENS: I'm the owner of Owens Funeral Home in New York City and Owens Funeral Home in Branchville, South Carolina.

Broll: *Willie Mae seated at desk in funeral home.*

OWENS: *My mother works two days a week at the funeral home in Branchville, she's like the receptionist.*

WILLIE: *Hello? (answers phone)*

OWENS: *When I was a kid you couldn't get my mother into a funeral home, if she went, she went because there was a reason she had to go and you know she wasn't so comfortable with death, and I guess nobody's comfortable with death.*

Broll: A hand draws in the dirt; Owens cuts open beer can with nail.

OWENS: At five years-old, I dug a hole, buried a matchstick, put the dirt over it, put some flowers over it, so actually that was my first funeral.

Broll: Shots of various pieces to funeral

OWENS: *These are the men. This is a lady.*

OWENS: *This is the hearse. The family's coming to the church, that's when the, the bell rings. Bing!*

Broll: Owens continues to "play" funeral

OWENS: When I was growing up I buried um frogs, I buried chickens, I buried the mule that died. I buried the neighbor's dog and the dog's name was Snowball. One day they found Snowball under the house dead, so they came and got me, so I buried Snowball.

Lower-third: Willie Mae Owens, Mr. Owens' Mother

WILLIE: Cats, chickens -- anything that he find dead, he buried, have a funeral.

OWENS: Except a snake. Snakes just got thrown into the woods or whatever.

OWENS: *This is a pregnant lady. This is an old man.*

Still: Isaiah as a young kid

OWENS: They thought I was a mental case.

WILLIE: I don't know where he got it from. Can't even think where he got it from. He was a mess. But that was his calling.

Broll: Owens continues to bury can.

OWENS: *Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.*

OWNES: I was isolated and lonely, but I had a business under the house. I had my funeral home. It was the only little place in my life that I kind of felt comfortable.

Still: Owens' father

OWENS: My father was a sharecropper. Everybody that lived in the house was out picking cotton and you got paid two cents a pound, so if you picked 200 pounds of cotton in a day, you got paid four dollars at the end of the day.

Broll: Cotton scenics

OWENS: When I was growing up, people buried people by planting cotton. You know, they would go to the funeral home, and somebody would die and they would sign a promissory note that when the cotton is ready this year, that they would come back in pay.

Stills: Old photographs of funerals

OWENS: The black funeral director wound up being a friend, somebody in the community that was stable, appeared to have means. When I was growing up we didn't have a telephone, whenever somebody got sick, they would call Mr. Bird at the funeral home, and then he would ride out in the country to tell my mother, such and such one is real sick in Philadelphia and that your sister called.

Still: Willie Mae as a young woman

WILLIE: Well all my lifetime when a black person die, they go find the black undertaker. They – they didn't deal with – they know better than to go anywhere else. Cause they know they wouldn't be served.

Stills: Black funeral home exteriors

OWENS: The funeral business, have long had a strong relationship in the black community, probably because it was a business that white people never really wanted to do.

Stills: Black funeral directors

OWENS: We're their brothers and their sisters, we're family. We don't go outside of the family when trouble comes.

Broll: Willie Mae and Owens picking apples; Willie sitting on bench

OWENS: I've had to bury everybody. I've buried my sister, my father, my nephew, my brother, I've buried one, two, three of my mother's sisters, probably, and four of her brothers and their wives most of them, or husbands. I've buried a lot of family members.

Broll: Gravestones in various cemeteries

OWENS: My grandfather who was the first black insurance agent in the state of South Carolina, was getting ready to start a funeral business when he

was killed I think in 1946. Maybe I kind of took over where my grandfather left off.

Broll: Owens opening a casket inside of small country church, people at funeral

CHOIR: (singing) *I'm free, praise the lord, I'm free, no longer bound, no more chains holding me, my soul is resting, ain't that a blessing, praise the Lord, hallelujah I'm free, praise the Lord, I'm free*

Broll: Branchville trees

OWENS: I think that there was a time when the slaves were killed, sometimes by their owners and by whatever means, it wasn't a proper funeral, but they kind of did their best even with the restrictions that was put upon them. When they got down in the woods, away from the slaves masters and was having funerals they came up with these songs like: "Soon I will be done with the troubles of the world, going home to live with my God, no more weeping and wailing, no more weeping and wailing."

Broll: Funeral continues inside

OWENS: For the slaves death meant freedom. It meant that they would meet a judge that would be just and fair to them. Even for us today, death brings us justice.

Stills: Archival photos from RFK's funeral train

OWENS: I came to New York when I was 17 years-old. The day that Robert Kennedy's body was being taken to Washington, DC for burial, I was on the bus coming to New York.

Broll: Harlem broll

OWENS: During that summer I got a job at a plastics factory on 138th street and I worked there until September where I started mortuary school.

Broll/Stills: Owens embalming a body; stills of Owens as a young mortician

OWENS: The first body that I did, I was doing my apprenticeship with Elizabeth Smith Funeral Home and Elizabeth Smith was the person that taught me.

Broll: Embalming continues

OWENS: Someone had died and a family recommended me. Well immediately she heard about it, so she put me out, and told me if not I was going to steal all of her business.

Broll: Shots of Harlem

OWENS: There used to be a lot of funeral homes in Harlem, but since '68 I probably could count at least 20 or 25 funeral homes that has gone out of business.

Broll: Various funeral home fronts in Harlem

OWENS: Forty years ago you had your allegiance to a little mom and pop funeral home. All of that generation that went to the little small funeral homes is finished.

Broll: Owens watering flowers outside funeral home; awards inside

OWENS: I get faxes from different companies that say to me that if you're interested in selling that we would be interested in buying, but at this particular point I don't think that I'm interested in selling because I'm trying to create a business that could take care of my family for maybe the next hundred, 200 years.

Broll: Framed photo on the wall of Lillie and Owens

LILLIE: *This is Tuscany silver and this is Tuscany silver. This is Old Sea World, so, that's, that's right for that.*

Lower-third: Lillie Owens, Mr. Owens' wife

LILLIE: As a child growing up, I was always petrified of hearses and the dead. When I was growing up the funeral directors, their hand felt cold or and they looked – they looked like funeral directors, always in black. But Isaiah, he's – he's, you know, the jolly type.

Music: "My Man's an Undertaker" by Dinah Washington

Stills: Isaiah over the years

LILLIE: You know, when I met him, he had that same giggle, the same laughing and jumping around when he laugh, so it was like, "He don't look like a funeral director," but of course, when they told me was a funeral director, I really didn't want to meet him.

Stills: Lillie and Isaiah get married

LILLIE: He's his own individual unique person and I let him be who he is.

Broll: Owens puts white top hat on in front of the mirror.

OWENS: *I got this one on cause they wanted everything pretty much in white, for her. White bridal dress and all that kind of stuff that they made. If it look too, if it looks too tacky—well, I'm going to be in a horse and buggy anyway so. But right now, this is just costume.*

Broll: Owens now dressed, standing outdoors in snow.

OWENS: In the 10,000 funerals plus that I've conducted, there is never two funerals the same.

Title card: Petra Butler, 1938-2009

Broll/Stills: Shots of parade preparations; Petra family photos

FELITA: My mother's name is Petra Cruz Butler.

CATH: She was selling clothing on 125th Street. She was a street vendor.

KARIM: She made these African "gangas," which was a head wrap. With her dashikis and her gangas, that's what supported our family.

Broll: Owens loading the casket into the carriage, etc.

OWENS: My style is based on the southern tradition of funerals.

DOLORES: I said, "Listen, I would like a horse and buggy for my mother."

Broll: White horse, buggy

DOLORES: 'Cause we really didn't know about a parade. We just said, "We want a horse and buggy," but he says, "We gonna have a parade."

Stills: Old funeral parades

Broll: Owens holding roses in parade; people marching in parade

KARIM: *Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar...*

KARIM: You had her Christian family, you had her Muslim family, you had her African family, you had her Puerto Rican family, and you had the whole community that loved her. People, once they found out it was her, they was just joining the parade.

Broll: People walking in the parade

OWENS: It's like walking them down the road and holding the family by this hand and holding the dead person by this hand and getting them to that point where they'll no longer need me and they can kind of go on.

DOLORES: My sister is a Yoruba priestess and a lotta time the "egums" [phonetic] of the ancestors come back in different ways. They come back and they speak through people.

Broll: Felita chanting in parade

FELITA: *Felita tell them, "I am here, what you crying for...I can dance, I can dance, I can dance, I can dance, what you crying for?"*

DOLORES: It's almost like you could say my mother's body transitioned into her body for a minute.

FELITA: *I am here. What you crying for.*

DOLORES: She was saying, "I'm here," and then she started dancing. My mother loved to dance. Mother loved to dance.

Broll: Felita dancing

CATH: And she was talking to the crowd and talking to us, giving us her last good-byes and her last advices.

FELITA: *I can dance. I can dance...*

Broll: Felita walks up to carriage to touches it, begins crying

FELITA: When they said she was going to die, I said, "Mommy, if you need to go, then you should go." A homegoing. Going home to all our ancestors and everybody that left before her. So you really going home. But I would tell her, "Job well done, and it was a honor being your child."

Broll: Carriage pulls up to the church front; Owens and Felita

FELITA: I feel that being an undertaker, you have to first be a caretaker. Not only making their loved ones look special, but you got to make the ones they leave behind feel special. And he does that very well.

Broll: Felita enters church; gravestones

Broll: Embalming room cutaways

OWENS: My kids grew up in the prep room, anywhere a body was, they was there. So for most people, that children would be afraid, they actually were never afraid.

Stills: Owens family portrait

Lower-third: Chris Owens, Mr. Owens' Son

CHRIS: As a kid growing up, our family was to me, just like any other family, my dad just had a different job.

Broll: Chris & Owens strapping flowers onto the top of hearse

OWENS: *Up, up, up. Right, right, right. I don't want to mess with this, right here.*

CHRIS: I like the business aspect of the business. As far as dealing with the families it's too emotional for me personally and with the remains, I rather not, I'm fully capable of it, but I rather not.

Broll: Owens looking at pictures....

CHRIS: This business is his life, 24-7, 3-6-5. Eats, sleeps, everything just funerals.

Broll: Owens looking at old pictures in funeral home office

OWENS: I remember the first family that I did, back in 1970-71, I buried Mr. Rufus Felton, that was my first funeral.

Stills: Pictures of people Mr. Owens has buried.

OWENS: When I look at these pictures it makes me feel like we're here and then we're gone. And all that's left is either some pictures or some memories.

Broll: Various gravestones

OWENS: Last year my business probably dropped about 65 funerals from the year before and it's because of the economy. No matter how much you love somebody, you still got to eat, you still got to pay your rent, so you can't go and get yourself put outdoors to try to get someone buried.

Owens: Ok, we need to assemble ourselves in couples please to go over to the grave. You're probably going to be first, right?

Broll: Owens leads family over to the burial site

OWENS: I get quite a few people that come now, whereas they would normally have a traditional funeral and a burial for somebody, and now, the best they can do is do a direct cremation and maybe hope to get enough money to do a memorial service.

CHORUS: *(singing) My home is in heaven, there is no parting there, all will be glorious, bright and fair...*

Broll: Owens sprinkles flowers on casket; signing off-camera

Broll: Shots of caskets with prices

OWENS: Normally in good times, families would get together and \$300 a piece, \$400 a piece, and they just chip their money into it, but now you got to try to keep their job and they're not doing it anymore.

Stills: Shots of old funerals outdoors

Broll: Time-lapse sequence of Owens applying make-up to woman's face

OWENS: You have an obligation, when a person has lost a loved one, they have to give it a lot of thought about who they're going to trust to take care of that person. And when people give you that kind of trust, I feel like I'm obligated to really, really take care of them.

Stills: Photographs of deceased woman and her daughter

Broll: Daughter looks at mom in casket, Owens in front of funeral home

Title card: Gladys Simons 1927-2009

Broll: Framed photograph of Mr. and Mrs. Simons

WALTER: I remember that Friday I woke up about eight o'clock and my first message was from my grandfather letting me know my grandmother had passed away at 7 a.m. He was at the hospital with her and, you know, the nurses told me that he was there holding her hand still. It took them a while to even get the body out because he wouldn't let go.

Broll: Owens starts make-up

Still: Gladys as a model

WALTER: This is one of my grandmother's modeling pictures. She was always very fashionable. She also told me that, you know, when she was coming up how hard it was for black women to get modeling jobs or to get any jobs at all, you know, not only just as a woman, but then as a black woman.

Still: Gladys on a motorcycle

OWENS: You know, Mrs. Simons, she was always dressed up, very pretty and was always here with him...

Stills: Gladys and Coda

OWENS: He was in last week to make her arrangements and um, he just kinda looked a little tired. And I kinda said to him, "you know, maybe it was just the right timing for Mrs. Simon to go because now, you can get some rest and she can get some rest," you know, not knowing that the next day, he was going to be gone, too.

Title Card: Gladys Simons 1927-2009; Rev. Coda Simons 1922-2009

Broll: Wide shot revealing two caskets

OWENS: In grief and mourning, I've seen people die.

Still: Mr. Simons looking sad

WALTER: When I went to see him that Friday, you can just see he was glazed with weakness. It seemed like his reason to live was gone. I knew right away that maybe his time was -- was, you know -- was going to be short, but I didn't expect it to be as short as it was.

Broll: Owens finishes make-up, wheels two caskets into the church

WALTER: I never understood how much he loved her until she actually got into the nursing home. He would literally still go to the hospital every day and hold her hand, kiss her hand, rub her head. And that's when I knew that he was nothing without her.

SINGER: *(singing)* Why, why so much pain? But he knows what's best for me...

Broll: Simons family enters and stands before casket

WALTER: I honestly was thinking too I was dreaming because who expects a double funeral like that you know.

Broll: Walter crying over casket

WALTER: I was also having a little bit of regret.

Broll: People viewing open casket

WALTER: There are some people who just don't want to see it at all, but you know, for most people like myself, you need that last few minutes to sometimes touch, feel, and look and, you know, and let your tears flow.

Broll: Owens closing the casket; choir and congregants singing and clapping along

CHOIR: *(singing)* Oh lord, lift me up, and I shall stand by faith...

Broll: South Carolina scenics

Broll: Owens singing at podium

OWENS: *(singing)* Happy birthday to you.

Broll: Willie hugging and kissing people at party

OWENS: *I just want to say this, Mama, September the 29th, 2016, we'll see you right back here in this same spot celebrating your 100th birthday. Alright, five more years! God bless you.*

WILLIE: I'm not afraid of death, 'cause I know one day I got to go. And I'm preparing for it, I'm looking forward to it. I got my obituary wrote out. I got my program wrote out...(laughs)

Broll: Willie's open coffin in the back room

WILLIE: I call that "my bed" back there, where I'm be put to rest in. I call it "my bed."

Still: Willie and Owens as a young man

WILLE: He had that bed made. If I go first, I have to get the bed. If he go first, I guess he'll get it. But, ah, I call it "my bed." I said "my bed is in the back."

Broll: Willie touching coffin; Owens in family cemetery

OWENS: My mother asked me to do her eulogy when she pass away and she has a second person as a back-up in case, when the time comes, I'm not able to do it, I don't want to do it. I think it will probably be maybe the most difficult day of my life. So it, it would just be—a mess. I guess that's it, it would just be a mess.

Broll: Owens and Willie standing over birthday cake

Owens: *You want to blow your candles out? Okay, you did good.*

WILLIE: When my time come, I just hope I be ready. I always tell my kids give me my flowers while I live. I can smell 'em. I can see 'em. I can hold 'em, but when I'm laying up there in bed of mine, I don't care how many flowers you give me. I don't know I got one. So give 'em to me now while I can enjoy them.

Broll: Driving shots to New York

OWENS: It's not always depressing to always be in the presence of death, what it does it kind of keep your feet on the ground. I don't practice this all the time, but anything you need to do, you kind of need to do it now because tomorrow is not promised to you.

Broll: Owens getting a straight shave

OWENS: I'm not afraid of death and I'm not afraid of dying. I went some years ago and had a living will, done. So that when my time come, the people that love me won't prolong my agony and keep me here in pain. I think that talking about death is healthy, but I think about it all the time too. I'm always at my funeral.

Broll: Montage of clouds in the sky

OWENS: I remember a dream that I had. I was trapped in this building in the Bronx and I went up to the top of the building and I don't know what I was trying to escape from and there I was on this tall building and I decided that I was going to jump off of the building. I jumped off the building and just kept flying straight up towards Heaven, I always remember that dream.

Broll: Owens doing make-up on woman

OWENS: Now when they sing at funerals, "Some glad morning when this life is over, I'll fly away." I know how it's done, because I've flown. Because of my love for the living and the dead, it's why I'm who I am and what I do.

Broll: Sunset at cemetery

OWENS: "In the midst of life, we are in death," they say that at almost everybody's funeral. In the midst of life, we are in death."

Music: "Trouble of the World" by Mahalia Jackson

End Credits