



# Funeral Consumers Alliance of Eastern Massachusetts

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

Annual Newsletter

February 2016



## President's Message

Raya Gildor

### Greetings from your FCAEM board!

We were delighted with the turnout at our 2015 annual gathering, featuring Funeral Director Peter Stefan (Graham, Putnam & Mahoney Funeral Parlors, Worcester), and a Death Café. Peter was responsible for holding and preparing the body of marathon bombing suspect Tamerlan Tsarnaev. A Death Café is an informal gathering at which, over coffee, tea, and cake, participants share their experiences of and feelings and ideas about death.

Due to the positive response to this Death Café, we have begun to schedule them more regularly. In addition to the ongoing monthly ones in Falmouth, we hosted one in Cambridge in August, another in Somerville in October, and co-hosted one with Mount Auburn Cemetery in November.

The Funeral Consumers Alliance of Eastern Massachusetts is now on Facebook! Please check out our page [www.facebook.com/fcaemass](http://www.facebook.com/fcaemass) often for interesting information and upcoming events.

FCAEM volunteers came together to support the Wake Up to Dying Project's visit to Somerville's Davis Square in September. The Wake Up to Dying Project aims to shift our cultural perspective on death from fear and avoidance toward familiarity – by inviting people to acknowledge death, be prepared for it, and live more fully for having done so.

Additionally, several volunteers represented us at both the Northeast Organic Farming Association's winter and summer 2015 conferences, as well as at the Bioneers by the Bay and Connecting for Change Conference, the Hospice & Palliative Care Federation of Massachusetts (HPCFM) Education Conference, and at several other speaking engagements in our area.

FCAEM members contributed several presentations to the successful Natural Deathcare Collaborative workshop, In Loving Hands, a daylong intensive workshop on the Art of Green, Family-led Deathcare.

Our volunteers have compiled and published our 2015 Funeral Price Survey on our website, [www.fcaemass.org](http://www.fcaemass.org), in order to promote greater transparency regarding funeral costs and services available in eastern Massachusetts.

We are currently seeking nominations for a new president. Please send your suggestions to [fcaemass@gmail.com](mailto:fcaemass@gmail.com); the election will take place at our spring annual meeting. I am pleased to announce that we already have one interested candidate: Ashlie Taylor is a very active volunteer, and has demonstrated wonderful leadership skills this past year. It has been a pleasure and an honor for me to be president of the FCAEM, and I look forward to remaining involved with our dedicated and lovely group of volunteers in another capacity!

We look forward to continuing the mission of supporting our members and educating the public on how to make informed, thoughtful, and affordable after-death plans in 2016. Thank you for your support!

Raya Gildor

### Please Save the Date!

Please reserve the afternoon of

**Saturday, April 2nd, 2016**

for our Annual Meeting and Speaker Series to be held at

**The Democracy Center**

**45 Mt Auburn Street**

**Harvard Square in Cambridge.**

The event is still being planned, so make sure to check our website in the coming weeks for details. You can also stay informed by joining our email list by sending us your email address. If you do not have email or internet access, feel free to call our 24 hour phone line at (617) 859-7990 and a volunteer will contact you with the details.



## Green Burial Massachusetts: A project of FCAWM and FCAEM

Eva Moseley

Burial without extraneous chemicals (notably embalming fluid), metal or hardwood caskets, and metal or concrete grave liners is haphazardly available in Massachusetts in some municipal or other cemeteries. Cambridge Cemetery, for example does not require a grave liner; Mount Auburn, a conventional “garden” cemetery in Cambridge and Watertown, places green graves in among non-green ones as space permits; the town cemetery in Richmond, N.H., has set aside a portion of its land for green burials.

A municipal cemetery accepts only residents of the city or town; denominational ones, notably Catholic, Jewish or Muslim, with some exceptions accept only members of the faith. The mission of Green Burial Massachusetts (GBM) is to establish a cemetery open to all — and eventually perhaps a dozen or more throughout the Commonwealth. The aim is also to keep the prices of burial plots and services within reach of all.

The effort to establish a green burial ground was centered in the Green Burial Committee (GBC) of the FCA of Western Massachusetts, before it became GBM. Members made presentations to select boards, cemetery commissions, and boards of health of towns in or near Pioneer Valley, and to land trusts in that region, also publicizing the idea at fairs, in newspaper interviews, and with film showings. Others aimed to interest land trusts at their annual conferences.

As a result, GBM now has an important ally in Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust (MGLTC), a major force in land conservation in its 23-town region west, north, and east of Quabbin Reservoir. MGLTC staff are on the lookout for suitable conservation land. Aside from standard land conservation practices, MGLTC engages in innovative projects: for example, with various methods enabling farmers to work land that they otherwise could not afford. Green burial also combines land conservation with practical, sustainable land use; a green cemetery continues to be open space, available for such “passive” recreation as hiking or bird-watching.

Although we have looked to MGLTC and other land trusts, there are other ways to achieve this goal. Some Cornell University professors and others pooled savings for a down payment on a large tract of land south of Ithaca, N.Y., establishing Greensprings Natural Cemetery Preserve. Even if land, especially in eastern Massachusetts, may be more expensive than land in western New York State, this model might be feasible in our region too.

If the idea of returning your physical remains to the earth that fed you for your lifetime “speaks” to you as it does to us in GBM, here are a few things you can do to further this quest.

Let us know

of any available land that might be suitable for this purpose.

of any groups or institutions you belong to that would welcome a presentation: FCAEM’s “Road Show,” about green burial and other topics, and/or film or video.

of people you know who are willing and able to invest in land for green burial.



## Art and Death

Heather Massey

For the second year running, the Woods Hole library announced a call for art work intended for a community wide art show, this year entitled “Uncharted Territory”. The show was inspired by an abundance of nautical maps and charts donated to the library by the various seafaring and scientific institutions housed in the Village of Woods Hole.

The show’s name proved an irresistible challenge for a diehard death educator to create a death educational piece! Able to locate a casket shaped styrofoam cooler, I proceeded to cover all of the interior and exterior and all six sides with the donated nautical maps and charts. The finished piece was titled *Death: the Ultimate Uncharted Territory*. The interior floor of the yard long casket was further illustrated with the names and logos of all the local death awareness and educational organizations and events such as Death Café, Living with Dying, the Natural Deathcare Collaborative and of course, the FCA of Eastern Ma.

The piece attracted much comment and curiosity as it was on display over the summer at the library, and now travels with us to these and other events as we volunteers strive to educate and inform the public of available deathcare options and resources.



## Death Cafés: Bringing Death to the Table

Jasmine Laietmark

Before I knew it, two hours had passed. Our little group easily wandered together through meaningful discussion, though we'd only just met. We'd been chatting over cupcakes about one of the most taboo subjects in 21st century Western culture. Many of us are pleased—relieved, even—to sit with others looking to bring death back into our daily American lives in an uplifting way.

The agenda-less phenomenon known as Death Café was developed in Europe in 2011 by Jon Underwood and Sue Barsky Reid and modeled on the ideas of Bernard Crettaz. Deathcafé.com provides a guide and resources for any potential organizer. The discussion group is not bereavement counseling nor an end-of-life information session; its simple recipe calls for a few basic ground rules, sweet treats, and tea. Conversations follow infinite paths. The only constant theme is death. By the close of 2015, there have been over 2,400 pop-up Death Cafés in 32 countries, including over 1,300 in the US.

Death Cafés ride the wave of “death-positive” movement around the US and beyond. People are apparently hungry to push through euphemisms and explore their natural curiosity.

Death Salons, gatherings of self-identified “death-geek” academics, experts, and artists, are selling out of tickets in each incarnation. *Smoke Gets in Your Eyes* by mortician and Order of the Good Death founder Caitlin Doughty became a New York Times Bestseller. Sheri Booker’s memoir *Nine Years Under*, an account of her years in the funeral industry, won her the NAACP’s Image Award. The Conversation Project rolled out a public health ad campaign with the MBTA in Boston. Mainstream books such as Dr. Atul Gawande’s *Being Mortal*, are turning out to be game-changers for people of all ages. FCAEM’s ongoing Cape Cod Death Classes are more popular than ever.

Death Café’s stated objective is “to increase awareness of death with a view to helping people make the most of their (finite) lives.” By talking about death, sharpening our awareness of mortality, we may also be honing our empathy and will to work for justice as we share this earth.

FCAEM now facilitates monthly Boston-area Death Cafés in addition to the Cape Cod monthly series, which continues to thrive as it heads into its third year.

Send an email to [FCAEMass@gmail.com](mailto:FCAEMass@gmail.com) to join our email list and stay informed about events in our region.



### 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 support to consumers with questions about their rights and options in after-death care through both our phone line and email.
- Offering workshops and presentations to educate the public about meaningful and affordable after-death care
- Maintaining our website
- Mailing our annual newsletter
- Holding our 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.



## Electronic Death Registration

Ashlie Taylor

Unlike the federal census conducted every 10 years since 1790, the recording of vital events predates the Constitution and continues to be a primary function of the states. Vital statistics depend on continuous record keeping of vital events as they occur. Birth, death (including fetal death and abortion), marriage, and divorce all require registration with a local jurisdiction

### Modernization of Death Registration

The Federal eVital Standards Initiative (aka Electronic Death Registration) was begun in 2002 with the vision of replacing the decentralized and entrenched system of paper death registration with the use of technological innovation. It allowed for the verification of social security numbers during the processing of death certificates and has gradually been implemented by most states, including Massachusetts as of September 2014. The Electronic Death Registration System (EDRS) is an online, multi-user module of the Department of Public Health Vitals Information Partnership (VIP), which allows for the timely and efficient creation, amendment and completion of the death record by involved parties from their computers. Users of this system include physicians and other medical personnel, funeral directors, long-term care facilities, hospice centers, boards of health, and city/town clerks. A user of the system must complete training and receive access through an account with secure user authentication.

### Electronic Death Registration (EDRS) in a nutshell

• Starting in November 2014 – all deaths in Massachusetts must be registered electronically using the EDRS.

- EDRS access is not available to the general public.
- A family may specify a designee to complete the death registration in lieu of a funeral director.
- The special or family designee will work with the medical certifier, clerk of the city or town where the death occurred, and burial agent to enter the death record in the EDRS.

• To remove a body from a facility where the death occurred, the family designee must be provided a signed and completed Pronouncement of Death (R-302), a signed Medical Certifier Worksheet, or a Death Certificate Attestation Copy.

• Medical certifiers may be either “online” or “offline.” Online means they use the EDRS directly and enter the medical certifier information through the system. Offline medical certifiers use a paper method which requires an extra step in data entry for the town clerk. Offline certifiers rely on the town clerk to fill in the medical component on their behalf with subsequent verification via “fax” attestation.

While the death registration process as outlined in the EDRS structure presupposes that most families will employ funeral directors, this is clearly not required. Detailed instructions are provided online for families not working with a funeral home. As with any new system, users will need diligence and persistence.

For more information regarding the electronic death registration system please visit: <http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/>



## Taking Another Look At Our Bylaws

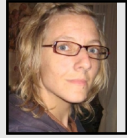
Paula Chasan

Our current bylaws were amended and approved in 1992, almost 25 years ago. We are hoping this year to review our bylaws, to clarify and make them more relevant to our present organization and interests. We have evolved since earlier days when in addition to the primary goal of helping grieving families with information, and educating the public, the organization worked to encourage donation of bodies to science and for medical education. Our name then was The Memorial Society, Inc. (still our legal name); we had not yet begun to call ourselves The Funeral Consumers Alliance of Eastern Massachusetts. The Memorial Society Inc. was led for many years by physicians, and they appre-

ciated the great need for donation of bodies for medical education and research. Although we have our newer name, we haven’t changed our primary goals, of helping families in need of guidance at time of loss and educating the public. But we have other interests today, which include supporting more choice in after-death care, including Green Burial, and also supporting greater participation in the process by families and individuals.

We plan that any changes made in our bylaws will help FCAEM to function even better for our members and the public.





## 2015 Funeral Price Survey Results

Ashlie Taylor

During the summer of 2015, we initiated our biennial Funeral Price Survey for Eastern Massachusetts and are glad to present our findings, even if they represent only a small percentage of funeral homes. We expanded our questions this year to include the number of requests fielded by Funeral Homes for green/natural burial, and questions that aim to determine funeral homes' flexibility when dealing with individual service requests. We were curious how funeral homes respond to requests by survivors to provide partial services.

Please visit our website to read our online summary guide containing an overview of your rights and descriptions of typical services offered. If you choose to use a funeral home (and that is a choice!), the staff are likely to be happy to accommodate your specific requests, but don't forget your rights and don't be afraid to ask and clarify services you do and don't want, as well as costs, as you go! To read the detailed results of our survey, please consult our website, [www.fcaemass.org/fhs.shtml](http://www.fcaemass.org/fhs.shtml)

### Breakdown of 2015 Returns:

#### Basic Service Fee

High \$3850.00  
Low \$1450.00

#### Immediate Burial

High \$4945.00  
Low \$750.00

#### Direct Cremation w/alternative container

High \$3795.00  
Low \$905.00

#### Least Expensive Casket

High \$1950.00  
Low \$295.00

#### Least Expensive Alternative Container

High \$295.00  
Low \$45.00

#### Least Expensive Vault/Liner

High \$1395.00  
Low \$375.00



## Call for Volunteers

Ashlie Taylor

As a new year unfolds, current FCAEM volunteers have identified some new goals and events that we would love to host and promote. If you would like to be part of the action - definitely reach out! We are seeking volunteers to work on the following projects and committees:

**Events Committee:** Help establish regular death cafés, table at relevant events, host guest speakers, develop Q&A forums for the community, and/or curate movie nights! We need help with venue location, communication with speakers, organizing refreshments, and advertising.

**Legal Advisory Committee:** members would answer questions from FCAEM volunteers or members concerning legal issues around death care and our non-profit status.

**Bylaws Committee:** FCAEM's bylaws need to be updated to reflect its current activities and focus; we could use help in revising them.

**Hotline Committee:** Learn to answer the FCAEM telephone line and respond to email inquiries from the general public. This is a key service that we offer, making our knowledge and support available to those needing assistance. You will be part of a mutually supportive team of experienced volunteers sharing the responsibility of providing compassionate and empowering information to those in need!

**Treasurer's Assistant:** Help with the annual filing of our non-profit state and federal reports. Our treasurer has been doing double duty and needs to be relieved of this annual task.. If you are interested in how non-profits are regulated, this is a very educational supporting role.

**Data Management Assistant:** The FCAEM data guru is transitioning to using relational databases and would love assistance in best practices and support from those who have special knowledge in this area.

**Volunteer Reporter:** The Massachusetts Board of Registration in Embalming and Funeral Directing meeting occurs every 1st and 3rd Tuesday at 10am in Boston. The FCAEM would love to be a regular presence at these meetings in order to stay abreast of current regulatory discussion and funeral board news. If you have a penchant for citizen journalism – this would be a great service.

The FCAEM is run entirely by volunteers; the organization relies on this dedicated team of people who offer their time and skills. If you have other interests or ideas about how you could be involved, we would love to hear them. Any level of commitment is greatly appreciated! Send your ideas and your offers of help to [fcaemass@gmail.com](mailto:fcaemass@gmail.com).



## Undertakers in the News

Eva Moseley

### Charles W. Dee, Sr.

Funeral directors die too and some are particularly beloved in life and sorely missed in death. Charles W. Dee seems to have been one such person. Except for World War II service in the Army Air Force, he lived his entire 88 years in Concord, Mass. and followed his father and grandfather as the head of Joseph Dee & Son Funeral Home.

His Irish-American great-grandfather was a farmer who also dug graves at Sleepy Hollow Cemetery, where (much later) as a boy Charles Dee charged tourists 25 cents to guide them to the graves of Emerson, Thoreau, the Alcotts, and other notables. After the war he studied funeral directing thanks to the GI Bill and, in addition to running the funeral home, served Concord's veterans as agent and graves officer. His daughter described him (as quoted in his obituary in the *Boston Globe*, 8/10/2012) as a humble person and a good listener, who made sure to elicit his clients' wishes rather than urging them to buy goods and services they might not want and perhaps could not afford.

### Joseph V. O'Donnell

Not all funeral directors are as popular and ethical as Charles Dee is said to have been. In 2014 a grand jury indicted Joseph O'Donnell on 278 counts. Many pertained to human remains he left to decompose in storage facilities he owned. He gave some families the wrong ashes and continued to operate O'Donnell-Mulry F.H. on Neponset Avenue in Dorchester after his license expired in 2009. Another charge was embezzlement: at least 31 clients gave him money for future services but he spent the nearly \$150,000 "for his own purposes." One Quincy couple, for instance, gave him \$12,250 for their funerals. That money is gone and the family is unable to replace it.

In May 2015 O'Donnell was sentenced to 3-5 years in prison plus 5 years of probation, and he must pay the victims restitution. Very few funeral directors should be sitting in prison with him, but the Funeral Consumers Alliance's advice has always been: plan pre-need but don't pre-pay! O'Donnell's story is an object lesson in the soundness of that advice.

### Troy J. Schoeller

The truth may make you free, but sometimes telling it can get you in trouble. Schoeller was an embalmer who, when interviewed by the *Boston Phoenix* in 2006, described what he did in graphic and even crude terms, for instance admitting that he "really hate[d] embalming fat people" and describing fluids that leak from bodies. The Board of Registration of Funeral Directors and Embalmers found that his statements "violated rules of conduct" that "protected the integrity of the profession" and revoked his license. He was fired from his job.

Schoeller argued that the Board violated his free speech rights. His remarks might be considered crude but what he said about embalming was accurate. The Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court agreed, suggesting that the public should be better informed about embalming. Although he was able to get his license back after the SJC ruling, and although he loved the work — "I could help families at a really hard time," he said — he wasn't sure he would resume embalming. According to LinkedIn, he now works in biotech.

(For descriptions of what happens during embalming, see Jessica Mitford, *The American Way of Death*, or Mark Harris, *Grave Matters*. You will see why the profession doesn't want you to know too much about it.)

### It's the 21st Century!

FCAEM has 1683 members, of whom 169 have given us their email addresses. This means that nearly 9 out of 10 either do not have email addresses or haven't revealed them to us.

Please send us your email address so that we can let you know quickly (and cheaply) about the many events FCAEM has begun hosting beyond the annual meeting.

**Email Address** ---> [fcaemass@gmail.com](mailto:fcaemass@gmail.com)

### How to Contact FCAEM

**Phone:** (617) 859-7990 (24-hour answering machine)

**Email:** [fcaemass@gmail.com](mailto:fcaemass@gmail.com)

**Mail:** FCA of Eastern Massachusetts; 66 Marlborough Street; Boston, MA 02116

**Website:** [www.fcaemass.org](http://www.fcaemass.org)

**Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/fcaemass](http://www.facebook.com/fcaemass)



## Hello From the Treasurer

Paula Chasan

Reading our newsletters and annual appeals, members become familiar with encouragement to contribute beyond the one-time membership fee, to sustain the activities of FCAEM. You have responded every year with generous financial support for which we are deeply grateful. We want you to know where your donations go, so here is a summary of funds collected and spent in the fiscal year 2015 (September 1, 2014 to August 31, 2015.)

But first, some background: for almost 10 years our yearly receipts and expenses have each been in the range of \$4000 to \$6500. These amounts fluctuate year to year and are often not equal in amount in a given year. However over several years the receipts and expenses generally balance out.

This fiscal year our expenses grew to a total of \$7515. As is usual in our budget, more than 50% of our expenses were for mailings to our membership: printing and postage for the newsletters you are reading today, for our annual appeal letter and for our survey of funeral homes. In Fiscal 2015, these two largest items, printing and postage, came to almost \$5000. Other expenses were our phone and internet services, \$370; annual dues to our national organization, the Funeral Consumers Alliance, (15% of our last year's income), \$773; expenses for our Annual Meeting, \$430; and a host of miscellaneous expenses from filing fees to paying for tables at relevant conferences where we inform the public of FCAEM activities.

The increase in expenses this year seems to reflect greater activity and energy in FCAEM; more younger members have joined and there is great interest in some of our new programs such as the Death Cafés.

Thanks to generous contributions, our income in Fiscal 2015 came to \$5320.



## Burial At Sea

Heather Massey

As a native of Cape Cod with a lifelong love of the sea, and as a volunteer FCAEM natural and DIY deathcare educator, I have begun to explore ocean burial as an option for final disposition and a form of natural deathcare or green burial for those of us here in eastern Massachusetts,

Research began over the course of the past year and with some initial inquiries here on the Cape by one of our new volunteers, Jasmine Laietmark.

While collecting General Price Lists for our price survey last fall, Jasmine and I visited with licensed and insured Captain Ro of Dog Gone Sailing Charters out of Provincetown, who offers memorial sails for scattering of cremains (cremated remains, also referred to as ashes) aboard her sailing vessel. Her memorial excursions can be part of a sunset cruise or other sailing trip offered and can accommodate up to 6 accompanying passengers for fees starting at \$280. If the family is unable to accompany the cremains on the sail, the captain can also accommodate requests for scattering by the crew.

We also intend to explore the possible option of full body burial at sea off the Massachusetts coast, and report back to members via the FCAEM website and future newsletters.

Anyone with information on or experience with burial at sea, either scattering of cremains/ashes and /or full body burial, is encouraged to contact us via email: [fcaemass@gmail.com](mailto:fcaemass@gmail.com) or by phone at 508-457-1612. Thank you so much for any leads and/or stories.

We are particularly interested in funeral homes that have provided this service as well as private licensed sea captains.



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

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### ***Before I Go: A Useful Booklet***

Heather Massey

Are you aware that the new expanded version of the old blue covered *Before I Go* has been updated and is now available through FCAEM?

I was reminded of what a valuable resource this new version is when we volunteers presented a death education class on FCAEM's services and resources this fall. The realization prompted me to purchase and give the 30 page funeral planner to family members as a gift this past holiday season. We are always reminding consumers of the need to plan ahead, yet we sometimes forget to remind ourselves and our own families.

The spiral bound workbook, illustrated by the late Cape Cod artist Edward Gorey, whose work is known to many through the PBS series *Mystery*, is provided free with new membership, and is available for purchase as a stand-alone for \$15. Also available is a digital version of this popular funeral planner in Adobe PDF format for \$10. Both can be ordered from the national FCA website, [www.funerals.org/bookstore](http://www.funerals.org/bookstore). You can fill out this digital version of the planner

on your computer, save it, and update it as many times as you like. Some members choose to get both versions; i.e., a hard copy for working on at home and keeping with their other advance directives, while maintaining and updating the digital version online for retrieval there if the hard copy is inaccessible for some reason when needed.

Using *Before I Go* you can

1. record your detailed funeral wishes,
2. leave instructions for your pet care,
3. tell survivors where to find your assets and how to wind down your online life, and
4. read two free chapters from the book Final Rights with all the funeral and burial laws and consumer protections specific to Massachusetts.