



# Funeral Consumers Alliance of Eastern Massachusetts

Promoting a consumer's right to choose dignified, meaningful and affordable after-death care.

Annual Newsletter

January 2013

## Annual Gathering and Speaker Series

featuring

### “The Rise of the Religiously Unaffiliated” with Katrina M. Scott

Please join us on Saturday March 2, 2013 from 2 to 4 pm for our annual meeting. We are delighted to have Katrina M. Scott speak about “The Rise of the Religiously Unaffiliated”. According to the Pew Forum on Religion and Private Life report, *Nones on the Rise*, released in October 2012, one in five American adults — nearly 20 percent of the US population — now describe themselves as religiously unaffiliated. Within this broad category, some people do have spiritual and religious beliefs — they just don't identify with any specific religious group.

How does this shift affect who provides spiritual end-of-life care and bereavement services, especially funerals/celebrations of life?

Katrina M. Scott received her Masters of Divinity from Harvard Divinity School (05) and is the Oncology Chaplain at Massachusetts General Hospital, where she provides spiritual support to patients, family and staff. She is the author of several articles on the National Consensus Project for Quality Palliative Care (NCP) *Clinical Practice Guidelines Domain 5: “Spiritual, Religious and Existential Aspects for Care”* (2008) and is dedicated to promoting a multi-disciplinary team approach to end-of-life care. Endorsed by the American Ethical Union (Ethical Culture) for Health Care Chaplaincy, Katrina is an Officiant of the Ethical Society of Boston and Board Certified by the Association of Professional Chaplains. She lives in Newton with Fred (spouse) and Moxie (dog).

The meeting will take place at:

First Unitarian Society in Newton

1326 Washington Street, West Newton MA 02465

For more details concerning directions and parking please see the article on page 3 or call the FCAEM phone: 617-859-7990.

## Greetings from your FCAEM board.

### Highlights from 2012:

- Annual Meeting: Josh Slocum, Executive Director of the national Funeral Consumers Alliance, educated and entertained us as only he can on the topic of after death rights and options. The presentation was followed by a lively question and answer session
- Our volunteer speakers have been enthusiastically received at several talks
- We were able to send a representative to the biennial National Funeral Consumers Alliance conference in Arizona
- We participated in the 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Connecting for Change: A Bioneers by the Bay Conference presented by the Marion Institute in New Bedford,

This coming year we will again be conducting our funeral home price survey, and we are also planning to enhance and update our website.



## Annual Donation Request

Please consider sending a donation in the enclosed envelope. In addition to our one-time membership fee, this is our primary fund-raising method. Your donation will ensure that we can keep:

- Providing help and advice to consumers inquiring about their rights and options in choosing after-death care through both phone calls and email messages.

- Offering workshops and presentations to educate the public about meaningful and affordable after-death care.

- Mailing annual newsletters

- Holding annual meetings

FCAEM is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit. All contributions are tax-deductible.

Any size donation will be appreciated. Thank you in advance for your generosity.

# GREEN BURIAL VS. CREMATION

Eva S. Moseley

When my mother died in 1971, my brother and I went to a nearby Jewish funeral home. Among the coffins we were shown, I wanted the plain pine box with a Star of David on the lid and a small cushion for the head. Only for the Orthodox, we were told. Our family was secular, so we “had to” buy something more elaborate, and more expensive.

Like most people we hadn't thought about death in any serious way but that wooden box made an impression, and a few years ago I began to talk with people in FCAEM about simple burial, and to read occasional articles about plain coffins or green cemeteries. Green or natural cemeteries permit no embalming or other extraneous chemicals and no vaults; containers must be biodegradable. Standard cemeteries require vaults so they can mow more easily. Green cemeteries mound the extra soil from the grave; as the coffin and the body decompose, the mound gradually settles to ground level.

Because most green cemeteries permit only stone or wood markers level with the ground, a field of graves is still a field, where people can walk, watch birds or butterflies, even picnic. That is true of Greensprings Natural Cemetery Preserve, in Newfield (near Ithaca), N.Y., one of three green cemeteries I visited in 2012. In June Joel Rabinowitz, the director (who spoke at FCAEM's 2007 annual meeting), showed me around.

A small group of interested people had provided the down payment for the land; after a few years the former owner forgave the balance of the loan, a big help financially. More than 500 plots have been sold; about 55% are “local”—i.e., within a radius of 100 miles; most out-of-state clients are from Pennsylvania but some as far away as California. Adult plots cost \$1000, with another \$1000 for burial; infants \$250, burial \$300; and “cremains” \$250, and \$350 for burial. A resident caretaker lives with his wife in a pre-existing house; a neighbor with a backhoe digs graves for a set fee.

Ten-acre West Meadow is divided into 90x90' squares; each square consists of thirty-six 15x15' plots. Mounds are soon covered with the meadow's grasses and wildflowers, others have plantings from a list of approved local varieties, a few are edged with flat stones dug from the graves. Flat stone markers of irregular shapes measure about 400 in<sup>2</sup>. Some older graves have trees growing in them but tree-planting is no longer allowed as the roots can disturb contiguous graves and make digging them difficult.

A small Jewish area was consecrated by a Conserva-

tive rabbi from Ithaca. Neither cremation remains nor metals are allowed here. (Small nails or screws are permitted elsewhere.) There has been one Muslim burial, but so far there is no separate Muslim area. My visit was on a beautiful summer day, but in any weather the beauty of the natural surroundings would be soothing in a time of grief.

Older FCAEM members may remember Jessica Mitford's *The American Way of Death* (1963; revised edition 1998), which gave a big boost to the memorial society movement (now FCAs). Mitford, originally English, considered cremation the progressive, sophisticated choice and didn't mention green burial, but now England boasts more than 200 Woodland Cemeteries (as they're called). Official arrow-shaped roadsigns point them out. I visited two last April.

Brinkley, east of Cambridge, was rather scruffy, with ribbons and plastic items left on graves, but well used. Some of its many graves have subsided, later ones are still mounds. Flat polished stone markers were laid on graves haphazardly. Benches made of tree branches and other natural materials were that day covered with bird droppings. This was clearly a large field that should eventually be all or part woodland, but its few trees were small and struggling.

Barton Glebe, west of Cambridge, consists of two or three former fields. The trees here are larger and better established, the whole cemetery better cared for, with strict guidelines for what may be planted or placed on graves. Only temporary wooden markers (roughly 13x16") are allowed. The original 19 acres were consecrated by the Bishop of Ely in 2005; land acquired in 2009 makes the total nearly 40 acres. A “Lodge” is used for funeral services and gatherings and there is a small staff. Though run by the Arbory Trust, “the first Christian charity to offer woodland burial,” Barton Glebe is open to all. Despite the active interest in natural burial in that part of England, among friends and acquaintances I talked to about it, most, like Mitford, still want cremation.

That was also true of many in the audience at two talks about green burial: at the Sudbury UU church in August and to the Rainbow Lifelong Learning Institute in Arlington in November. Talk of cremation's high energy use and air pollution did not budge many from their visions of ashes scattered at sea or over a favorite landscape. But for me and colleagues on the Green Burial Committee (which is still looking for land for a green cemetery in Massachusetts), becoming part of the earth is the only choice that is intellectually and emotionally satisfying. Whatever your spiritual or religious views, it seems to me that any sense of connec-

tion with the earth, and concern for its future, *demand* natural burial. As Mark Harris puts it in *Grave Matters* (p.186): “Our best last act may...be the simple act of using what remains of our physical existence to fertilize depleted soil, push up a tree, preserve a bit of wild from development and in the

process perpetuate the natural cycle of life that supports those we leave behind. All the better that such basic, earth-friendly send-offs are sparing of resources, driven by families, and easy on the pocketbook.”



*Mourners gather at the graveside for a green burial at Greensprings Natural Cemetery Preserve in Newfield, New York. Much planning and preparation went into adorning the body for the ceremony. More photos of this same burial can be found on the Greensprings website.*

## Opportunities for Volunteers

Our members often ask what they can do to help us. Please consider why you joined in the first place, why this cause is important to you. Then, think of a place in your community where you could introduce yourself as an FCAEM member. A church, temple, senior center, hospital, nursing home, hospice, library, or funeral home would be a wonderful location to share information. We have over 1900 members! If each of us would do this, the results would be significant. Or you could begin by bringing one or more friends to the annual meeting.

Another great way to help is to send us a donation in the enclosed envelope. In addition to one-time membership dues, this is our primary fund-raising method. Your donation will ensure that we can keep:

- Providing help and advice to consumers inquiring about their rights and options in choosing after-death care through both phone calls and email messages.
- Offering workshops and presentations to educate the public about meaningful and affordable after-death care.
- Mailing annual newsletters
- Hosting annual meetings

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I wake up in the morning and dust off my wits,  
I grab the newspaper and read the obits.  
If I'm not there, I know I'm not dead,  
So I have a good breakfast and go back to bed.

From a turn-of-the-20th-century “parlor song,” quoted in Studs Terkel, *Coming of Age: The Story of Our Century by Those Who've Lived It*, p. 13.



A safe deposit box is not a good placeto store your funeral wishes as they won't be seen until other arrangements have been made.

## FCA National Conference 2012

By Heather Massey

I had the honor and privilege of representing the FCAEM at the FCA Biennial held in Tucson, Arizona last June. The conference was held at a hotel for the first time, to maximize opportunities for attending affiliate members to meet and network in close proximity of the conference sessions, meals and accommodations.

The FCA board further provided affiliates with the option of attending pre and post conference board meetings. Apparently this special opportunity is a long-standing tradition and one that was eagerly taken up by several attendees including myself. I was impressed not only with the open access to the inner workings of the FCA and board, but with the caliber and backgrounds of its members.

FCA affiliate board structure and composition was a topic addressed in a workshop presented by Laurie Powsner, President of FCA. In her session, "Building a Better Board", she stressed the need to reach out to and recruit a diverse working group that reflects the community and population that each affiliate serves.

Price surveys are a staple service that FCA affiliates offer their communities, and the workshop "Price Surveys and Publicity" was well attended. While the biannual surveys take a fair amount of time and energy, consumers rely on their local FCA to provide this valuable resource. Strategies for increasing funeral home responses to the surveys and ways to publicize the results for maximum exposure were presented by Joyce Mitchell, FCA board member and Presi-

dent of the Utah affiliate. The FCAEM has addressed this issue as well in recent years, asking members to consider volunteering to collect General Price Lists from their local funeral homes.

Ed Howard of the Center for Law in the Public Interest, a California lobbyist, became aware of and involved with the FCA as many folks initially do, through a death in his immediate family. His inability to find accurate or useful information from funeral homes online led him to a joint project with California FCA members, which resulted in getting a law passed there that requires funeral home to place more information on their websites. The successful venture and his positive FCA experience inspired him to present at the national conference.

The above sampling of educational offerings was balanced with wonderful networking opportunities and meaningful dialogue. It was gratifying to see the number of affiliates who chose to send representatives, as well as other like-minded organizations such as the National Home Funeral Alliance, a variety of hospices, and those who advocate for the needs/wishes of the dying.

The FCA biennials provide such inspiration and useful information, I would encourage members of our FCAEM community to consider attending. The 2014 conference is scheduled to take place in Nashville, Tenn. in early summer.

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## Alkaline Hydrolysis Disposition aka Water Cremation aka Water Resolution aka Bio Cremation aka Resomation aka Flameless Cremation

**Alkaline hydrolysis** is a process for the disposal of human remains, which its creator states is more ecologically favorable than cremation. The process is being marketed worldwide as an alternative to the traditional options of burial or cremation.

In the alkaline hydrolysis disposal process, the body is placed in a silk bag, itself placed within a metal cage frame. This is then loaded into a steel chamber. The machine is filled with a mixture of water and lye, and heated to a high temperature (around 160°C [320°F]), but at a high pressure, which prevents boiling. Instead, the body is effectively broken down into its chemical components, which takes about three hours.

The end result is a quantity of green-brown tinted liquid (containing amino acids, peptides, sugars and salts) and

soft, porous white bone remains (calcium phosphate) easily crushed in the hand (although a cremulator is more commonly used) to form a white-colored dust. The "ash" can then be returned to the next of kin of the deceased. The liquid is disposed of either through the sanitary sewer system, or through some other method including use in a garden or green space.

Alkaline hydrolysis as a method of final disposition of human remains is currently legal in Florida, Maine, Minnesota, and Oregon, among other states. In Minnesota, the Mayo Clinic uses an alkaline hydrolysis process to dispose of donated bodies. In Florida, a commercial resomator has been installed at the Anderson-McQueen funeral home in St. Petersburg.



## Why is our organization needed?

A death in the family often leaves people vulnerable and likely to make hasty and expensive decisions if they lack sufficient information regarding the wishes of the deceased. The Funeral Consumers Alliance encourages its members to study options and make decisions in advance, and to make a written record of their wishes, thereby sparing their survivors from having to make difficult decisions under stress.

Before You Go Funeral Shopping . . .

Being able to answer these questions will help you prepare to shop for a funeral home and for talking with funeral directors

- Do you want cremation or burial?
- Do you want to be embalmed? Embalming is rarely required by law. It is not required when burial, cremation or refrigeration takes place within a reasonable time.
- Do you want a viewing? Public or private (just family)? At the place of death, at home, at a religious institution or a funeral home?
- Do you want the body present at a funeral service?
- Do you want a graveside service?
- Do you want a memorial service held after the body is buried or cremated?

If you want the body embalmed and/or don't want to keep the body at home for a viewing, you will want to use a

funeral home and choose one that is physically convenient and appealing to you. Visit more than one, talk with the funeral directors, and choose a flexible one that you believe will honor your choices with caring and dignity. This is a meaningful, once-in-a-lifetime occasion and can be marred by insensitive staff.

If you want a funeral service with the body present, but don't want to hold it in a funeral home, consider a religious institution or have a graveside service. (If you have no affiliation, you might want to ask your local Unitarian Universalists or Society of Friends (Quakers) what they charge for use of their generally religiously neutral spaces.)

**An Important Fact: If you want a memorial service after burial or cremation has taken place, there is no need to hold it at a funeral home.** Have it at your convenience at a religious institution, home, park, club, hotel, or community center.

Some Funeral Consumer Alliance affiliates have maintained "cooperative agreements" with select funeral homes. Under those arrangements, cooperating funeral homes have agreed to give FCA members discounted prices on funeral services. However, the national FCA has been encouraging its affiliates to adopt a more educational and public-service role, rather than serving as "buyers' clubs" for their members.



## Information about the FCAEM Annual Meeting in Newton

**Location:** The First Unitarian Society in Newton, often called FUSN (pronounced "few-zen") by members and friends, is located at 1326 Washington Street in West Newton, Massachusetts, at the corner of Washington and Highland streets.

**Directions:** FUSN is across from the Newton police station, near the West Newton Cinema, where Route 16 crosses the Mass. Turnpike. Get directions from your home by typing in the address in MapQuest, Google, or other mapping services.

**Parking:** Parking is allowed on Highland Street and along Davis Street. Parking is allowed in the bank parking lot on the corner of Highland and Davis streets when the bank is closed; however, the spots along the bank building are not available for parking for non-Bank business, ever. Handicapped parking is available in the small lot behind the church on Highland Street opposite the bank lot. There is

also public parking in lots across from the church off Cherry Street and behind the Police Station off Waltham Street and limited metered street parking.

**Public Transportation:** A commuter rail and several MBTA buses stop in West Newton Square near FUSN. You can check routes and times for the Framingham/Worcester commuter rail and for local and express bus service through the MBTA Rider Tools—just put in FUSN's address, 1326 Washington Street, West Newton MA 02465, to get current information.

**Entrances:** The building has six entrances. The double door Washington St. entrance at the west end of the building leads directly into the Alliance Room, where we will be holding our meeting. At the back of the building, through the small parking lot and the gate in the chain-link fence, is a single door that serves as the handicapped entrance.

**Funeral Consumers Alliance of  
Eastern Massachusetts (FCAEM)  
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Boston, MA 02116**

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**Thank you!**