



Natural Transitions

Volume 4 Issue 2

Conscious, holistic approaches to end of life



[Doing Death Well in Australia](#)

[Only with Love in the UK](#)

[Exploring Taharah: Jewish After-death Ritual](#)

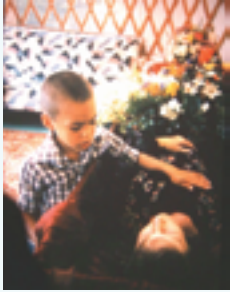
[Home Funeral Guides and Money](#)

Home Funerals 2015



FINAL PASSAGES

Institute of Conscious Dying, Home Funeral & Green Burial Education



*Transform your views of death and reframe
your relationship to living and dying*

Honoring Life's Final Passage

A three-level certificate program in Spiritual Death Midwifery
and Home Funeral Guidance with Jerrigrace Lyons & guest instructors

- 2016 Training Dates -

Levels One and Two:

March 25-28 and July 22-25 and Sept 23-26 Sebastopol, CA

April 28-May 1 Bend, OR

Level Three: May 18-22 Calistoga, CA

Please check our website for updates.

For individuals, caregivers and professionals: Final Passages' Sonoma County retreat-style workshops offer an atmosphere of intimacy, support and full immersion as we explore these teachings and much more:

- A conscious approach to dying and sharing our fears surrounding death
- Social, economic, ecological and spiritual benefits of caring for our own
- Legal, practical and spiritual components of family-directed home funerals
- Multi-cultural perspectives on funeral practices
- Practical techniques for preparing and honoring our beloveds
- Films from hundreds of personalized family-centered passages



CEU's available for Nursing and Behavioral Science professionals

Please visit www.finalpassages.org for more course information



Jerrigrace Lyons, Founding Director of Final Passages, is a trailblazer in the new field of home funeral guidance. Since 1995 she has trained hundreds of students in a sacred approach to conscious dying, natural death care and family-centered funerals. Many of her graduates are now leaders in the home funeral movement. Jerrigrace is one of the founders of the National Home Funeral Alliance and now an emeritus board member. She is featured in the acclaimed PBS documentary "A Family Undertaking."

Final Passages is a non-profit educational 501c3 dedicated to compassionate choices in conscious dying, natural death care, family-directed home funerals and green burial. Our work has appeared in major newspapers, television and in film. www.finalpassages.org

DEPARTMENTS

EDITORIAL

4 Bathe the Body
by Karen van Vuuren

COMMUNITY FORUM

5 The Work of the Green Burial Council
by Ed Bixby

MEDIA

29 A Night of Grief and Mystery on the
Stephen Jenkinson Road Show
by Karen van Vuuren

IN SPIRIT

32 Exploring the Soul of Taharah
by Rabbi Avivah W. Erlick and Richard A. Light

CULTURAL CONNECTIONS

34 Doing Death Well in Australia
by Zenith Virago

LAST WORDS

43 Reciprocation
and
Lola at Dawn
Watercolor by Nancy Jewel Poer

LAST WORDS

Nancy Jewel Poer, lecturer, author, and artist, is producer of an award-winning documentary on conscious dying, *The Most Excellent Dying* of Theodore Jack Heckelman, and the classic book, *Living into Dying: Spiritual and Practical Deathcare for Family and Community*. She has also written a children's book, *The Tear: A Story of Transformation and Hope When a Loved One Dies*. Find out more at nancyjewelpoer.com.

FEATURES

6
Unearthing the Tradition of Natural
Death Care by Jerrigrace Lyons

10
What's in a Name? The Debate about
Deathcare Terminology NHFA reprint

13
Only with Love: Claire Turnham's Approach
to UK Home Funerals by Claire Turnham

18
Home Sweet Home Funeral Home
by Olivia Bareham

22
One Washcloth
by Lynn Holzman, Rochelle Martin, and Susan Oppie

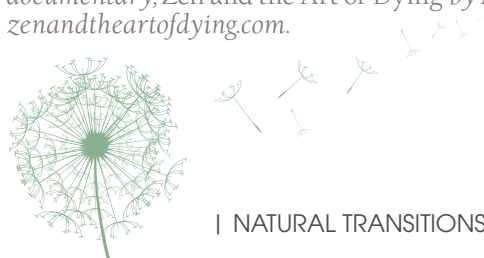
24
Home Funeral Guides:
Licensing and Money by Lee Webster

26
Dying for a Smaller Carbon Footprint
by Mary Reilly-McNellan

30
In the Parlor: Behind the Scenes of a
New Home Funeral Film by Daniel Boucher

37
Death as a Rite of Passage
by Kitty Edwards

Cover photo: Zenith Virago at the annual death memorial celebration in Byron Bay, Australia. Photo from the new documentary, *Zen and the Art of Dying* by Broderick Fox, zenandtheartofdying.com.



Bathe the Body

by Karen van Vuuren




Karen van Vuuren

“Healing is always found by going towards the suffering, not away from it,” Frank Ostaseski, founder of Zen Hospice, told an audience of after-death care educators at the 2015 National Home Funeral Alliance (NHFA) conference in Los Gatos, CA, this October.

I’ve thought about that in relation to home funerals. Laying out our own dead is an act of love, as well as a statement of honesty. Despite feelings of grief, we meet with an opportunity to face what is real. The corpse, apart from reminding us of the reality of death, wordlessly speaks of the biography of the departed, replete with joys and sorrows. With mindful, deeply personalized ritual, we can navigate the place of loss in a way that can be truly healing.

Ostaseski, a lanky, white-haired lion of a man who faced his own mortality a few years back after a heart attack, is a long-time champion of home funerals. “At Zen Hospice, we always bathed the body. We never forced anybody into participating, but inevitably they came forward and did something they wouldn’t have done otherwise,” he told the audience in Los Gatos. “One thing we could do to change the way we die in America would be to bathe the body.” He continued: “Home funeral guides are wisdom keepers who have a responsibility to share what you have learned. When you put hands on death, you learn things that our culture needs.”

Ostaseski’s keynote marked a buoyant beginning to a weekend of inspirational speakers including the entertaining Caitlin Doughty, of *Smoke Gets in Your Eyes* book fame, and Nancy Poer, the grande dame of contemporary after-death care. Poer’s session primarily emphasized her understanding of the spiritual nature of deathcare work and called for the helpers to remember the consciousness of the deceased in caring for them at the time of transition.

Many of the faces of the participants at this biennial conference were new, and that bodes well for the movement. Among the presenters, the forerunners were out in force, including Jerrigrace Lyons of Final Passages. In 2015, Final Passages celebrated 21 years of existence, and in this issue of NTM, Lyons shares a retrospective of her remarkable journey. To mark this biennial conference year for the NHFA, we’ve included a liberal selection of home funeral stories. Home funeral guide, Olivia Bareham, shares her transition to funeral home owner; Heidi Boucher unveils a new documentary to illuminate the home funeral option; and One Washcloth project members encourage clinicians and others to invite families to participate in deathcare. What a difference we are making! 



Natural Transitions

Published biannually by Natural Transitions
a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization

3980 North Broadway
Suite #103-171
Boulder, CO 80304
(303) 443-3418
mag@naturaltransitions.org
<http://naturaltransitions.org>

© 2011 Natural Transitions Magazine
Opinions expressed in Natural Transitions Magazine
are not necessarily those of Natural Transitions or
its Board members.

OUR VISION

- Acceptance of death, loss, and grief as a natural part of life

OUR MISSION

- To share holistic approaches to end of life
- To provide a forum for end-of-life caregivers and educators

EXECUTIVE EDITOR Karen van Vuuren

ASSISTANT TO THE EDITOR Mary Reilly McNellan

COPY EDITOR / PROOFREADER Margaret Pevec

DESIGN Sean Doyle doylegraphics.com

LAYOUT Ann Erwin

ILLUSTRATOR Christina Lewis

ADVERTISING DIRECTOR Marcie Cole
magads@naturaltransitions.org

Ten Years Encouraging Eternal Greenness The Work of the Green Burial Council

by Ed Bixby




The last ten years at the Green Burial Council (GBC) has been like watching a child grow. As we all know, children as well as adults learn by trial and error. We've worked tirelessly and learned from our mistakes as is common for grass roots non-profits in their formative years. The article by Lee Webster (GBC board member) in the previous issue of *Natural Transitions Magazine* proves just how far the GBC has come. Our ability to serve the public by providing education and knowledge on the most current standards, practices, and consumer funeral options has contributed to the natural expansion of the green burial movement in the US.

The GBC considers itself the standard-bearer for eco certification and a vehicle for public awareness and funeral industry awareness of natural burial. The core principles of the GBC are supported by a committed board of directors. This Board includes cemetery and funeral owners, funeral product providers, funeral directors, and environmental specialists who daily have their boots on the ground within the home funeral and natural burial movements. The diversity of our GBC Board provides us with the insight we need to better serve the public and providers, and to illuminate best practices to protect the movement as a whole.

The GBC has established guidelines and created educational resource materials for its certified providers and consumers. These guide and protect our providers, as well as the public, ensuring all essential green burial requirements are followed. Becoming a certified provider means making the ultimate commitment to the consumer and to the environment.

The GBC knows that public awareness is the key to success. So we are proud to announce an interactive way that people can get involved with the expanding green burial movement. "Friends of the GBC" is a new initiative we're offering as a free service to consumers. Signing up will allow supporters to receive up-to-date news about and insight into what is happening with the movement for natural burial through our free, monthly newsletter. Consumers can also ask questions and receive answers from green burial experts. It's a way for supporters to further educate themselves about natural burial and become advocates for the movement.

The GBC is also putting renewed effort into fundraising, and we are meeting with government officials in the hopes of creating legislation that promotes natural burial options. Natural Burial is not a fleeting idea. It's about cultural change in the way we view and embrace the care of the dead. For more information and to support our work, please visit GreenBurialCouncil.org 

Natural Transitions has always focused on building community. With that goal in mind, our Community Forum page is to encourage communication among our subscribers and within this movement for more conscious, holistic, and greener approaches to end of life. We welcome comments on the articles and sharing news and inspiration from your part of the world! Email your letters to mag@naturaltransitions.org.

Ed Bixby is the president of the Green Burial Council's education and certification programs. He is also the owner and operator of Steelmantown Green Burial Preserve in southern New Jersey. Find out more at steelmantowncemetery.com.

Unearthing the Tradition of Natural Death Care

by Jerrigrace Lyons, Founder of Final Passages

My involvement in the home funeral movement wasn't born overnight. Twenty-one years ago, the terms "death midwifery" and "home funeral" were not in my vocabulary, let alone a road map for what to do when someone dies. My initiation and awakening to the possibility of a home funeral came through the sudden and unexpected death of a dear friend, Carolyn, who left specific instructions for her post-death care and memorial. She embraced ancient traditions and asked her friends to care for her at home after her death. I consider Carolyn to be my mentor and guiding light, both before and after her death. Caring for her transformed my life and started me on a whole new path of service to the community.

Today, people call me a trailblazer. I like to say that I am a pioneer, but it is not a new trail. Instead I see the movement as unearthing tradition, cutting back the weeds which have grown over the traditional path of caring for our dead. Like the home birth movement of the 1960s, we are reclaiming our right to care for our loved ones with wakes, vigils, and home funerals. Though it's gaining momentum, I believe there's a distance to go before this movement becomes what I envision: a world in which everyone is aware of their options for having a home funeral, being empowered to direct, participate in, and lead our own end-of-life rites and rituals with honor and grace.

Looking back I can see that there were a number of areas that were organically developing, areas that at times would present an extreme challenge to every fiber of my being and make me want to scream. In the end, I realized I was never alone in my/our plight. There were always angels walking beside me/us and guiding the way. I like to think they have a vested interest in making sure those who cross over the threshold into the

next realms have the same love and care as those entering this world.

Growing into Leadership

I never set out to be a leader in the home funeral or natural death care movement. My role evolved out of the example Carolyn set by writing out her last wishes. A year and half after Carolyn's death, I invited a group of interested friends to my home, and the Natural Death Care Project was born, becoming the first non-profit organization with the mission to inform all people of their rights to care for their dead. Several times I tried to give away the daunting task of leading this group, but it kept coming back to me. When a friend agreed to take it on, she immediately got a full-time job and changed her mind.

There were many ups and downs of our group and through it all, a couple of us were guiding families through their own home funerals. Later, Mark, my husband-to-be, would play a much stronger role as a partner, educating and assisting families. Once I gained enough experience guiding others, I realized the need to develop a guidebook for those we could not reach personally. At that point my friend, Janelle Macrae, stepped

forward to co-author our guidebook *Creating Home Funerals* and to co-direct the Natural Death Care Project.

While developing the guidebook, we realized we needed new language to describe ancient traditions; to find words that the modern world would understand. We coined the phrase "home funeral" to describe the process of home-based and family-directed funeral arrangements. At the time we didn't notice the irony that it was a reversal of the term "funeral home." After a year of writing and revising, the book was completed and made available on our website.

In 2000, Janelle and I developed our first two levels of training, "Honoring Life's Final Passage," and began teaching. We changed our name to Final Passages. With donations, volunteer help, and further developing a language through trial and error, this non-techy leader found real triumph in completing our website (and again this year with a major upgrade).

My Spiritual Journey

My background in Reiki and exposure to the philosophy of the Center for Spiritual Living (which provides spiritual tools to transform our personal lives and make the world a better place) has been vital to me in this work. I learned to listen with more than just my ears.

I was guided by two voices: Carolyn's and my dad's. It was not the norm for me to hear voices speaking directly to me when there was no audible sound, but the day after Carolyn's death, as I was considering whether to go back to her house to complete preparation for the crematorium, I heard her voice say loud and clear, "Go back to the house."

Friend and mentor, Carolyn Whiting

www.naturaltransitions.org



Courtesy of Final Passages

When my father was in a coma dying, connected to machines, and I was wondering why they didn't unplug him, I heard him say, "Be patient." When my mother finally accepted that he wasn't coming back, we knew it was time. My patience had allowed her to get to that place of letting go. I had no idea at the time that this lesson in patience would be so important for my work ahead.

Slowly, I learned to trust and go with the flow. I saw how each home funeral took on a life of its own. I learned to step back and release control. Those in this work know the power of the threshold. Each family feels the energy, whether they call it Love, God, Angels, Spirit, or something else. It is something higher than anyone can create or imagine on their own. Obviously something spiritually bigger is at work here. Feeling this, and experiencing the synchronicity and magical connections that unfold, feeds my soul and keeps me passionate about this work. Standing in the threshold alongside the families makes it all worth it. I feel held. The family feels held. It's why after more than 20 years, when I get a call, I feel both compassionate and enlivened. What a huge gift and opportunity to be a guide. This is a deeply moving and tender time, and we are honored to hold the families as they hold their own to say goodbye.

I have dedicated myself to this work. In embodying and sharing the wisdom and passing it on, I've become part of the shamanic tradition that Carolyn passed on to me. I trust that every person who has had a hand in it has contributed to this living teaching.



Lyons' client, Nancy, in shroud with family gathered for ritual at burial

Encouraging and Empowering Families

I left the powerful experience of caring for Carolyn's body with the strong desire to share it with everyone I knew or met. I was rudely awakened to discover that many people didn't want to talk about death. When I first began this work, it seemed most people didn't want to use the "D" words. When I told people I was a death midwife, some replied that it was so nice of me to work with people who were hard of hearing.

Talking to people about the idea of keeping a body at home was one of the most difficult challenges because of our death-denying culture. People did not understand why anyone might want to keep a body at home. I could see by the glazed look in their eyes they didn't want to think about it, or they thought it was ghoulish. They could not imagine how this could benefit them or be healing. Rather, they pictured what they had seen in the media, zombies and the walking dead, complete with odors

and macabre decomposition. They feared that the last look at their loved ones would be a bad memory.

Many of our first cases were referred to us by hospices that had been assisting people who were financially challenged. One family had spent all of their savings on medical bills and now was searching for a way to cover the cost of a funeral on top of all that. When they heard from hospice that we were helping people to arrange funerals by donation, they turned to us for assistance. Little did they know all the benefits they would reap aside from the financial savings.

When the home funeral was complete, they turned to me and said that they could not imagine doing it any other way. It became a recurring mantra for almost all of the families we have assisted since. They all say it was an amazing experience because they were allowed to say good-bye.

There were others attracted to what we were offering in the community. As I began to study and research how other world cultures handled death, I realized that many cultures and religions honor their dead for at least three days. I encouraged families to stay connected to the death process by spending time with their loved one and to grieve in a slower, gentler way rather than the conventional whisking away of the body.

We slowly started to get people's attention for reasons other than cost savings. One of the first families I guided was Quaker; they loved the simplicity of taking care of their own arrangements. When I started to tell my story about Carolyn, the first ones to listen were those involved with anthroposophy, a philosophy developed by Rudolf Steiner,

who suggested that people stay beside a person's body for three days following his/her death.

Others who have been drawn to the idea of taking care of their own rather than turning their care over to strangers include people who:

- ♦ had bad experiences with funeral homes and were looking for an alternative;
- ♦ had religious or cultural reasons for wanting to have their loved ones at home;
- ♦ were used to being autonomous, like home birthers and home schoolers;
- ♦ understood the important rites of honoring a passage.

The Physical Process Following Death

The experience with Carolyn taught me that washing the body of the deceased is very much the same as washing a bed-bound person. But I didn't know anything about rigor mortis and how to close the eyes and the mouth. Remembering the tradition of coins on the eyes, we tried that, but it didn't work very well, and we had to come up with more effective ways.

We learned how to preserve the body with dry ice. We discovered how to use it and maintain it for three or more days during the wake.

What a surprise when we first discovered that too much dry ice improperly wrapped could cause a layer of frost on the deceased's clothing! We realized that it came from the condensation as the dry ice sublimates – another new term! We also found that dry ice could assist us when closing the mouth if rigor mortis had already set in, and that it did a very good job of preserving the body when used correctly and was maintained during the vigil.

We found that keeping a good sense of humor helped in many situations. For example, one family had elevated the head of their loved one during the vigil. Since dry ice freezes the back of the body, he was frozen in that shape. When we put his feet in the casket, his head was up out of the casket. We gently lowered the head, and his feet see-sawed up! We had to wait for the body to warm enough before we could put the lid on the casket.

Another family wanted to close the eyes of their deceased patriarch by putting salt in a zipper baggie. They found that they were out of zipper baggies, so they used a surgical glove. They placed the salt-filled glove over his eyes, and laughed when they saw that the glove appeared to be pointing, just as he always had in life.

Paperwork and Crematories

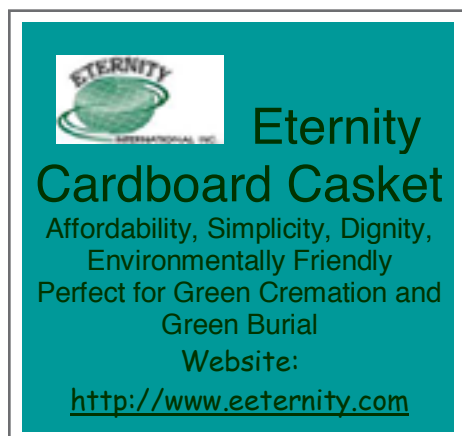
In order to help families with all of their arrangements, we needed to learn how to correctly complete the Death Certificate and Disposition of Remains for the state of California. This was no small feat. Initially, we invited an employee of the Office of Vital Records to one of our group meetings to explain the rules and how best to work with their office.


When the Office of Vital Records started to use the online EDRS (Electronic Death Registry System) in 2006, we thought that completing and filing the paperwork for families would be much easier. But we soon discovered that families were not allowed to use this simpler method; they are still required to hand-write or type these documents on an old-fashioned typewriter.

I also discovered that the stereotype of doctors having some of the worst handwriting is true! Early on, I had to buy a medical dictionary and still frequently need to call the doctor's office to help me decipher handwriting and medical terms. Just last week, an assistant helped me decipher the doctor's handwriting, and now I know how to spell "oropharyngeal aspiration," and what it means. Don't even ask.

Right away we were able to find a crematory willing to work with families who were caring for their own, but

| ADVERTISEMENTS |



**Eternity**
Cardboard Casket
Affordability, Simplicity, Dignity,
Environmentally Friendly
Perfect for Green Cremation and
Green Burial
Website:
<http://www.eeternity.com>



Affordable, Green Caskets 

- Caskets and Urns made from sustainably harvested blue-stain (heart-leaf) pine
- Certified by the Green Burial Council
- Stress tested to over 600 lbs.
- Assembled caskets starting at \$610
- Unassembled caskets starting at \$425
- Funeral homes must accept our caskets
- Optional lid emblems (cross, oak leaf, etc.)



www.NaturesCasket.com • 720-375-7613



What's Your TRIBUTE?
Share your ideas to
commemorate a loved one



mourningdovestudio.com

after a couple of years they felt pressured by other funeral directors to stop encouraging this autonomy due to their fear of withering financial gain. They stopped engaging with us and I persevered until finding others who were more open minded. No easy task. Now we have three in our area.

Rituals, Ceremonies, and Mourning

The beauty of this work is that every home funeral is unique. One man who died loved Volkswagens, and was always working on one. His wife lined his casket with fabric printed with Volkswagens. Another man raced cars, and his family painted the outside of his cremation casket to look like a racecar. Friends of one woman who died threw chocolate kisses into her grave because she loved them.

We found that people needed a place to put their grief, and came up with the idea of decorating a cardboard cremation casket and other art projects to enhance their memorial experience. One family collected lace remnants and sewed them together into a blanket to cover their mother after she died. Another family wrote love notes and stories on paper stars and hearts and placed them in the casket with their loved one.

Every home funeral can reflect the life of a loved one, and bring meaning and value to everyone participating. A home funeral and the attendant grief are one of the most personal and potentially life-changing passages that we go through. The death of a loved one brings everything in our lives into sharper perspective and unites us all beyond our cultural differences.



Lyons teaching in New Hampshire


Going Forward

The movement has grown so much since I began this journey 21 years ago. There is now a National Home Funeral Alliance non-profit organization with countless home funeral educators and guides, and growing media coverage on this topic. We have already trained more than 1,000 people in our workshops, and helped nearly 400 families with home funerals. We have traveled across the country, and to Canada, England, and New Zealand. Wherever we go, people are hungry to learn about relevant ways of embracing death, rituals that will include all ages of family members, and how to exercise more authority over their loved ones' final passages.

I've heard it said that when 20% of the population adopts a habit or lifestyle, it becomes a permanent part of the culture. I would like to think that home death care, home funerals, and green burials (burial with low environmental impact on the earth) will once again become a normal part of family life.

I recall when I first started talking about home funerals to groups of people, I

would ask how many had heard of Reiki. Very few raised their hand. Fast-forward 20 years, and now almost everyone in a group will raise their hand and say that they have at least heard of it. This gives me hope that in another ten years, the terms "death midwife" and "home funeral" will be common knowledge. Even if people don't choose this direction for themselves, they will know that they have this choice. Home funeral guides/death midwives/death doulas will be accepted as an option for a path of service.

Personal and spiritual lessons learned and experiences I have had during my journey have been rewarding beyond my imagination. My heart feels nothing but gratitude for all of it, challenges included. My role as an educator and guide in this process has given me a purpose, knowing that I am empowering others through the experience of home funerals. Knowing that there is even more to learn and that we can bring this movement to common practice together inspires me. 

Learn more about Final Passages at finalpassages.org.

What's in a Name ?

The debate about deathcare terminology

Many of us who are committed to the concept of family-led after-death care realize that there has been growing confusion over what we call ourselves and what the public is hearing and understanding. This concern has come to the attention of the National Home Funeral Alliance (NHFA) from several directions, suggesting that, as the umbrella organization in the US, we take the lead in grappling with defining the many-faceted aspects of the vocation of end of life, dying, and after-death care.

What we call ourselves is both a reflection of our own self-worth and a way of advertising to the world what we offer. In a field as new and unknown as this, at least to those who have no memory of the ancient practice of caring for our own dead without professional assistance, presenting a clear, consistent message is crucial for many reasons.

As the pioneers who are shaping the national conversation about after-death care, it is up to us to unite in spirit and intention. Our words and the terms we use to describe ourselves and what we offer matter. We must find common terminology for what we do in order to be understood by those we seek to serve.

Getting Started

While we understood that no one term would be satisfying to all of our constituents who provide services, our first and foremost goal was to meet the needs of the public. A public with no relationship to a concept will not respond to shocking or uncomfortable

Reprinted with permission from the National Home Funeral Alliance. Originally published on the NHFA website as Clearly Defined: Matching Deathcare Terminology to Our Intentions.

terms, leaving our providers without an audience. In meeting the needs of our members, it behooved us to bring our terms into alignment, if for no other reason than to ensure our own future success.

We began by polling our members, both through a formal, online survey and by calling and writing to a large variety of involved persons. The results were unambiguous, giving us sure footing in developing an understanding of what end-of-life care advocates of all interests call themselves and how they see their involvement in the big picture. We also felt strongly that it was up to us to evaluate the effectiveness of current terms and imagine a fresh outlook.

Survey Results

The thirty people who responded met the criteria for survey results relevance. In addition, we reached out to individuals by phone and email to comment and give recommendations.

Asked to choose one definition that best describes a person who helps a family with after-death care of the body, 76.6% selected “home funeral guide,” with 13.3% selecting “death midwife.”

When asked what best describes a person who works with a dying person to help facilitate a smooth or conscious death, 63.3% chose “death midwife,” with “death doula” a far second at 16.6%. Though “death midwife” is used commonly in some parts of the country, many people felt strongly that the early term “transition guide” might be better recognized, less threatening, and more readily accepted in public and medical spheres.

The term “celebrant” was the easy choice for someone who officiates at a funeral service at 93.3%.

The hardest term to determine was for someone who both aids the dying person and stays to help the family with after-death body care. “Home funeral guide” edged out “death midwife” at 30% and 26.6% respectively, but “death and dying guide” and “transition guide” were still in the running at 16.6% and 13.3%. Due to the strong and relatively even split between the terms, many members voiced that a fresh, more universal term might better serve to describe someone who provides a full spectrum of death and dying services.

Defining the Problem

Results of the survey, along with many and varied discussions, helped answer some questions while bringing up new trains of thought. As we explored, more terms were discovered that individuals were using to satisfy their perceptions of their own unique offerings. Several concerns were identified through this process.

Establishing Credibility

There is a lack of consistency in terminology to distinguish those who provide before- and after-death care. This may create a perception from those we seek to serve that we are disorganized, unprofessional, or on the fringe. Since people are trying to wrap their heads around new concepts, having multiple, hazy word usage may make it even harder for the public to envision and adopt these new ways in lieu of conventional practices that rely on a professional industry that has a well-established language and marketing brand.

Creating Our Own Brand

Without a clear understanding of what end-of-life educators offer based on their title, the people we are trying to reach will not know who or what to ask for when they want a specific service. Clearly separating what we call ourselves when providing before- or after-death care is one step toward clarity. Someone who provides a fuller range of services also needs a term that is easily recognizable.

For those trying to raise awareness about their services, undefined or misunderstood terms make it difficult to help educate and inform the public. Instead, we should have a thoughtful, coherent and consistent reply for members of the media who are in a position to expand our reach. And since the internet is one of our major tools in getting the word out, search engines must be able to find us easily with a few succinct key words.

Our own members in this fast-growing movement are clamoring for consistent and understandable terminology for what we do. Clear role definitions will inspire confidence by reflecting our ability to market ourselves effectively and deliver on our promises of quality care in whatever areas we feel we are qualified.

Choosing Wisely

So what was the criteria for choosing titles that adequately convey a consistent message and have a chance of becoming instantly recognizable? We developed the following set of considerations to guide us:

- ♦ Titles must sound mainstream, be non-threatening, and be easy to understand.
- ♦ Descriptors need to get the idea across in everyday language.
- ♦ Terminology needs to easily integrate into a medical environment and language lexicon.
- ♦ Terms must translate well across regional cultures and generations, faiths, and worldviews.

The role of the NHFA is to educate, not regulate, but it is also to provide leadership. We recognize that we will never reach 100% agreement about what terms to use. What we do agree on is that this proposal does not require others to use a specific term—we have simply defined the terminology that the NHFA will be using going forward, and we encourage our members to do so as well. This approach also gives us the freedom to grow, change, and redefine as this movement matures.

After careful consideration of the data and research from a wide variety of resources and individuals, the NHFA has chosen to employ the following terms:

Terms and Definitions for End-of-Life Service Providers

Death and Dying Guide: one who works with the dying person and family to accompany them throughout the death experience, facilitates family-led after-death home or facility care, and may attend to spiritual and ceremonial needs as requested

End-of-Life Transition Guide: one who accompanies a dying person and/or family and friends through a personal, intentional, and conscious dying process to achieve a conscious death

Home Funeral Guide: one who empowers families and/or friends to care for their own dead, including educating, consulting, and guiding them through after-death care

Celebrant: one who works with family and/or friends to co-create a highly customized ceremony (for funeral, memorial, and/or celebration of life)

Terms and Definitions for Advocates and Educators

Home Funeral Advocate, Home Funeral Educator: While not included in the lexicon of end-of-life care providers who educate families through consulting, coaching, demonstration, and myriad other means *privately*, home funeral advocates/educators do vitally

important work by educating *publicly* through presentations, workshops, local tabling opportunities, and other events aimed at developing a global understanding of the home funeral movement.

Glossary of Related Funeral and Disposition Terms

Home Vigil (also known as lying in honor, visitation): the period between death and final disposition that may include family and community visitation in the home or place of rest for the purpose of acknowledging the death, supporting the family, and validating grief while offering the opportunity for private goodbyes

Community Care Group: Often called threshold groups or threshold circles, community care groups are trained to care for and support others within their group or the larger community during the home funeral period (death to final disposition).

Conventional Burial: final disposition by full body burial in the earth in a casket that is usually buried in a concrete, plastic, or fiberglass vault for purposes of maintenance of the lawn cemetery

Crematory (aka crematorium, cremator or retort): a place where cremation takes place

Green Funeral: after-death care that employs environmentally-responsible practices, that may include organic, noninvasive preservation techniques of the body; use of locally sourced materials, such as native pine caskets or hand sewn shrouds made by regional craftspeople; wildflowers; natural burial; or other regional opportunities or practices

Green or Natural Burial: final disposition by full body burial in a hybrid cemetery, natural, or conservation burial ground or preserve that allows decomposition processes to occur naturally; eschews embalming fluid, concrete or plastic vaults, rainforest wood and metal caskets, pesticide or herbicide use

Home Burial: final disposition by full body burial in the earth on private family property

Disposition: the final step in after-death care in which the remains of the deceased are either buried in the ground or entered into a cremation retort (The legal place of disposition in a cremation is the crematory.)

Home Funeral: family or community-directed after-death care from the time of death through final disposition; may occur in home or other setting; may or may not include professional assistance; may or may not include a vigil, ceremony, or memorial service

Interment: the act of burying a dead person


Inurnment: the act of placing cremated remains in an urn; may also refer to placing the urn in a location such as the ground or in an above-ground columbarium

Scattering: when cremated remains are released to the air, sea or earth without burial

Threshold Choir: a chapter of a national non-profit organization choir that sings to people on the threshold of dying, to soothe and reassure the dying, their family, friends, and caregivers

Summary

There is clear evidence of rapid growth of the home funeral movement throughout the US since the inception of the National Home Funeral Alliance in 2010. In a seemingly brief period of time, a culture that encourages open conversation and engagement with death has emerged, both adding to the strength of the movement and illuminating a need for consistency and clarity in the words we use and the ways we identify ourselves to one another and to the public.

It is the fervent hope of the NHFA that its members embrace a changing lexicon of terms early in the growth of the movement that best reflect our collective intentions. Failing to come to agreement on this issue may lead to fracturing of this courageous yet fledgling culture. We urge you to adopt the terminology that best describes your services and intentions within the framework of this united front. 

|ADVERTISEMENT|

THE Advance Death Care Directive: Planning for funeral and final disposition

Don't leave these decisions to loved ones - complete your directive today!



deathcaredirective.com



Published by Sacred Crossings
sacredcrossings.com
310/968.2763

|ADVERTISEMENT|



National Home Funeral Alliance
www.HomeFuneralAlliance.org

Only with Love

Claire Turnham's Approach to UK Home Funerals



Turnham family honoring "Poppa"

When my father, Ivan, was suddenly diagnosed as being terminal, it was a complete shock. I had only just arrived from England with my four children, to stay with him on vacation in New Zealand. We were expecting to celebrate his 72nd birthday together and hear that his recent surgery to remove a bowel tumor had been successful. Instead, at his first appointment after the operation, we were told that Dad was going to die, and while the oncologist didn't know exactly when, he felt it would be soon.

From that life-defining moment, our plans, hopes, and lives were changed forever. Dad and I just clung to each other and cried. The pain in my heart was overwhelming.

In essence, while I understood medically that no more could be done to save my dad's life, I felt we could help him as a family. I knew in my heart that we could not, ultimately, change the outcome, but I knew intuitively that by being there for him, we could change the journey.

I remember driving home from the hospital numb with disbelief. We both felt scared and distraught, yet the reality

was we had no choice but to accept what was happening. I also needed to tell my children Poppy 14, Celia 11, Theo 7, and Fern 3, who were all waiting for us at home.

I summoned all my courage, faced my deepest fears, and shared the truth to the

best of my understanding with each of my children in an age-appropriate, sensitive way. Knowing how much they loved their Poppa, and how much he loved them, I felt it was important they all felt included and valued in the process.

I had no intimate experience of death or dying before this, but I knew instinctively that I wanted our remaining time together to be the very best, most natural, joyful, and most real and loving it could be for all of us. With the support of my family, friends, and the local hospice, I devoted my time to caring for my dad in his own home. With each passing day, we became more attentive, more caring, savoring every moment, making it last. We lived totally in the moment until he died, gently cradled in my arms, surrounded by us all.

It had been Dad's wish to remain at home and to "live" up until he died, and this is exactly what he did. We lived with him throughout this time, staying with him in his own home. The day before he died, we all enjoyed a day out to a bird sanctuary. This is now a

priceless memory of a beautiful day we shared together.

Dad was able to speak right up to his last breath, and one of the most significant things he said to me was that he was so proud of everything I had achieved so far. I knew at that time, by the way he spoke, that there was more to come, and I trusted that he would be proud of that too.

I cared for Dad in death, just as I had in life. As his only daughter, it felt only natural for me to continue that care, and we kept his body at home until we led his funeral some six days later. I home-birthed and home-educated my children, and so it just makes sense to me that death care and funerals belong with families too.

The children were fully involved in the care of Dad at home, and so we had time to accept and come to terms with everything that was happening. The children each took on their own role, by choice and without direction. They did what felt right and comfortable for them. Poppy wrote poetry and helped with gathering photos and music. Celia helped choose the clothes we dressed Dad in and lovingly looked after him. Theo drew pictures of roses and stood watch, and Fern who had just celebrated her fourth birthday two days before Dad died, talked to him and cuddled him throughout.

I had always felt very safe with my dad, and I remember fondly how as a child he had lovingly held my hand. When he did, I felt secure and protected. After he died, my being able to tenderly touch his body and hold his hand again was very important to me. When the time came to finally let his body go, I was able to still feel the imprint of his hand in mine and I can still feel it to this day.

With the help of family and friends we celebrated Dad's life with a beautiful



Fern with "Poppa"

and intimate funeral ceremony in his own much-loved garden. Friends generously gave their time, brought delicious homemade food to share, and we gathered flowers from his garden and theirs. We read Poppy's poetry and played Dad's choice of music. We gathered in close around his coffin and spoke words of warmth. We were all surrounded in love.

For myself, this experience was life-changing and transforming. I found my active involvement in caring for Dad and our continued connection to be nourishing, healing, and sustaining.

In my experience, when we are encouraged to embrace death by lovingly participating in this way, we feel more empowered to confidently support, guide and give back to each other, ourselves, and our communities. Experiencing Dad's death so fully made me more determined to live a life of love, meaning, and purpose. This is my dad's legacy.

Beginning Only With Love

In May 2014, I founded Only With Love: Family-led Home Funerals (OWL) as a way of sharing my knowledge, skills, and experience to help others. My future is dedicated to passing on these gifts and

to help support other families as if they were my own.

My work with OWL spreads mainly by word of mouth. To every family I help—as a celebrant, advocate, family death care educator, or home funeral guide—I devote my time to the best of my ability. This is not dependent on how much a family can or may pay. Instead, I offer my service as a gift from my heart, and I am dedicated to gently changing death care one family at a time. Before my dad died, he told me that the care we had given him was priceless and that he loved us unconditionally. I am now paying this love forward.

I passionately believe that home and family-led funerals offer a value beyond price. Only With Love is built on trust, fairness, gentleness, and tender loving care for all, and we offer families a “pay as you feel” service. It is up to each family to determine the value this holds for them. Most importantly, I value the relationships and the loving connection with others. When families entrust me with the care of their loved ones, I trust them to help me continue with this meaningful work, in whatever way feels right, comfortable, and appropriate for them, depending on their individual needs and circumstance.

I am inspired when I see families and communities helping each other and themselves compassionately, with

kindness and gratitude, in the spirit of one human family and community. This compassion extends beyond the families I work with, and the benefits of working in this way can be seen in countless beautiful and unexpected ways.

Suspended Coffins

Only With Love passes on all expenses—at cost—to families, and offers the idea of a “suspended coffin” to help another grieving family in need. Families may, if they wish, choose to pay for a simple coffin or shroud for another family's loved one. There is no expectation, but the service is there if wanted.

OWL's approach to funeral care may appear at odds with the mainstream options here in the UK. However, I am not alone in my approach. The number of companies offering family-led, home-based deathcare is growing. Many of us believe that bringing the funeral back into the home is needed to help families make more informed choices about how they wish to say good-bye.

Dee Ryding of Divine Ceremony, an undertaking firm based in Bristol, UK, explains, “Our current contemporary funeral practices within the UK have as much to do with one woman's inability to deal with grief as they do with economics. After her beloved Albert's death, Queen Victoria sank into a deep grief. All the resulting masculine pomp and ceremony within the funeral industry as it has become, stems from this time, and strong Victorian rituals around funerals and grieving were born during this era.”

“Before this time, it was midwives who brought the babies into the world, and it was the midwives who laid out the dead. Death was an intrinsic part of our lives. People stayed home after death; families attended to their dead and began the important process of grief and mourning together—close to their loved ones. Home funerals within the UK were normal, particularly in the North [of England].”

Indeed, my own maternal great grandmother was the woman in her Yorkshire village who was called upon to help at times of transition.

She supported the families in her community at both birth and death. My mother still remembers, as a child in World War II, being evacuated to her grandmother's home and her grandmother being regularly called upon to lay people out in their darkened front rooms.

Now within the UK, we are returning to this traditional and more personal, meaningful, and affordable approach. I am working alongside an increasing number of families who are rightfully recognizing that they are the best people to care for their loved ones and so they are taking responsibility to remain connected and participate more fully in this extended process.

Family-Arranged Funerals

Rosie Inman-Cook of the Natural Death Centre has this to say about families who don't like conventional funeral directors: "Cost comes into it," she says, "but mostly they just hate the black Victoriana approach. They don't want it and certainly don't want to pay for it."

Many people who phone Rosie on the NDC helpline are repeat DIYers. They understand the emotional benefits, and will never hand over the body of a loved one again.

Rosie recognizes that "our biggest challenge is education and creating awareness in our communities that home and family arranged funerals are legal, safe, and possible."

James Leedam (Leedam Natural Heritage, a green burial site) confirms that the freedom and lack of formality at a natural burial ground has led to "a huge increase in enquiries from people over the last ten years. Increasingly, people are wanting to organize things themselves, without using a funeral director (or with only minimal support).

"Additionally, we are seeing a rise in the UK of more progressive, flexible funeral directors, who are keen to support families wishing to participate more fully in the funeral arrangements."

The Ideal Death Show and Good Funeral Guide Awards

Two highlights of the year in the UK funeral industry are the annual Ideal Death Show and The Good Funeral Guide Awards, held together in early September.

The Ideal Death Show offers an alternative to mainstream funeral services, spotlighting the many and varied options available, with an emphasis on green practices. The highlight of the weekend is the awards ceremony that acknowledges excellence within the death world. In both 2014 and 2015, I was honored to be a finalist for the Good Funeral Awards in the categories of Most Promising Funeral Director and Most Outstanding Contribution to the Understanding of Death.

In 2015, Jerrigrace Lyons (of Final Passages in the US), and I led a series of home funeral guidance and natural body care workshops in Oxfordshire, held during the Oxfordshire-based Kicking the Bucket Festival of Living and Dying (www.kickingthebucket.co.uk). Organized by Liz Rothschild of Westmill Burial Ground, over 40 events took place during the four-week event to promote conversations about death and dying. Our home funeral workshops were an intrinsic part of the festival and were attended by members of the UK death-care community, as well as the general public.



Dee Ryding heads a procession at Divine Ceremony/Home Funeral Network launch



Divine Ceremony and Home Funeral Network water-borne launch

Only With Love

Home Funeral Network

The UK Home Funeral Network was born with the encouragement of the Natural Death Centre and the US National Home Funeral Alliance.

In June 2015, the HFN and Divine Ceremony's undertaking service were launched simultaneously in Bristol. Over 100 people came out in support. It seemed highly appropriate to combine the launch of these two entities since Divine Ceremony was involved in one of our home funeral workshops in October 2014. Founder Dee Ryding



Claire Turnham speaks about the new Home Funeral Network.



Turnham with client at green burial

now works within the Bristol and Bath area offering personal funeral services and ceremonies to families in her care. For Dee, “the emergence of the HFN is timely—families are keen to know what is possible. Having a resource which runs alongside and is complementary to the Natural Death Centre, offering guidance and support to families and to fellow industry professionals, is crucial.

“The HFN is committed to enabling families to make informed choices about home funerals. We offer education and guidance for all those involved in arranging a home-based, family-led funeral in our communities, and we are dedicated to promoting environmentally sound and culturally nurturing death practices. We provide a link to similar individuals, families, and independent businesses, with the aim of sharing resources, knowledge, and experiences. Importantly, the network supports not only funerals that take place entirely at home but also facilitators who are bridging the existing industry and the consumer.”

Smaller local branches of this movement are beginning to appear, such as The Community Funeral Network in Brighton, led by Tora Colwill of The Modern Funeral. Incorporating monthly meetings and a supporting Facebook page, The Modern Funeral offers practical support to families who would otherwise struggle to pay for assistance with the logistical aspects of a funeral.

The UK is experiencing a resurgence of events that encourage public conversation about death and dying. The Modern Funeral is one such group that promotes and runs talks, exhibitions, and Death Cafés.

The UK is definitely challenging the status quo. Regulations are more relaxed here than in the US, which allows us to take charge and reclaim our experience of death and dying. Natural burial is a growing industry. The Natural Death Centre has just recently opened its own site in Kent, and many more are opening countrywide. Indeed, the green funeral movement is lucky to have wide support here in the UK. We believe we might just be on the cusp of wider positive social change within the industry; we believe that the more we challenge, the more far-reaching and positive the benefits could be for our collective experience of grief and bereavement.

Moving Forward

Next March, I plan to return to New Zealand where my home funeral journey began, and I will be leading home funeral workshops there. Later in the year, our intention is for Jerrigrace Lyons to return to Oxford for the 2016 Kicking the Bucket Festival, where we plan to continue to share and develop further awareness about the many aspects and benefits of home- and family-led funerals. As part of Kicking the Bucket Festival 2016, HFN also hopes to host a

Gentle Death Conference that will be attended by speakers and delegates from both the UK and overseas.

It has been an incredibly busy 18 months, personally and collectively. Our strength lies in our togetherness, and I feel very excited for the natural deathcare community and the wider home funeral movement as a whole.

Since our initial home funeral workshops, several new independent funeral services have begun and/or have developed more fully across the UK, including: It’s All about Love, Dandelion Farewells, Divine Ceremony, The Modern Funeral, and A Natural Undertaking.

As we move forward, we welcome other progressives and independent thinkers to join our network. Our voice will contribute to the broader funeral discussion within our culture, impacting and changing the way families are supported at this difficult yet inevitable time. 



Claire Turnham is a family deathcare educator, independent celebrant, funeral arranger, and home funeral guide. Find out more at www.onlywithlove.co.uk.



The Shared Crossing Training Program

April 22-24, 2016

Join us in beautiful Santa Barbara for a weekend intensive that guides participants through a felt, emotional experience of the end of life. You'll learn research-based practices* that lead to deeper connection with loved ones and a greater acceptance of death—whenever it may come. We also teach the *Shared Crossing Protocols*, designed to facilitate the **Shared Death Experience**.



Facilitated by **William Peters, M.Ed., MFT**
See workshop details and more information at
www.SharedCrossing.com

- Cultivate a conscious, life-affirming relationship with death and the beyond
- Learn compassionate and effective practices that can positively transform the end-of-life experience
- Gain peace of mind discussing death and dying with family and friends
- Learn methods to share in the initial stage of your loved one's "crossing over" (the Shared Death Experience)
- Join a caring community of like-minded friends exploring end-of-life themes

***The Shared Crossing Research Initiative** is currently the subject of a rigorous research study by the Religion, Experience, and Mind Lab Group at the University of California, Santa Barbara.



Like us on Facebook

www.SharedCrossing.com

(805) 883-8179

info@sharedcrossing.com

Home Sweet Home

FUNERAL HOME

by Rev. Olivia Bareham

It was never my intention to become a death midwife and certainly not the owner of a funeral home, but fortunately life is what happens while you're making other plans.

By 1987, after studying for many years with healers, shamans, and spiritual teachers, I was ordained as an interfaith minister and enjoyed a fulfilling career performing wedding ceremonies, speaking publicly about the joys of living, and managing a successful hands-on healing practice in Los Angeles.

In 1989, life took another turn when I gave birth to my daughter Oriana at home. After the long journey of pregnancy and the intensity of the actual birth, I basked in the time alone with my daughter to exhale while we became familiar with our new roles. It felt like the most natural thing to do. My body was healing from the trauma of birth, my breasts were preparing to let down milk, and my baby was saying her goodbyes to the other side and making it through the veil to this earthly plane. I was grateful for this quiet time with Oriana, to really feel what it meant to be a mother, and to be present for my baby while she completed her transition into the sea of humanity. It took three full days before I began to feel ready to merge back into daily life.

In 2005, Mother died and I noticed that my needs were very much the same. After the long journey through aging and sickness and the intensity of the actual dying experience, I (and perhaps Mother too) needed time to exhale and become familiar with my new role. Once she had passed, I needed to spend time with her body to accept the finality, integrate the loss, and feel what it meant to be motherless. I instinctively felt the need to be quiet and present with her while she completed her transition into the ocean of eternal love. I needed time

alone before merging back into daily life. She needed time to say goodbye to the earthly realm. Organically, this would have taken about three days.

But only a few hours after Mother's death, the funeral directors took her body away. Rather than the tender, natural transition I'd felt at the birth of my daughter, I felt the painful, unnatural ache of separation and anxiety that a mother must feel if her baby is taken from her and placed in a nursery. When my mother's body was put into the funeral director's van, something more than her body was taken away. I didn't know what it was. I only knew I needed more time; maybe just a few more days.

After the funeral, I arrived back home in L.A. to find an article about Jerrigrace Lyons and Final Passages, her home funeral guide training course in Northern California. It opened the doorway to an intense spiritual journey and a new career in midwifing death, which now includes a funeral home. This is the story of my evolution from hospice caregiver to home funeral guide, to death midwife, to co-owner of a funeral home.

After my training at Final Passages, I returned to Los Angeles, excited to begin helping families as soon as possible. Armed with the knowledge of home-based after-death care practices and under the telephone guidance of Jerrigrace, I opened the doors to Sacred Crossings, an education and support service for after-death care and family-directed home funerals. I put together my death midwife kit, made brochures, ordered some cremation caskets, and bought two bold magnet signs for the sides of my car. It was a proud moment, if not a bit nerve-racking. In a city of ten million souls, I was the only person offering home funeral service. Could I

do this? What if I've bitten off a bit more than I can chew? But there was no time to think, because just two weeks later the phone started ringing.

At the time, my teenage daughter was entering high school, and I was holding down a day job as house-manager for a Hollywood celebrity, doing my healing work, and volunteering for hospice in the evenings. A single mom without savings or assets, I knew that social security was not going to take care of me. I needed to create a business that I could conduct well into my seventies. Everybody died, I thought, so once people hear about the amazing benefits of a home funeral, everyone will want one. Myth number one.

During Sacred Crossings' first few years, I enthusiastically answered any question, night or day. While making breakfast, driving carpool, sitting in parking lots, standing in elevators, and at work, I would excuse myself to go to the restroom to expound the virtues of a three-day vigil or explain where to place dry ice. I made home visits to families in the evenings and on weekends. I became deft at tearing off my car magnets and tossing them in the back seat before arriving at work or picking up my daughter from school. I put together cremation caskets in my living room and changed the spelling of my name so that my boss wouldn't Google me and find out I washed dead people, for I quickly discovered that not everyone shared my enthusiasm about caring for the dead.

I said yes to anyone who called wanting help because I didn't have the heart to say no and I needed experience. Fortunately, my daughter was happily distracted with boyfriends and glad to keep her distance from her weird mother who drove around with caskets in the car. So I had time to visit bereaved families who needed support to create the home funeral experience.



Saying goodbye to Dorothy, home funeral client

Most patients died in the wee hours of the morning, so I would arrive at the house at 3am to help guide the family with washing and preparing the body and still get home in time to freshen up before work. But sleepless nights make managing the staff of a busy celebrity household challenging. Explaining to loved ones on the phone how to keep the mouth closed on the corpse while I'm fixing an overflowing toilet; picking up dry ice while I'm booking the jet to Martha's Vineyard; rearranging schedules for five nannies while I'm writing a eulogy...it was stressful to say the least. But I was determined to make Sacred Crossings work. I firmly believed that once clients told their friends about the benefits of a home funeral, the phone would start ringing off the hook and I could quit my day job and make this a full-time career. Myth number two.

Once a body was safely refrigerated with dry ice, I then had to help the family get the paperwork done. This meant taking the next-of-kin to the vital records office in downtown L.A.

on my lunch hour, making the 20 or so phone calls necessary between hospice, doctor, crematory, and family members, and then returning to vital records to have the death certificate filed and get the disposition permit. I achieved this mammoth feat twice before concluding that holding space for the family to have a sacred experience and keeping the day job were far more important than getting paperwork filed.

So I began to search for a funeral director who would be willing to work with me. The funeral home, I decided, would file the paperwork, transport the body, and do the direct cremation or burial while I would help the family with the three-day vigil and funeral at home. This would be a no-brainer, I innocently imagined. Once the funeral director saw the potential for clients I could bring them, and once he or she realized the amazing service we could provide families, there would be a bidding war to help Sacred Crossings. It would be a win/win for both of us. We could

support each other. Hey, maybe the funeral home would even hire me as their home funeral guide? We could start a new trend! Myth number three.

Conventional funeral directors in L.A. are not friendly towards home funeral guides. I know. I have sat perched before large wooden desks in more than 12 stuffy funeral homes, and I have smiled sweetly at stoic men in black suits and expounded the merits of home-based after-death care. They don't like it. I would go so far as to say that they are threatened by the home funeral movement. Goodness knows why. At one funeral a month, I was hardly cutting into their business. But the more rejections I got, the more determined I became. There must be one who will see the benefits of compassionate cooperation and collaboration. My efforts paid off. I eventually found a lovely young funeral director who remembered going to the home wake for his grandmother in Indonesia; he agreed to help.



For the next four years Sacred Crossings grew slowly, from three home funerals a year to fifteen. I would counsel and guide the family through the home funeral process and my FD would send his drivers to pick up the body after the vigil, file the paperwork, and oversee the direct cremation or burial. I became a funeral arranger for the funeral home, helped the family complete all the documents, and hand-held them through to the final disposition. The funeral director didn't ever meet the families but still earned his direct cremation fee. Things were looking up. I was able to quit the celebrity job and found a three-days-a-week job as a personal assistant to Pamela, a lovely woman in L.A. fashion who respected my death midwifery life and didn't complain if I needed a two-hour lunch break to change dry ice.

Sacred Crossings was finally feeling like a business, but it wasn't exactly a profitable one. Without a budget for advertising, I relied on word-of-mouth referrals, monthly introduction evenings in my home, and talks at local community groups and churches. The home funerals were steady at one or two a month, and this was about all I could manage on my own. By now I was working eighty hours a week. I did the math: 24 home funerals a year brought in approximately \$24K; my rent in L.A. was \$1800 a month. This was not going to buy me retirement.

Just as I was questioning my sanity for getting into this business in the first place, my biggest fear was realized: Three families needed help in the same week. Panicked, I invited girlfriends over for a champagne casket brunch and

begged for their help. I demonstrated—amidst much tipsy laughter—how to put together a cremation box, how to carry a body on a backboard, and how to wash and dress a stiff person and keep their jaw tied closed. I have very good friends who go along with a lot of my ideas, but none of them was prepared for the crazy next few weeks—driving out in the middle of the night to help load caskets and gear into my car, meeting a bagged body just brought from the hospital, leaving work early to help put dry ice under a client, and doing things to a corpse that went waaaay over and above what normal friends do for each other. I will be eternally grateful to my soul sisters: Anita, Julie, Amy, Stacie, and Frankie.

We made it through the crisis, but it was a wakeup call. If I was really going to build Sacred Crossings into a successful, viable business, I needed to get help from committed people who believed in the vision and could see the potential for a lucrative career. I needed a team and I needed to train them. I needed a network of guides who could be trusted, not only to teach Los Angelenos how to care for their deceased loved ones, but also to hold space for the spiritual and emotional transformation that takes place during a home funeral. I needed to let go of the fantasy of my knight coming to rescue me and take care of me forever and, instead, marry Sacred Crossings. It was all or nothing.

So I performed a little “joining together in holy union” ceremony, put a ring on my fourth finger, and sat down to create an education program. I was trained as a teacher, I had a degree in education, I could do this. I called my training *The Art of Death Midwifery*, a three-part program designed to teach students how to guide a family through the conscious dying process, how to take care of a body after death, and how to create a celebration of life ceremony at home. I thought if I could take five people through this program and teach them everything I knew, I would have a team. Pamela, my gracious boss, offered to host the classes in her beautiful Palisades home, which was the perfect

Top: Bareham and cremation casket
Middle: Trainees moving the box
Bottom: Training in shrouding at a workshop

Photos courtesy of Sacred Crossings

place to practice home funerals. Sacred Crossings: The Institute for Conscious Dying and Family-Directed Funerals was born.

With barely any promotion, the very first class was filled within weeks. I was stunned! Maybe Mother was helping from the other side? People seemed hungry to learn about death and eager to volunteer or be a part of Sacred Crossings in some way. As soon as one class ended, the next one filled, and each group of students opened me wider and dropped me deeper into the sacred path that was now my life's work.

It wasn't long before I had a team of volunteers who had graduated from the program and willingly offered to sit vigil with the deceased, sing at the bedside of the dying, and help with a dry-ice change. But with little hope of ever being compensated, they averaged three funerals before returning to their regular vocations or establishing companies to offer their own unique and valuable end-of-life services.

Now my workload seemed to have increased exponentially. I was not only visiting the dying and helping families create home vigils and funerals, but I was also managing and mentoring the rotating volunteers, scheduling students, and teaching classes. I was feeling fulfilled, on-purpose and inspired, families were having extraordinary experiences, students were opening to unrealized potential both personally and professionally, and—I was aging fast.

At this point Sacred Crossings was aligned with two alternative funeral homes that supported the home funeral movement. They took care of the direct cremation or burial, which included authorizing transportation, securing the doctor's signature on the death certificate, and filing the documents electronically. Their charge to the family was between \$800 and \$1200. Sacred Crossings' services included death midwifery visits, supporting the family throughout the home funeral process (including a four-hour at-death visit usually in the middle of the night), loaning all equipment and supplies, coordinating and officiating the funeral service, organizing and attending the cremation, and returning cremains to the family. Ministerial fees averaged between \$500 and \$1000. Something felt out of balance.

Most other home funeral guides across the country support families to do everything themselves, which includes filing the paperwork and transporting the body to the crematory or cemetery. Since this had proven too challenging in Los Angeles, I had been forced to give up a significant portion of revenue to the funeral homes to do this piece of the process. It became clear that, if Sacred Crossings were to ever help more than two families a month, it was going to have to include a funeral home.

The universe was listening. It wasn't long before two graduates of the death midwifery program—Alex Edwards and Lisa Schiavello—stepped forward offering to do whatever it would take to make the home funeral experience available to everyone in L.A., including becoming licensed funeral directors. They believed in the vision, they embodied the selfless compassion required to drive into the night to help a family care for their dead, they were gifted and funny and devoted to Sacred Crossings. We were a team!


We spent many hours talking to attorneys, accountants, insurance advisors, and experts in the field. We formed a partnership; secured our crematory, refrigeration, transportation



and electronic death registration system (EDRS); and are now focusing on building a website that will entice not only those familiar with the idea of natural death care, but also those who would not have considered it in their wildest imaginings.

Our vision is to support families in having the most intimate and transformative experience possible. This may include simply singing at the bedside while life-support is discontinued, or holding space while a loved one bathes and dresses the body in a mortuary, or assisting a family through the entire three-day process of a home funeral.

We are a home funeral home, owned and operated by caring and compassionate end-of-life professionals who are trained in the art of death midwifery. We are your escorts to eternity, proud to offer a complete range of services including advance planning, death midwifery, home funeral guidance, direct cremation, direct burial, green burial, and funeral and celebrant services.

Our final and most difficult challenge is drawing up the price list. How do you put a price on the privilege of entering the liminal space at the deathbed? How do you charge for having a personal transformation with every family, in every home? How much should it cost for permission to wash your dead loved one? These are questions that have tormented all of us in the home funeral movement for years, and now as we teeter on the bridge that links the world of sacred service with the world of corporate finance, we find ourselves wondering. 

| ADVERTISEMENT |

Sacred Crossings
Death Midwifery & Home Funerals



Rev. Olivia Bareham
310/968.2763
Los Angeles, CA

www.sacredcrossings.com

One Washcloth

by Lynn Holzman, Rochelle Martin, and Susan Oppie

At the National Home Funeral Alliance (NHFA) conference in Los Gatos, CA, we heard repeatedly the refrain, “If nothing else, bathe the body!” The guest speakers said it. The attendees said it. And it resonated with One Washcloth (www.onewashcloth.org).

One Washcloth is a charitable organization seeking to encourage families to care for their loved ones after death, regardless of where death occurs. A washcloth ... any washcloth ... becomes a tool for engagement with the body of the deceased. The washcloth is the invitation and the permission to not only look, but to touch. Despite multiple research studies detailing the benefits of after-death care and ritual, medical institutions often fail to offer such practices to the families of deceased patients.

As nurses working in end-of-life care, the founders of One Washcloth have witnessed, as have many of you, the transformative effect that occurs when families participate in hands-on postmortem care. You undoubtedly have stories similar to ours: Two small grandchildren, holding warm, soapy washcloths, cleaned their grandmother’s hands and feet (carefully, and in that order). Twin sisters lovingly washed their mother’s body, marveling that they had emerged from that sacred vessel many years before. A young wife bathed her husband with help from



her father and three-year-old daughter. These baths didn’t require instruction, just suggestion. The choreography that followed evolved naturally. The rhythms and pacing were as unique as the individuals involved.

The idea for One Washcloth actually began at a NHFA conference. One nurse said that her standard practice in the hospital ER when death occurred was to offer a washcloth to bereaved families. That moment cannot be replicated. Because of one nurse’s encouragement, families had lasting benefits. It was not hospital protocol. It was her intuitive wisdom. Why not offer washcloths as standard procedure? It would be so simple!

Even when a traumatic death has occurred, family participation in after-death care is beneficial, suggests Chappel and Ziebland in their 2010 study: “Seeing a damaged body [after death] is inevitably distressing, but in the study was rarely regretted.” In her book, *Finding Hope When a Child Dies* (1999), Sukie Miller describes how cultures around the world incorporate ritual after the death of children as “an antidote to powerlessness” of loss. “In other cultures parents and other family members and friends of children who die believe they can do something, can take some action on behalf of the deceased child—and ... as a byproduct of doing something for their child, they also

do something good for themselves.” Olausson and Ferrell found that when nurses participated in death rituals, either with or without families of the deceased, such activities “provide nurses with a mechanism to cope with frequent death experiences.”

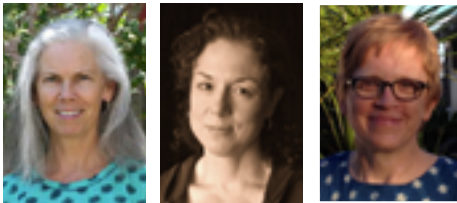
One Washcloth would appreciate your input and involvement. Please let us know if you are interested in facilitating a research study that would explore the benefits of hands-on care of a loved one immediately after death, through the One Washcloth project. Likewise, if you or a facility you are affiliated with would like to receive One Washcloth gift sets or educational materials in order to introduce the concept to families, please contact us at onewashcloth.org.

References:

Chappel, A. & Ziebland, S. (2010). Viewing the body after bereavement due to a traumatic death: Qualitative study in the UK. *British Medical Journal*, 340, pp. 1-11.

Miller, S. (1999). *Finding hope when a child dies: What other cultures can teach us*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Olausson, J. & Ferrell, B. (2013). Care of the body after death: Nurses' perspectives on the meaning of post-death patient care. *Clinical Journal of Oncology Nursing*, 17(6), pp. 1-8. Retrieved from <http://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/819105>.



onewashcloth

|ADVERTISEMENT|

COMPASSIONATE CARE ALS

GORDON T. HEALD ALS FUND

LEADING A NEW VISION IN ALS CARE SINCE 1998

WWW.CCALS.ORG

Home Funeral Guides: *Licensing and Money*

by Lee Webster

Imagine you have discovered a whole new way of looking at death through the lens of the home funeral.

You think about how you would care for the loved ones in your life and your own death care. Then it occurs to you that you could be of service to your community. You could offer insight and guidance to those in your church, your local hospice, and eldercare facilities. Suddenly you see the possibility of alerting the world to an affordable, noninvasive, family-centered, healing, cultural game-changer that will revolutionize funeral practices and change our relationship to death forever.

You locate workshops, choose one or more, and attend, paying for registration fees, airfare, cab fare, car rentals, and hotels. You purchase books, films, essential oils, perhaps a portable massage table, additional linens, a go-bag full of cotton balls, wipes, rice bags, and other sundries. You rack up a significant investment in your newfound knowledge and developing skill set.

You return home ready to hang out your shingle. You prepare and pay to have your marketing materials printed—educational pamphlets, trifold brochures, business cards—and maybe even talk with your lawyer about the advantages of different business models, from non-profit or sole proprietorship to limited liability corporation. You start thinking about taxes and personal liability risk and insurance.

At some point in this journey, you no doubt debate how you will fund your new enterprise and how much you will earn as a bonafide home funeral guide. Setting up as a home funeral guide requires a significant investment, and if that work is valued as it should be, you deserve to charge money to support yourself, right?

Enter the home funeral guide's dilemma:

What does it mean to be poised to offer a service that the federal government has the authority to limit and shape, even if you choose not to enter the industry?

What does it mean to offer a service that closely resembles a licensed, highly regulated profession that uses a shared language, even though it is vastly different in intent and outcome?

What ramifications will there be for families if home funeral guides are licensed?

What does it take to successfully walk the line between a profession and a vocation?

How can you make a living doing this vital "heart" work that potentially addresses social injustice, supports the poor, reintroduces ritual and meaning, and revives and strengthens cultural and family connections?

The Impact of Federal and State Governments on Home Funeral Guides

In the US, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) oversees the funeral business, professionals and nonprofessionals alike. Through the Funeral Rule, the FTC regulates what funeral services and products may be provided by licensed professionals, and requires a written formulaic pricing sheet (general price list, or GPL) that is intended to protect consumers.

In addition, each state gets to determine the specifics of what it means to practice as a licensed funeral director. In some states, merely discussing after-death care options with family members during their time of need is construed as falling within the scope of a funeral professional. Therefore,

funeral planning done by home funeral guides in exchange for money is fraught with potential for challenge by the state or through legal action by industry professionals.

Funeral directors are required (by their state) to complete college-level training and an apprenticeship; they must pass a licensure examination; and they are entitled to charge money. Federal and state governments set no restrictions on the price of their funeral goods or services.

The FTC also regulates what products and services nonprofessionals can sell, and what forms and paperwork need to be used when dealing with the public. The FTC's requirements have implications for home funeral guides (who are not licensed as funeral directors), which significantly impacts their sources of income. In plain language, federal and state governments make it clear that if you want to make a reasonable living selling funeral goods and services, it behooves you to get a funeral director's license.

The Licensure Debate

Prior to enacting restrictive legislation that has hamstrung citizens and home funeral guides, Oregon Mortuary and Funeral Board executive director, Michelle Gaines, said that home funeral guides must be regulated because "they are supervising or otherwise controlling the transportation, care, preparation, processing, and handling of dead human bodies."

Nothing could be further from the truth. Home funeral guides (according to the National Home Funeral Alliance definition) do not supervise; they do not control, process, prepare, transport, or otherwise handle dead bodies unless it is in the course of demonstrating proper body care and mechanics

(which, incidentally, is a valid teaching technique).

There are several practical and administrative reasons for home funeral guides to resist becoming licensed:

§Licensure forces guides into becoming industry professionals, the very thing some families are rejecting.

§Guides view themselves differently in different parts of the country according to their spiritual beliefs and according to how their work—such as hospice— informs their vocation. They do not provide a uniform type of service, and regulating all of these variations would be cumbersome for the state(s).

§The state would be placing funeral guides under financial duress by requiring them to pay for licensure, which would force them into charging fees.

§Most importantly, licensure could have the ripple effect of curtailing families' rights by implying that someone with credentials is required to assist a home funeral.

The FTC also regulates what products and services nonprofessionals can sell and what forms and paperwork need to be used when dealing with the public. For instance, a general price list must be provided to clients, written in precise language provided by the FTC, by any home funeral guides who offer both goods and services.

Differentiating Language, Intent, and Outcome

The key difference between professionals and home funeral guides is that funeral directors do for the family while home funeral guides educate the family to do for themselves. Because we are talking about the same essential service—assisting families in making decisions about after-death care—it is not surprising that the language we use is the same. However, the intent and the outcome differ diametrically.

Home funeral guides are often available before as well as at death, for kitchen-table discussions, phone calls, and home visits to provide emotional and practical support directly to families. They teach

seminars, give demonstrations, make presentations, and hold workshops for groups or spiritual communities. For any of these educational activities, they may legally charge a consultant or teacher's fee, as with any other exchange of information or instruction. This fee, similar to any regionally determined pricing (as in the case of real estate), depends on what the market will bear. This basic economic axiom makes it difficult for home funeral guides to share pricing strategies or to find a basis for pricing standards across regions.

If a home funeral guide is asked by a family to participate in anything remotely resembling hands-on body care, this assistance must be shared freely, as the physical handling of dead bodies resides unequivocally within professional territory.

Fee for Services: It's Complicated

The exchange of money for services is the crux of the matter. When families call a funeral director, they may not know it, but they are either hiring a professional to do something they have chosen not to do themselves, or they have been compelled to hire a professional by state law.

We understand this to be an energetic exchange; goods or services provided in exchange for money is as American as it gets. It's a practice that represents the interdependency of human beings, and allows us to survive. In clear terms, exchanging money is one way we value one another and ourselves.

This is also where the money discussion gets bogged down. For instance, home funeral guides have been compared to personal elder caregivers, independent home cleaning service providers, nannies, and others, whose services are socially valuable and who deserve to be paid a living wage. So why the difference?

What's different is that these other activities have no regulatory agency overseeing them. While charging for educational efforts and materials is perfectly acceptable, anything sidling up to what professionals do is dangerously close to practicing without a license.

A home funeral guide may not imitate the job of a funeral director. And, as educators and advocates, their services differ from those of a funeral director.

While this limits a home funeral guide's prospect of receiving a substantial, steady income by providing direct service to families, it speaks to the need for quality home funeral education for which guides may be well compensated. But the focus of educational offerings must be on providing resources and information, increasing the visibility of the home funeral option, and giving families the confidence to care for their own at death.

More Information:


The National Home Funeral Alliance has developed several white papers that speak to many of the issues referenced in this article. These can be downloaded for free at <http://homefuneralalliance.org/about/nhfa-position-papers>.

Look for:

NHFA Code of Ethics, Conduct and Practice

NHFA Position on Certification and Licensure

Clearly Defined: Matching Our Terminology to Our Intentions

Essentials for Practicing Home Funeral Guides is a how-to designed for practicing home funeral guides with specifics about what can and cannot be charged for, and also includes approved business forms. It is available from Amazon.com. 



Lee Webster is the current president of the National Home Funeral Alliance, treasurer for the Board of Directors of the Green Burial Council, and director of New Hampshire Funeral Resources, Education and Advocacy.

Dying for a Smaller Carbon Footprint

Decomposition by Alkaline Hydrolysis

by Mary Reilly-McNellan

After a particularly chaotic day at work last week, I found myself remembering a 1970s commercial that featured a stressed-out woman at the end of her rope imploring, “Calgon, take me away!” Fade into the next scene where the woman—now happy and relaxed—is soaking in a blissfully overfilled, sudsy bathtub, soft music playing in the background. You can almost feel the tension melting away as bath salts work their magic, soothing aching muscles and softening skin.

Who doesn't love a spa day?

Fast-forward several decades to 1995. A cadaver donated to the University of Florida's anatomy bequest program is gently lowered into a pressurized, cylindrical stainless steel container, where a water and potassium hydroxide mixture is pumped through the metal “coffin.” The strong water/alkali solution is heated to about 350 degrees, creating a pH environment that frees the water's hydrogen ion and effectively breaks down the chemical bonds holding large tissue molecules together. Proteins and fats are broken apart, accelerating decomposition so that the process is completed in about two to three hours instead of the usual 20 to 25 years required following traditional burials. When the “coffin spa” is opened, all that remains is a soft, porous, mineral ash, and a sterile, coffee-colored liquid composed of amino acids, peptides, sugars, and salts that pose no health hazards to the living or the environment. Remains buried in soil, which is often already high in alkalis, decompose in the same manner, but at a much slower rate. (Food digested in the body undergoes this process as well.)

No, this is not some ghoulish variation of hydrotherapy (which uses water for pain relief and treatment), and it

certainly doesn't offer quite the same soothing outcome as Calgon. It is, however, gaining acceptance as a greener alternative to traditional burial and fire-based cremation. Known generically as “alkaline hydrolysis” (AH), the process has been variously labeled and patented as “resomation” (from the Greek word *resoma*, meaning “rebirth of the human body”), “bio-cremation,” “aquamation,” and even “tissue digestion.” Touted as a relatively quick, eco-friendly, and less resource-intensive way to deal with dead bodies, the process produces 20 times less CO₂ emissions than average cremation, and uses one-tenth the energy. Surgically-inserted metal items like pacemakers, replacement joints, and pins are unaffected and may be recycled for reuse. Although copious amounts of water were originally necessary for effective AH decomposition, improved technology has reduced this to 55 gallons per procedure. And for the budget conscious, it is three to five times less expensive than cremation. In Minnesota, for instance, basic alkaline hydrolysis costs about \$2400, while the cost of a simple cremation ranges from about \$800 to more than \$4300. The national average cost for a traditional funeral, including burial and a headstone or monument, is about \$10,000.

In her acclaimed book, *Stiff: The Curious Lives of Human Cadavers*, author Mary Roach describes the chemical process in more simplistic terms: corpse disposal by a pressure cooker filled with Drano. Yes, Drano contains lye, which is similar to potassium hydroxide and reacts with water to produce significant heat. And yes, lye basically digests the body and anything else that contains proteins. But the process also destroys pathogens and prions, which are how such diseases as scabies and mad cow disease may spread. And since lye is an alkali, the good news is that it is rendered inert

during the process and may be disposed of as wastewater, returned to family members in receptacles, or spread as fertilizer to nourish flowers and trees and support life.

While flame-based cremation may trigger alarming images of a violent inferno, proponents of AH describe the process as a “quiet and gentle” means of reducing the body to its basic elements of bone ash and organic nutrients. Because the process accommodates only protein-based material, traditional wood or cardboard caskets are not utilized—resulting in fewer carbon dioxide emissions. Bodies encased in biodegradable “pouches”—often made of silk—are quickly consumed by AH. Magnets remove any remaining metals from the remains—dental fillings and titanium medical implants, for instance—for possible recycling by such organizations as Doctors Without Borders. The remaining ashes and sterile liquid are returned to the family, used as fertilizer to cultivate new life, or simply disposed of via the sewer system.

This is by no means a new process. Amos Herbert Hobson patented AH in the United States in 1888 as a way to produce fertilizer from animal carcasses. A century later, two professors at Albany Medical College patented a “modern tissue digester” to dispose of human cadavers. Several years later, a Scottish physician developed a hot alkali process to effectively kill bovine spongiform encephalopathy (mad cow disease) pathogens, rendering them harmless. Minnesota's renowned Mayo Clinic began using AH to dispose of human research cadavers in 2006 and proposed a bill to the Minnesota state legislature to have it approved as a third method of disposition (in addition to traditional burial and flame-based cremation).



cremation releases 50 times the Environmental Protection Agency's legal limit of mercury emissions, primarily from amalgams. Caskets are frequently cremated with the body, resulting in a tremendous waste of such hardwoods as mahogany, walnut, and cherry.

Dealing with the dead is not an easy issue. For centuries, traditional burial involved family or friends digging a hole, interring a corpse, refilling the topsoil, and perhaps placing a stone memorial on the grave. Soil and microorganisms immediately began their inexorable decomposition process, the worms crawled in, the worms crawled out, and within several decades, bodies were completely composted. By the late 19th century, however, chemical embalming had made its debut in the United States, and the funeral industry took off like gangbusters. Undertakers found that decomposition could be delayed by draining the body of blood and replacing it with such toxic chemical preservatives as arsenic and formaldehyde. Casketed burials became the norm, and a multitude of cemeteries and headstones popped up across the landscape. Costs increased, and the funeral industry burgeoned into the \$20 billion dollar industry that exists today.

As population skyrocketed and land availability decreased, it became clear that another method to properly dispose of the dead was necessary,

and cremation was introduced as an alternative to traditional burial. By definition, cremation is the process of reducing the body to its basic elements of bone fragments through the use of heat—typically using wood or fossil fuels such as natural or propane gas. Although incineration of corpses is believed to have been practiced as far back as the Stone Age, modern cremation in the United States did not take off until the late nineteenth century. The first crematorium (in the US) began operating in Pennsylvania in 1876, and although it has had a rather rocky history, cremation is expected to be the preferred end-of-life option for individuals by 2018.

Although flame-based cremation is certainly a greener option than traditional, embalmed burial, it is far from being environmentally safe. Each cremation uses the energy equivalent of 26 gallons of gas to spew about 95% of the body back into the air, releasing harmful chemical emissions and greenhouse gases in the process. And if the cadaver received dental fillings during life, the impact is even worse—

In spite of its current popularity as an acceptable alternative to embalming and traditional burial, cremation was frowned upon for many years by some religions—especially Catholicism. St. Thomas Aquinas believed that the soul retains a transcendental relation to its body even after it is separated from it by death, and at the resurrection, the soul will regain a body which will be the same body as the one it had in life. This shifted somewhat in the 1960s, when Pope Paul VI lifted the penalties that had previously been connected to cremation, and the practice became a morally acceptable alternative to burial if it is done for valid reasons by faithful Catholics—and not as a denial of immortality of the body and resurrection of the body.

If AH is “greener” than cremation, why then hasn't it caught on more quickly in the United States? For one thing, there is still the pesky “ick” factor, and getting the public to accept a process that strikes some as horrific is challenging. No one likes the idea of Grandma's poor, tired body going into the sewer, and AH may evoke visions of psychopaths and dictators using acid or lye to torture their


victims. Indeed, when Senator Kemp Hannon introduced legislation to make AH available to the public in New York State, it was branded “Hannibal Lecter’s bill” in a play on both the sponsor’s name and the sadistic character played by actor Anthony Hopkins in the 1991 film *Silence of the Lambs*. Legislators tend to move slowly—especially in matters relating to death and dying. Minnesota was the first US state to legalize the process in 2003, and only 11 states currently permit AH as a means of disposing of the dead.

In spite of the billion-dollar funeral industry’s continued attempts to effectively lobby against the process, AH appears to be gaining on cremation as the future of the funeral industry. In many ways it is similar to cremation—the process is convenient, quick, and much less expensive than traditional burial. But with more than a 75%

reduction in the carbon footprint, it is much, much greener, with significant benefits.

Understandably, the process has not been completely embraced by green burial advocates. There are still emissions associated with AH, adding to the billions of pounds of human remains that are already disposed of in the atmosphere via fire-based cremation. In addition, the process may not seem as “green” or “natural” as placing the deceased in a simple shroud or biodegradable casket and returning the body to the earth. And some families are understandably bereft when their loved one is whisked away to a mortuary or crematory, sometimes never to be seen again. The healing and solace described by those able to care for and bury their own unembalmed dead is no small matter. Indeed, participating in a loved one’s burial at a natural woodland

or prairie site can be an immensely comforting, spiritual experience. It is these powerful traditions that root us in the past, connect us with the present, and prepare us for the future.

Dust to dust. 



Mary Reilly-McNellan has been a volunteer editorial assistant with NTM for the past two years. Her interest in environmental conservation has led to a new-found passion for promoting green burial, and she is currently working with a local team of volunteers to bring this sustainable tradition to Boulder.

| ADVERTISEMENTS |

Coma Communication

FOLLOWING & CHERISHING THE SPIRIT IN DEMENTIA DELIRIUM • COMA • END OF LIFE



Someone is always home... Communication is always possible...

CONSULTATION & TRAINING FOR FAMILY, VOLUNTEER + PROFESSIONAL CAREGIVERS

~ 25 YEARS EXPERIENCE ~

Ann Jacob, B.Ed
Stan Tomandl, MA, PWD
250.383.5677
comacommunication.com
phone | Skype | in person

Dying Wish

A dying doctor’s decision to stop eating and drinking and die with grace.



A Ward Wise Production

An extraordinary, beautifully made film of a courageous physician facing his final days with the help of a loving family and supportive hospice team. It is thought provoking and reassuring. Highly recommended!

Porter Story MD, Author, Executive Vice President, American Academy of Hospice and Palliative Medicine

Dying Wish has featured at the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization’s annual clinical conferences and film festivals.

A valuable tool for facilitating difficult conversations about voluntary stopping of eating and drinking at end of life.

VIEW THE TRAILER/find out more @ www.dyingwishmedia.com

A Night of Grief and Mystery on the Stephen Jenkinson Road Show

Review by Karen van Vuuren

Stephen Jenkinson is a provocateur. Even if you disagree with his message that hospice has got it wrong with its maxim “it’s about how you live,” Jenkinson can stop you in your tracks and make you think.

Since the bio-documentary, *Griefwalker*, brought Jenkinson and his Canadian-based Orphan Wisdom School to the attention of a wider public, something of a cult of personality has formed around this enigmatic, Harvard-educated theologian, former hospital social worker, boatmaker, and bard. The enigma about him is accentuated by his attire. On stage in Boulder, CO, during his recent book tour for his new work *Die Wise*, he could easily have swaggered out of a wild west saloon. Yet, as Jenkinson readily points out, he has succeeded in rising to the top of a corporate Canadian health care system “looking like this.”

Jenkinson’s finely crafted oratory and his poetic turns of phrase make him the consummate performer. Guitarist/singer Gregory Hoskins, with his evocative, improvisational music, was a brilliant addition to this leg of the Jenkinson tour.

People appreciate or abhor Stephen Jenkinson for his directness. On his own admission, this candor is his riposte to what he views as our society’s dishonesty with death and with the dying. “We have people who come to the end of their lives as amateurs,” Jenkinson says. He claims that our hospice patients are “dying not dying.” For Jenkinson, the reason our dying people are “amateurs” is that there is no recognition that dying can result in some “cultural good.” In the Jenkinsonian world view, hospice and palliative care don’t address dying because of their focus on “comfort” and “palliation.”

Jenkinson emphasizes the origins of the word palliation, the pall part meaning “to shroud or conceal.” His thesis is



Mark Tucker

that palliation can remove us from our dying, but what our society needs is to cultivate the capacity to die. “*Die Wise* is asking us to be wise in our death phobic culture.” The reason for this, says Jenkinson, is that we owe a debt to those around us and generations to come, to show them the way. Jenkinson believes that to accomplish this, we need to be “sorrowed aloud at a time that seeks to sedate every trouble” so we can “awaken to our dying and our grief.”

One hospice worker told me she was offended by Jenkinson’s invitation to open to dying and to put hope to the side, or as Jenkinson conjectures, to become “hopefree.” This focus on hope is, in Jenkinson’s view, an impediment to being in our dying. “Hope functions like a mortgage,” he warns. “We do without for a benefit to come.” The notion therefore is that hope turns us away from the now, and we feel pressure to be hopeful in the name of “dying well.” Dying à la Jenkinson is really a “call to order.”

Jenkinson recounts the story of a preacher who failed to “hear the call.”

As a social worker, Jenkinson visited this elderly man with end-stage lung cancer. Struggling for breath, the man of the cloth informed Jenkinson that he was still carrying out his churchly duties. Jenkinson assumed the reference was to some minor clerical tasks, ones less onerous than appearing before his congregation. But no, the man was dragging himself to church each Sunday to preach to his flock. In order to spare them the burden of knowing his unfortunate circumstances, he hadn’t told his parishioners of his illness. Jenkinson departed this meeting with a salutary reminder: hadn’t an important person two thousand years ago foreseen his own demise and revealed his destiny to others so that his follows could prepare for his death? The setting for this revelation? The Last Supper.

Stephen Jenkinson invites us to be wise despite our death phobic culture, a culture in which we can die not dying. The dying are the ones who can teach grief literacy to a culture that doesn’t believe in dying. Jenkinson’s clarion call to examine how we support the dying is hard for some in the hospice world to hear. But it behooves us to examine and re-examine the way we are with death and to consider the truth in Jenkinson’s words. Does the hospice maxim have it right in saying “It’s about how you live!”? Or is it really about our capacity to “die wise”? [🔗](#)



Die Wise – A Manifesto for Sanity and Soul, is Stephen Jenkinson’s new book about grief, dying, and the great love of life. Published by North Atlantic Books (March 2015) orphanwisdom.com

In the Parlor

Behind the Scenes of a New Home Funeral Film

by Daniel Boucher



Long awaited by the natural transitions community, *In The Parlor: The Final Goodbye* will be screened around the country during the next several months before it is released to the general public. This documentary film brings viewers

into the lives of three families who have chosen alternative approaches to dealing with the death of a loved one. Written, directed, and produced by veteran home funeral guide and filmmaker Heidi Boucher, *In The Parlor* explores what it means to be part of a home funeral and how this approach, in contrast with conventional American funeral practices, affects those who are close to the deceased.

Boucher, a film production designer by profession, has also helped dozens of families undertake home funerals during the last 30 years. "Although I have done home funerals mostly as a service to the community rather than as a career, I've always felt more of a sense of purpose and contribution as a home deathcare guide, whereas the filmmaking is just fun," says Boucher. Boucher has formed strong relationships with three family-owned funeral establishments in her area, and she acts

as a funeral arranger. This role, she feels, enables her to bridge home deathcare with traditional care, allowing more families to become involved in caring for their loved ones at death. (In Boucher's view, not everyone is able or willing to care for their own dead, and in this way, they can receive some additional support.)

The idea for *In the Parlor* came to Boucher more than a decade ago. "But the stars didn't align in my favor until about four years ago," she says. "It's not easy to find people who are willing to invite a

film crew into their living rooms while they're mourning the loss of a loved one. It's also not easy to produce a film while raising three children," she adds.

But five years ago Julie Joyer, a terminal cancer patient with a 50% chance of surviving three years, called Boucher after reading about her in the paper. Joyer, a lifelong resident of Sacramento, asked Boucher to help her plan her funeral. "When Julie approached me, I knew it was time to make the film," said Boucher. "Most of the time, family members call me, often panicking, after

or just before a death. But what I really wanted for the film was the opportunity to tell a story from the very beginning; from the early stages of a family's planning a home funeral all the way until the end of that person's life. Julie and her family agreed to let me share with a film crew the most private aspects of her life, which was really the catalyst for going ahead with production." Joyer's story is the most powerful thread in the film. Boucher's last conversation with Joyer was three weeks before Joyer's death. Boucher was about to leave for a three-week job that would have taken her out of town. She gently joked that if Joyer was going to die, she needed to do it within 24 hours or wait three weeks until Boucher returned from her trip. Joyer knew that this would be their last meeting; she passed away the weekend Boucher got home.



One of Boucher's biggest challenges in the making of *In the Parlor* was stepping into her new role as journalist rather than as production designer. "I'm an expert in aesthetic. Throughout my career I have created visual environments, and while working in the film industry, most of this has manifested in creating the visual elements of fantasy. Documentarians, on the other hand, are journalists. So in this new role of communicating an important message and telling true stories, one recurring challenge was having to point the camera at someone who is suffering and ask them to share their suffering for someone else's benefit. Anyone who's been on a film set knows that the equipment—lights, microphone, camera—can be quite invasive."


Boucher says that the success of *In the Parlor* will be judged by how much it contributes to the home funeral movement. "I want a substantial portion of the American population to at least consider home funerals as an option for family members, friends, or themselves." She hopes the documentary is compelling enough to result in a guerilla distribution campaign, with viewers and home funeral advocates becoming ambassadors of the film.

Despite the inclusion of Lisa Carlson and Josh Slocum, two consumer advocates the funeral industry may characterize as incendiary, *In The Parlor* is largely apolitical. Although unequivocally pro home funeral, the film does not attack the traditional industry, and it does not claim that home funerals



are inherently better than conventional ones. It implicitly calls on viewers to simply think about their own approach to death, rather than passively accepting the conventional, one-size-fits-all, American funeral, the origins of which can be traced to the rise of our industrial society.

In The Parlor also invites viewers to think about the hands-on ritual at death and how this can positively impact the mourning and the healing process. "I want people to know about home funerals and why we do them, so that they can reflect on their own values and consciously decide whether it would be a worthwhile experience for them." Suspicious of dogmatists and generally private about her own beliefs, Boucher nevertheless encourages families:

"Consider it, try it, and you will probably be glad you did." 

Daniel Boucher is an associate producer of In the Parlor. Find out more about the documentary at intheparlordoc.com.



Top: Sacramento historic cemetery

Left: Peter, home funeral client, with canine friend

Far left: "Leilani," home funeral client

Photos: Stills from the documentary, courtesy of In the Parlor/Boucher

Excerpts from Exploring the Soul of Taharah

by Rabbi Avivah W. Erlick, BCC, and Richard A Light

Judaism's rituals for responding to death are ancient and deep; beautiful, mysterious, and misunderstood; filled with meaning, wonder, and kindness. ... One of the central elements of these traditions is the ritual known as *taharah* (ritual purification), the long-established, cultural and religious ceremony of ablution by which the Jewish people prepare their dead for disposition. ...

By means we cannot know, [taharah] transforms the unholyest thing in life, the definitive source of impurity in the Jewish lexicon, a corpse, into one of the holiest: a ritually pure vessel and its soul ready to face God. It is a moment outside of time. ...

Taharah is traditionally performed by a group of dedicated and trained personnel called a *chevra kaddisha* ... or "sacred fellowship." Taharah involves gentle washing, spiritual purification by water, dressing, and blessing of the decedent [*meit* (m.) or *meitah* (f.) in Hebrew], following a fixed liturgy. It is believed that the ceremony grooms both the body and the soul for a safe journey to their final resting places in this world and the next. ...

Since the late 1800s, with the institution of modern mortuaries in the United States and Canada, [taharah has almost exclusively been performed] with anonymity, out of sight of the family, in a mortuary prep room. It is characterized by a significant emphasis on respect for the sacredness of this ritual, creating a smooth-flowing rite, without interruptions, that is as complete and holy as possible. [We shall call this approach conventional taharah.]

The emerging alternative approach, we shall call creative taharah. This more flexible treatment of the ritual invites into the equation the desires and needs of the dying and their circle of care. ... The ritual can be performed in the home

or facility where the person dies, or at a mortuary. Members of the circle of care can participate. Meticulously enacting a ritual is less important than creating a meaningful one for the family. ...

When death comes to Jewish families today, they may [convene their local chevra kaddisha, if their community has one, and] request a conventional taharah. Or, they may turn for comfort to their Jewish hospice chaplain, rabbi, or a friend familiar with these customs, and request a ceremony adapted to suit a different set of needs. Creative taharah is a co-created, customized ritual that draws deeply from the well of conventional taharah, while simultaneously accommodating the wishes of the family, even if these run counter to ... traditional Jewish practices.

The following are the basic components of any taharah ritual.

☆ The central act of the taharah ceremony is the ablution by water. This is usually accomplished either by lowering the deceased into a dedicated *mikvah* (ritual bath), or by pouring [several gallons of cool] water over the body in a continuous flow. ...

☆ As with any Jewish ritual ablution [that is, use of the mikvah for other purposes, such as conversion], the purification is preceded by a thorough cleansing. Shampoo, soap, washcloths, combs, nail polish remover and more are used to attain a high conventional standard of cleanliness. There should be nothing preventing the ritual water from coming into contact with every square inch of the *meit*, not even knots in the hair.

☆ After the washing and pouring, the body is dried and dressed in the traditional burial garments known as *tachrichim*, an outfit consisting of pants, shirt, jacket and head covering, made of plain white cotton or linen, and

sewn without pockets, hems, knots or metal closures. Strips of fabric are tied in special knots around the clothes; the deceased is then wrapped in a prayer shawl (traditionally just for men, but available for women today) and a burial sheet, and placed in a casket. ...

[To understand the ways in which creative taharah deviates from the conventional approach, we must first explain the boundaries usually established for taharah.]

Taharah is performed by Jews for Jews, thus inviting participants to experience a deep connection to their Jewish spiritual and communal heritage and identity. ... Thus, most teams have policies to resolve boundary issues, such as how the Judaism of participants will be determined, and what non-Jews who wish to be involved can and cannot do. ...

The most common situation in which a taharah is declined by some teams is when the *meit* will be cremated or embalmed. ... [Cremation and embalming are traditionally considered a violation of the sanctity of the holy vessel that housed the soul: the body created in the image of God. Some chevra teams will perform taharah knowing that the remains will be cremated, stating that midwifing the soul is what is important, and that they are not in a position to police families as to what they can and cannot do. Other teams feel that if the family chooses cremation, they have discarded Jewish burial tradition, and hence refuse to perform the taharah.]

Most *chevrot* [plural of chevra] do not allow family members to participate in a taharah. Some do allow it, or allow it only on a limited basis, such as by inviting them into the room near the end to tie the last knot on the tachrichim. Often teams say that they chose this approach for their organization after an experience in which family members



Avivah Erlick

attended a taharah and turned out to be emotionally unable to handle the procedure, or spoke or acted judgmentally toward the team while in the taharah room, to the point that chevra members felt distracted and unable to perform their tasks with *kavanah* [spiritual focus].

[A *rosh* who takes the creative approach, on the other hand, can bypass these limitations in whatever way suits their sensibilities. They may invite the family to hold the ritual at home, for example, and to participate.] The idea of taking care of the dead in their own home is not new. Until the modern era, taharah took place in the parlor or front room of a family's home, with the family either participating or nearby as the chevra kaddisha performed its task.


According to Yaffa Eliach, writing in her book *There Once Was a World: A 900-Year Chronicle of the Shtetl of Eishyshok*, about a Polish Jewish ghetto destroyed in the Holocaust:

Until Eishyshok's final days [in the 1940s], most people died in their own homes, surrounded by their family. Immediately upon death, the family notified the chevra kaddisha and the *kvoresman* [grave digger]... The kvoresman would arrive at the house of the deceased carrying the taharah bret, the board on which bodies are laid for cleansing before burial; he then returned to the cemetery to dig the grave, leaving the actual purification of the body to the burial society, whose members arrived at the house soon afterward.

[The permissibility of deviating from conventional practice is a matter of debate, but Rabbi Mosha Epstein, author of the *Taharah Manual of*

Practices, allows that deviation to some extent is necessary even in the strictest circumstances.] The bottom line, according to [Rabbi] Epstein, is to honor the dead, and to apply common sense: to “do unto the meit as you would want to be treated” yourself. There must be *kavanah**, and there must be good intentions. That's really it. “We do the best we can,” is the motto for most chevrot.

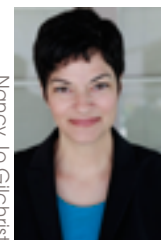
The mandate for water, for example, can be fulfilled only when water is available. When there is no water, the chevra can still satisfy the mandate to “do the best we can” by saying some prayers and treating the meit with utmost kindness. Is this still a taharah? There may be some disagreement, but we [the authors] would say, yes, it is.

What is important is the holiness of this work, the attitudes of those involved, and the intention to honor and respect the deceased and those left behind. Indeed, there has always been room for accommodation, as there must be in something so specific, and so enduring, as taharah. To follow in the rhythm of these elements, by some means and with an open heart, can, by our understanding, be understood to be a “full” and “complete” taharah and an honorable sending off of a loved one to the Holy One of Blessing. 

* *Kavanah* means spiritual deliberateness, intention, focus, attentiveness, direction, presence. If you say a prayer without *kavanah*, you might consider saying it again, just to be sure that it counts and is heard.

☆ The Hebrew word *chevra* begins with a sound that does not appear in the English language. It is described by phoneticians as a “voiceless uvular fricative,” and can best be described as “the sound of clearing your throat.” It is indicated in English with a “ch,” to suggest the sound as it appears in German, as in the word *achtung* (attention).

☆ This book represents the first time that the two approaches to the Jewish washing ritual of taharah were described and differentiated. This put the authors in the position of having to name them. Despite concerns that these were not quite accurate, the authors chose “classic” vs. “family-centered taharah.” In the year since, Rabbi Avivah says, preferred terms have come into usage: “conventional” vs. “creative taharah.” This excerpt has been modified to conform with this more recent device.



Nancy Jo Eichlister

Rabbi Avivah Erlick is a hospice chaplain who makes creative taharah available to Jewish families in Greater Los Angeles (www.Sacred-Waters.com). She is a Board Certified Chaplain (Assoc. of Professional Chaplains) with masters degrees in Rabbinic Studies and Journalism.

Rick Light is a national leader in the field of taharah. He is a vice president of Kavod v'Nichum, a non-profit helping Jewish communities reclaim traditional funeral rites. (www.Jewish-Funerals.org). He has written three books on the topic, and founded and for 18 years led his local chevrah kaddisha (Jewish burial society).

Doing Death Well in Australia

by Zenith Virago

Byron Bay is the easternmost point of Australia: a beautiful, small coastal town in New South Wales. It is a mix of subcultures and lifestyles, a town where several counter cultures met in the 1960s and 70s and grew together. As the local deathwalker for Byron Bay and beyond, it is with great joy and appreciation that I look back and see how our community has courageously pioneered our own death style for over twenty years.

As a younger woman I moved to Byron Bay like many other people, to live an interesting, open and adventurous lifestyle; in the mid 80s, everything felt possible. Life was going well for me. Then, early one morning in 1994, my close friend Sylvia died suddenly in her garden while practicing yoga. It was an unexpected death, and as I was driving to her house to be with her husband, Richard, I knew that this was a life-changing event for me. Later that day, I went with Richard to formally identify Sylvia's body. My love for Sylvia gave me a great gift. Her death opened up an aspect of living and dying that I wasn't aware of: family, friends, and community can reclaim the entire deathcare process for themselves, without a funeral director's services or equipment.

I believed that with my close connection to her family, my legal background, and my "let's confront the system" attitude, we could do it all ourselves. We didn't want to give her over to a funeral director to be placed in cold storage, then in a box, so we could turn up three days later for some sort of ceremony. Sylvia deserved more than that. We wanted to give her a rich, more meaningful and appropriate farewell. Perhaps this story is also your story, one of individual or community empowerment because of the need to do something different from the accepted status quo.

I realize now that we were not doing anything new or alternative. We were

simply reclaiming the old, traditional ways, the way it was always done until an industry evolved to do our work for us. We were just family, friends, and community caring for our own dying or dead.

The Natural Death Care Centre

Since Sylvia's death more than twenty years ago, many people and their families have been kind enough to share their lives, deaths, and losses with me. Early on, I created a small charity called the Natural Death Care Centre (NDCC; see www.naturaldeathcarecentre.org), through which I do most of my work as I am committed to community empowerment and cultural change.

The NDCC core commitments are:

An acceptance that death is the natural and sacred end of life.

The acknowledgement that indigenous peoples have always known that death is the natural and sacred end of life.

Respect for the diversity of spiritual, religious, cultural, and scientific beliefs.

To embody a holistic, sustainable, compassionate, and kind approach.

To take action for positive social change around the experience of sudden and expected death.

To demystify dying, palliative care, death, funerals, body disposal, loss, grief, and bereavement.

To support people to be well informed and to participate in appropriate and meaningful end of life and after death care.

Working with people at their kitchen tables, their bedsides (at home or in hospital), in their gardens, morgues,

funeral homes, the graveside, or at the crematorium, has been an incredible privilege and an astonishing teaching.

Having gained familiarity, humility, and wisdom, I realize that the funeral, as well as the bedside experience, can often be a crisis control situation. That's why we have decided to focus on pre-need education and training, so people can be well informed. Conversations can take place around any kitchen, dining, or workplace table. These ripple out, spreading awareness before the shock of death occurs.

After fifteen years of teaching one- and two-day workshops, we created a three-day Deathwalker Training, which we rolled out nationally last year. This complements the growing number of public events, conferences and talks. People are moving with the times and are hungry for a different way to do things. The Australian media is just discovering green or natural funerals; however we do not have a set definition of a green or natural funeral.

Being a Deathwalker

The NDCC definition of this very traditional role is:

“a person who walks their own journey towards their death as openly, courageously, and as best they can.

“a person who walks with, or accompanies someone else in their death journey, i.e., the dying person, family, or friends, offering guidance and care to inform, empower, and enable them to be as open, courageous, and the best they can be.

This definition covers the continuum of life, death, and loss. The first step is to be as courageous as we can about our own death and that of our loved ones. From that place, we can then serve others.

In a nutshell, we walk with the dying person and the bereaved through the whole journey, from illness, through dying, death, post-death, pre-ceremony, ceremony, and disposal, and then into a healthier bereavement.

A deathwalker is there throughout the experience with the aged care or medical system and with the funeral industry. A deathwalker is an advocate, inspiring and empowering others to participate as well, or as much as they can. They are much more than a death doula, a death midwife, or a death celebrant, although they may fulfill all these roles. It's not for everyone, but it is extraordinary work,

serving family, friends, and community in this way.

Last year, the NDCC offered a series of teachings in many major cities throughout Australia. These were well received and many people who attended said they had been waiting for something like this for a long time. They came as part of their own personal journey, to be able to care for a loved one, to complement their existing professional skills, or to become the local deathwalker in their spiritual, religious, or other community. The 2016 trainings include the Funeral Master Class in Byron, which allows participants to

work more deeply with ceremony and with more complex death scenarios.

As a charity, the Natural Death Care Centre is a pioneering institution. For many years we were the go-to organization for people who were searching for a light in the darkness. We find that families really are capable of doing everything themselves if we empower them and normalize death.

We have had a cold plate device for cooling the body that we imported from Holland many years ago. We loan this out to people for a donation.

I have also created a death care plan and an after-death plan. I am big on using all those real "D" words because then you know where you are. These have become very popular for people to share with their friends and families in order to convey their wishes. It's much more practical and intimate than the five wishes document, although both are just variations on a theme. Whatever gets us there!

For the past nine years, we have also held an annual community Day of the Dead event. Although the name is the same as the Latino traditional celebration, we are not trying to imitate that. We're just calling a spade a spade. Our Day of the Dead event is not religious, but it is sacred, and everyone is welcome. There is art, memento, and shrine-making, community singing, a ceremony, and a gathering afterwards to eat and drink. People honor those they love who have died, and they also mark the passing of the years. Those with young children who have died particularly love the ceremony. This will be the ninth year, and communities are holding their own events in Sydney and other cities.

We have held funerary art exhibitions, workshops, panel discussions, wild dances, picnics, death cafes, soirees, and film nights, the last of which featured a showing of *Zen and the Art of Dying* produced by Broderick Fox and Lee Biolis from Los Angeles, USA.

Other Australian organizations and individuals are also working with dying, death, and ceremony in a more



Broderick Fox

Memorial tree

Zen at the annual memorial event



Broderick Fox

sustainable way. We are catching up with America and Europe. Here is some of what is happening.

Tender Funerals: A community-run funeral service. This arose after coordinator Jennifer Briscoe-Hough of the Port Kembla Community Project, New South Wales, held community conversations about the high cost of funerals and the sense that deathcare was being driven by an industry rather than by the person closest to the one who had died. (Port Kembla is a poorer community, the socio-economic antithesis of Byron Bay.) Jennifer decided that funerals should be the responsibility of the community and created Tender Funerals. According to Colin Murray Parkes, a supporter, this is “because we are one people, one community, [and] the death of one is the concern of all.” The Project’s vision is to create a community-based, not-for-profit, contemporary funeral practice that can be replicated anywhere. See tenderfunerals.org.

The *Groundswell Project* is headed by Kerrie Noonan, an academic and palliative care worker. Its mission is to develop innovative arts and health programs that create cultural change about death and dying while championing others to do the same.

Dying to Know Day is an annual day of action dedicated to bringing to life conversations and community actions around death, dying, and bereavement. It is a time for encouraging all Australians to become informed and to make their end-of-life plans, including their wills and advance care plans, and after-death care plans; then to share these wishes with their families. See www.thegroundswellproject.com.

Death Literacy Conference: Doing Death Differently. Death literacy is the practical knowhow needed to plan well for death. This conference brings to life the critical components of death literacy: skills, knowledge, and the ability to take action. They are excited to be gathering some of Australia’s most experienced death practitioners to explore contemporary community-

based death practices in Australia, and to highlight the intersections between community practices, the health service, and community cultural development. See www.thegroundswellproject.com/death-literacy-conference.

The *Natural Death Advocacy Network*, Victoria, is a growing Australian network and advocacy partnership of community facilitators, professionals, activists, and educators working to enrich the experience of dying and death. Their aim is to create an informative, innovative and transparent organization advocating holistic approaches to dying and death through independent research and action. Their main areas of advocacy include death education, funeral planning, family-led funeral care, natural burial, and bereavement care. See www.ndan.com.au.

The *Death Down Under Conferences* for Australia and New Zealand are bi-annual and alternate between our two countries. This conference aims to promote the dissemination of social aspects of death studies research in Australia, New Zealand, and the wider Pacific region. It is associated with the Society for Death Studies (societyfordeathstudies.org), and aims to promote research and understanding across all areas of death studies. The 2016 conference has been postponed due to the death of one of the key organizers.

Assisted Dying. Although Australians briefly had a window when euthanasia

was available in one state, we have yet to have any intelligent or meaningful conversation on assisted dying.

Final Thoughts

Over these twenty years as a deathwalker, I have felt like I am riding an amazing wave. In the early years, pre-internet, I knew there must be others on the same wave. But they were far in the distance, and I could not see who they were. It was my dream that we would one day see and smile at each other and hold hands as we surfed that wave together: supported, excited, and free. That day has come, and I am laughing and hanging five, surfing the wave towards my own death, but practicing presence, so I don’t miss it, and so I fully experience it when it comes. 🌊



Zenith Virago is the founder and executive director of the Natural Death Care Centre. She is co-author of The Intimacy

of Death and Dying, and is featured in the documentary, Zen & the Art of Dying. She is the go-to marriage celebrant of Byron Bay, having conducted over 1500 marriage ceremonies. She is also the region’s deathwalker.

Photos for this article are stills from Zen and the Art of Dying by Broderick Fox, a new film about the work of Zenith Virago. Find out more at zenandtheartofdying.com.

| ADVERTISEMENT |



Accompanying the Dying: A Practical Guide & Awareness Training

**Empower your community.
Earn a living sharing wisdom.**

People need experienced mentors to explore their end of life calling and I have a proven system that has supported me well that I will share with you. Be part of an empowering network nurturing the next generation of death workers. Join me in this movement. Serious Inquiries Only. Investment Required.

APPLY HERE
For More Information



Death as a Rite of Passage

by Kitty Edwards

For thousands of years, human beings died in community. Communities cared for the dying, grieved together, and completed the rituals that supported the dead in their journey into the other world. These rituals gave meaning to the natural cycle of life and death.

Today, death looks very different. Modern medicine has robbed us of the experience of dying. The community is no longer engaged. The dying are isolated in hospitals and nursing facilities, and end-of-life care has become the domain of medical professionals. We have lost touch with the psychological and emotional closure needed in the dying process.

As a shamanic practitioner working with individuals challenged by terminal illness, I have learned first hand how little awareness many people truly have of the dying process. They have anticipatory fear of pain and suffering. They worry about being a burden to their family and friends. But by employing techniques that help them prepare for death as a rite of passage, I have witnessed many of the concerns disappear.

According to shamans—the indigenous medicine men and women who are the keepers of ancient wisdom—humans experience the world through four dimensions: literal, emotional, mythic, and energetic. In our Western culture, we engage life primarily on the literal and emotional levels; furthermore, we often intermix the two, which makes it difficult for us to understand our own motivations and those of others.

At the mythic level, we rarely acknowledge that we are limited by the life stories that we have created for ourselves. More importantly, we have little understanding of the power of energetic processes that can clear our vision, increase our intuition, and transform the way we perceive the

world. Learning to work within each dimension is essential when preparing for death.

By using techniques and rituals with each of the four dimensions, we can embrace death as a rite of passage. In doing so, we shatter the current paradigm, becoming active participants in the final passage of our loved ones. In addition, these techniques and rituals allow us to celebrate the accomplishment of navigating the journey to death. Understanding and participating in these rituals will also provide a greater sense of our own journey to come.

Rites of Passage

Traditionally, rites of passage are ceremonies or rituals that mark the thresholds we pass through during our lives. They often integrate cultural expectations with our biological life cycle of birth, reproduction, and death. With each rite of passage there is an ending or death of what has been and a beginning of a new role with different expectations and responsibilities.

Familiar rites of passage such as baptisms, bar mitzvahs, quinceañeras, graduations, and weddings are celebrated with much planning and expense. In our culture we know how to celebrate the beginnings, but we rarely honor the endings in our lives. We have no rituals for the loss of job, divorce, illness, or miscarriage. And our communities rarely step forward to support us at these times.



andrei@dugan@msn.com

Maya Nunez writing on a Before I Die Wall, Lyons, CO

A successful rite of passage takes place within a community and involves all four levels of engagement. To fully prepare for death as a rite of passage, we must challenge ourselves to explore each dimension by creating literal instructions, opening emotional doorways, mapping our mythic journey, and practicing energetic processes that free us to embrace death when the time comes. This requires us to complete tasks, build community, tell stories, and create transformative rituals. If we do this, we will arrive at the threshold of death ready to step through to a new beginning.

Literal Instructions

At the literal level of preparing for death as a rite of passage, we start by building our end-of-life community through conversations and developing written instructions that state our wishes in a direct manner. The language is uncomplicated, free of emotion, and without the use of symbols, metaphors or allegories. We simply state the facts.

The first challenge in preparing for death is to talk about it. Courage is needed to push through the cultural veil that prevents these conversations on



Cody Wiersema, codysol@gmx.com

Participants at Conversations on Death Symposium

death. Today, there are new initiatives such as Death Cafés, organizations such as The Conversation Project, and tools like the My Gift of Grace card game to help jump start the conversations we need to have with our families, friends, and the professionals who are available to assist us.

In this way we begin to build our community. You must decide who you want on your team—and involve them in the conversation. Your team might include your medical agent, medical provider, legal advisor, the executor of your estate, spiritual guides, comfort companions, and animal friends. Determine which tasks are better managed by some and not by others. Talking to each individual and leaving written instructions will smooth the process of their teamwork.

Edie Stone, shamanic practitioner, creates an altar.



Peter Jacobs, pjphoto@gmail.com

As you assemble your community, you will need to select a proxy or medical agent (Medical Durable Power of Attorney) to make decisions on your behalf when you are unable to do so, and to appoint a trusted person to handle non-medical obligations if you are disabled (Power of Attorney). There are also legal documents to complete to record your end-of-life choices (Advance Health Care Directives

or Living Will) and to indicate how you want your possessions distributed (Last Will and Testament). In these days of digital information, it is helpful to leave a record of important information, such as account numbers, user IDs, and passwords. Doing this will save your end-of-life team much time and energy.

It is important to develop an open relationship with your doctor. Receiving complete, accurate, and understandable information will help you or your team make choices that support your values and beliefs in regard to your life and your death.

Deciding what to do with your physical remains can be an interesting exploration. Do you want to be buried or cremated? Do you want to donate your organs? Do you want to give your body to science? Do you want to leave a low carbon footprint with a “green burial”? What is your budget for these activities? There are many online resources available to you.

Ritual

Once you have completed your literal instructions and shared them with the members of your end-of-life team, it is time to celebrate. Create a ritual practice that brings your team together. This could be an annual round of

golf, a seasonal hike, or the sharing of a scrumptious meal. Allow your team to get to know each other.

Emotional Doorways

Grief, despair, and fear can overwhelm us when preparing for death. It's only natural. But these emotions have resiliency and vitality that will enhance your life if you find ways to honor them. To engage life fully, both mentally and emotionally, requires developing skills for conscious living. There are many techniques that can open the doorway to your emotional vibrancy. I use each of the following practices in my personal life as well as my private practice.

Letting go as a practice will calm the mental and emotional turbulence of our minds. There are many ways to develop our skills of creating a tranquil state. Breathing exercises, meditation, yoga, dancing, chanting, praying, or simply walking in nature are just a few approaches.

Both grief and gratitude need conscious space in our busy lives. Practicing gratitude as a ritual serves as a reminder of all that we cherish. A gratitude journal can be invaluable. Likewise, setting aside time to express grief through silence, tears, song, writing, or other rituals offers an outlet for trapped emotions. Every year on the anniversary of my mother's death, I step away from my life into a silent retreat and reflect on my grief and seek guidance.

Taking time to review our lives and the valuable relations we have formed, enables us to better feel our connection to life. I started my own life review by creating an inventory of those I want notified upon my death. Each of these people and animal friends, whether alive or dead, shares my life's adventures. By writing about them, I remember when I felt most awake, alive, and engaged.

One of my favorite life reviews was created by a client who was a fabulous cook. She collected a selection of her favorite recipes, and for each one, she wrote about a meal that included that dish. She noted who was at the meal and the importance of their conversation or the event that they were celebrating. Here is an example:



Naya Devi officiating an Andean despacho ceremony

Caramel Apple Pie

Anne and I sat at the breakfast table on a cool October afternoon. We could not wait for dinner to taste the pie that I had taken out of the oven. Anne looked lovely in her sloppy sweater and whimsical hairdo. As we savored the

sweetness, she shared with me that she was a lesbian. I laid my dreams of weddings and sons-in-law on the table and stuffed them under my napkin.



Each of us has a legacy to leave, whether it is a large gesture or a small personal connection to another person. Our legacy often reflects how we have lived our lives. Patti Pansa, a client and friend, created the No Regrets Project during the last six months of her life. Aware that many people expressed regrets about their lives, Patti was certain that there was a way to live life and arrive at the end with no regrets. Through meditation, journaling, and talking with friends, she developed the five practices of the No Regrets Project: Be Grateful Every Day, Trust—Take the Risk, Courage to Be Me, Choose Joy, and Love Myself & Share It. Patti's story was published in *Natural Transitions Magazine* in 2014.



Community celebration of life at Conversations on Death Symposium

A “bucket list” of our aspirations for life is an opportunity to express and put into action those things that you would like to achieve before you die. Invite members of your end-of-life community to participate in reaching your goals.

Ritual

Develop a gratitude ritual or ceremony in which you share with members of your community the appreciation you have for life. Dance, sing, and enjoy each other's company.

Mythic Journey

A myth is a traditional story, especially one concerning the history of a people. Typically, it involves metaphors, allegories and supernatural beings. Myths resonate because they tell a universal human story of triumph and disappointment, luck or divine intervention, love and loss. To prepare mythically for death you must tell your own mythic story.

In traditional cultures, sacred space is always opened before stepping into ritual or ceremony. Opening sacred space is essentially a request for presence, support, and protection from mythic forces that create a safe

container of peace and possibilities, of imagination and celestial guidance. The way in which you choose to open sacred space depends entirely on your beliefs or spiritual tradition. Indigenous peoples perceive the world as fully animated. Each cardinal direction—North, South, East, West—is known to have unique flavor and a divine quality that can be called upon for assistance. The earth below and the sky above are included in this invocation for sacred space.

I often open sacred space by simply calling on mountains, rivers, plants, and animals from the four directions. I ask the earth to ground me and stars to guide me. Alternatively, for a client who was a scientist with no spiritual philosophy, I called in carbon, oxygen, hydrogen, nitrogen, silicon, and helium. He loved this because the elements were the way in which he perceived his world.

A key part of the mythic journey is finding or identifying your purpose in life. (This is different from a life review.) It gives us the opportunity to recognize our contributions, whether great or small. One of my client's purpose in life was to care for her beloved dogs. Another raised his children and gave them a solid foundation in life. Still another shared the music in his soul. Recognizing the

purpose of your life can guide you to live with more meaning. Writing a eulogy for yourself is a wonderful practice for finding your purpose. In your eulogy you become your own hero.

An ethical will (again, this is different from a Last Will and Testament) is a gift of your wisdom to be left to future generations. It is a way to share your values, life lessons, and dreams for the future. Too often we do not share this most valuable wisdom. In my ethical will, I have a file of my favorite poems, songs, rituals, and prayers that have consoled me through life.

A last suggestion for stepping into your mythic journey is to design your own celebration of life. You can incorporate much of what you have created: a special way of opening sacred space, a eulogy, prayers, poems, and songs that express your life's inner journey.

In 2001, I assisted a young man who suffered from muscular dystrophy. He was a poet and huge fan of rock & roll music. For months, we talked about what messages he wanted to convey

to those he would leave behind. He selected one of his poems to deliver each message. He made a list of people he wanted to speak, if they were so inclined. He also made a list of those he did not want to speak. He chose his master of ceremonies and asked his mother to read his eulogy.

Several hundred people attended his funeral, held in a large church with a fabulous sound system. I will never forget the opening strains of Jimi Hendrix picking the notes to "Hear My Train a Comin'," followed by Bob Marley's "Redemption Song." Friends, teachers, and family members spoke, but it was "O Death," a traditional gospel song that rocked the audience to tears and laughter. The service ended with "The End" by The Doors. This community knew that this young man was speaking directly to them that day.

Ritual

Why wait? Why not gather your community today to celebrate your life now? It can be a large gathering or an intimate conversation.

Energetic Processes

Physicists remind us that energy can be neither created nor destroyed, it can only be transformed. Shamans believe that animals, plants, stones, mountains, rivers, and planets all have energetic identities. Both physicists and shamans agree that each has an energy field that is in continuous motion, unique and yet connected to the all.

An energy field surrounds our physical bodies. Your energy field can take on different vibrations depending on your health, your thoughts and your activities. I find that simple energetic processes are important in preparing for death as a rite of passage. These ancient techniques can shift one's energies immediately.

According to the wisdom keepers, it is important to clear your energy field of heavy energies. These heavy energies can cause pain, disease, and disorientation. Clearing your energy field can be a simple process that helps you release energies that no longer serve you. Caregivers, too, can clear the energy fields of their patients as a

|ADVERTISEMENT|

GREEN BURIAL COUNCIL



bringing meaning and sustainability to the end of life
through public education efforts and certification of
green burial cemeteries, providers, and manufacturers
888-966-3330

way of reducing pain, dissolving fear, and creating peace. Shamanic teachers throughout the world offer classes in these techniques.

Unwinding time is a way of releasing one from the grip of linear time. Shamans live in the circular time of the seasons and the cycles of the sun and the moon. In circular time, time past and time future overlap on themselves. When called upon, a shaman steps outside of time completely through a process called journeying. Shamans journey in order to receive spiritual guidance. Rituals of unwinding time help us expand our conscious awareness of all the possibilities.

Engaging the spirits is an energetic activity that many people experience in the last hours before they die. Often, the dying have visions of loved ones who died previously. These visions bring peace in the dying process. Shamans practice energetic processes that send clients on spirit journeys to meet their spiritual guides and the community that is calling them across the threshold of death.

A client of mine suffered two strokes a year apart. He was fearful of death as well as the limitations of his life. Due to the strokes, his ability to communicate verbally was constrained. During my biweekly visits, I cleared his energy field and sent him on a short spirit journey. There were no words needed.

Over the next year, he diligently worked with his physical therapist, speech therapist, and me. He struggled to keep his balance as one stroke after another loosened the circuits of his brain. But he gained tremendous confidence in who he was becoming. It was my honor to be with him in his final hours to once again clear his energy field and send him on his way.

Granting permission to die can be a difficult process. Of course we do not want to leave our loved ones, but there comes a time when we must release them. I have found that the best practice for this is to learn to give yourself permission to die. Think about what you would want to hear from your family or friends that would allow you to die in peace. Would you need to hear that


you are loved? That your children or pets will be cared for? That you made a difference? Write these statements down for your end-of-life team.

Ritual

A ritual at the moment of death brings your community together to witness this precious moment, celebrate your crossing, and integrate their grief. In many spiritual traditions there are rituals prescribed for this moment. Washing and anointing the body, reciting poems or prayers, and singing are just a few. Work with your end-of-life team to develop a ritual with the flavors of you.

Conclusion

Start now to live your life and prepare for death as a rite of passage. Celebrate the good times. Celebrate the endings, honor them, and let them go. Prepare your literal instructions as a gift to those who will care for you. Find those emotional doorways to better navigate your life. Live your life and your death at the mythic. And let nature and the

universe restore your energies. It has been my experience that preparing for and celebrating the thresholds wakes us up and allows us to live and die more consciously. 

Prayer for Sacred Space

I call on the high mountains of this region to share their wisdom.
I call on the great rivers to share their currents to show me the flow of my sweetest journey.
I call on the plants and trees to breathe with me so that I may feel a connection with all of life.
I call on the animals that share their flesh and their beauty that nurture me.
I call on the earth herself to hold me and give me strength.
I call on the stars above to shine down on me and light my way.

Kitty Edwards is the executive director of The Living & Dying Consciously Project. Find out more at www.livinganddyingconsciouslyproject.org.

| ADVERTISEMENT |



GO in PEACE!

"A film that raises the consciousness of a nation."
Kandyce Powell
Chair,
National Veterans'
Advisory Board

1 in 4 of the people who die in the US is a veteran.

How do you care for vets with PTSD?

www.goinpeacefilm.org

Take flight on your *mythic journey*.
Let *your spirit* soar.
Find *Peace*.



**Conscious Transitions:
Harp Music for Times of Transition**
by Sue Hoadley

Available via CD or download at
livinganddyingconsciouslyproject.org/conscioustransitions

Proceeds benefit The Living & Dying Consciously Project,
a non-profit organization.

LISTEN TO EXCERPTS 



The Living & Dying Consciously Project helps individuals
live consciously — through all of life's passages — with
the knowledge that death is inevitable.

Visit our website at livinganddyingconsciouslyproject.org
to learn more about our community of teachers, workshops
and educational materials.





Reciprocation

Nancy Jewel Poer, 2015

Our bodies soon will fall away
For they are only mortal clay.
May many giving hands be there
To honor them with loving care.

The clay unites with Mother Earth
Who gave to us our mortal birth.
But birth that comes with earthly death
Is in the last and final breath.

As only grief and love remain
And earth and heaven make their claims,
The soul and spirit are born free
To live their spirit destiny.

Love is the power that holds it all,
Weds Truth to Life's courageous call.
Earth love-heaven shining lives above
As they care for us with uniting love.



**Counseling, Needs Assessments
Community Education, Referrals
Natural Deathcare Advocacy
Integral Thanatology Institute**



**Holly Blue Hawkins
PO Box 2094
Aptos CA 95001
831/588-3040**

hollyblue@LastRespectsConsulting.com

Things happen that make perfect sense
or no sense at all, or that I cannot even tell anymore
which, but somehow even that makes perfect sense
or at least a perfect sense of you,
like when music comes pouring out of my smartphone
though I have not touched it, with a commentary
from you on something I just thought
or your face now emblazoned upon my heart
things make perfect sense or no sense at all
or just simply a sense of you
writ large across my sky in a new constellation
that was not there last night, a perfect sense of you

©hollybluehawkins