



Funeral Consumers Alliance of Eastern Massachusetts

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

Annual Newsletter

April 2019



Becoming President

Patti Muldoon

Being elected president of FCAEM last spring entailed a steep learning curve. What impressed me most is the energy and commitment of the volunteers in our all-volunteer organization. This is a shout-out to all the wonderful volunteers, on and off the board, who tackle a range of tasks to educate the public and assist people with after-death planning and care.

FCAEM is undertaking actions on several fronts at once: providing outreach at multiple events from Worcester to Boston to Cape Cod; redesigning our website, helping to add a new statewide website; revising our bylaws; updating our logo, brochure and printed materials; and addressing internal issues to help us become a more effective organization.

Opportunities for Involvement

We need your ideas and your involvement!

- Nominations for Board Members – Consider throwing your hat in the ring to join the board, or nominating someone else. We are experimenting with alternating monthly meetings between ones open to all members and the public in a public location, and ones for board members only, usually at a member's house. We use audio or video conferencing for members who live far from meeting places. If you might want to join the board, please email fcaemass@gmail.com.
- Networking - connect us with organizations and individuals you know.
- Manage or help update the content of our website and social media.
- Become our graphic artist –help with designs for outreach.
- Join our presentation/tabling efforts; lead a Death Café or other event in your area. Please let us know whether you need training or can help train others.



Save the Date



Annual Meeting and Speaker Series

Saturday, May 11, 2019 from 3-5 pm
Mount Auburn Cemetery - Bigelow Chapel
580 Mount Auburn Street, Cambridge MA

How to Get the Death You Want



Karen Smith, LCSW PhD, is Vice President of the national Funeral Consumers Alliance. Karen provides ethics policy development and ethics education for the Henry Ford System of six hospitals in and around Detroit. She is passionate about sharing ethics with medical professionals and the community and assisting families during difficult decisions. She specializes in death and dying issues.

Note: For tours preceding the annual meeting see directions on page 2.

- We intend to continue our biennial funeral home and crematorium surveys later this year, which will require volunteers working individually or in teams.

The Mass. Board of Registration in Embalming & Funeral Directing holds regular meetings; one or more volunteers to attend would be very helpful, e.g., to observe, take notes, and report back .

FCAEM volunteers organize, speak or table at, or attend various conventions, conferences, Death Cafés, workshops, and film screenings. If you aren't already one of them, consider becoming one. You'll learn a lot and help further our mission. When our new website is ready, we will post detailed information there about volunteer opportunities and efforts, and past and future events.

(Continued on page 2)

Planning Ahead to Help Your Family

Claire McNeill

In New York State I was on the Board of our “Funeral Planning Society” for about ten years. In New York people have to utilize a funeral home, so we helped our members choose a funeral home based on our surveys and their financial ability.

When I was involved in making arrangements for three of my older relatives, I was grateful that they had made many choices ahead of time. My Aunt Helen was single and died at age 95. She had selected a funeral home and planned to donate her body to a medical school, so the funeral home transported her body there. I enjoyed planning the service for Aunt Helen, who had been an active musician in Albany, NY. Three organists who had been her students, as well as a bell choir she had conducted, participated in the memorial service at the church where she had been organist. The following summer we received her remains and held another gathering at the family plot to again share fond memories.

My mother died a few years later at 93, having long ago decided on direct cremation. I chose a funeral home based on the surveys our funeral planning organization had taken. Talking to the funeral home ahead of time I had arranged that my brothers and I could have a short “Goodbye” visit with my mother after her death, without any preparation of her body. Even though I had already talked to the funeral home, I still felt quite nervous when my brothers and I went to sign the paper

approving cremation. I was glad I had prepared the information needed for the death certificate ahead of time.

We took the remains back to her old home town and buried the cremated remains in the cemetery next to those of my father, each of us laying a red rose on the grave, remembering that our father had called her “Rosy.” After the memorial service we had a fine time talking about her life with her friends, and enjoyed the simple family ceremony at the grave led by her former minister.

When my mother’s sister died at 100 in a nursing home in Pennsylvania, she too had made plans with a local funeral home for direct cremation. All I had to do was to submit her obituary, which I had written before her death, and later pick up the remains. My husband and I drove to the cemetery on a sunny and cold December day to place the remains, in a box decorated with pictures of flowers, in the grave beside the remains of her husband.

My husband and I have also decided on direct cremation, and told our daughters. We have chosen a local funeral home based on obtaining the itemized price list and asking questions. We hope to have our remains buried in the family plot established by my husband’s ancestors in Winchester, where coincidentally we now live.

Claire McNeill is treasurer of the FCAEM.

Becoming President *(Continued from page 1)*

During the past year, we signed up 18 new members. Help us do better!

RSVP for the Annual Meeting, May 11th

Please mark this date in your calendar now. Mount Auburn Cemetery will, graciously and generously, allow FCAEM to use Bigelow Chapel gratis. We are offering a series of afternoon events (see schedule below). May 11th will be the height of the birding season so the cemetery will teem with birds (especially migrating warblers), birders, and beautiful spring blooms.

The tours are free, but you must sign up in advance to secure a spot. The meeting is free as well. You can

make reservations at www.eventbrite.com—search on FCAEM.

May 11th Schedule:

1:00 pm Tour of the garden will focus on changing attitudes toward death from Pilgrims to the Victorian Era to today.

2:00 pm Tour of the new crematorium, with technology that considerably lowers each cremation’s carbon footprint

2:30 pm Refreshments

3:00 - 5:00 pm Annual Meeting, and speaker Karen Smith

At our business meeting, we will present our revised website and brochure; vote on bylaw changes; and hold elections. For information about our featured speaker, see page 1.



Children & Loss: What to Expect, What to Do

Emily McClatchey

In times of loss, helping children through grief is demanding of your time, your thought, and your attention, which are already the most valuable benefits an adult can offer a child. But in times of upheaval, these resources become both scarcer and more needed. Here are nine key tenets about how children face grief that can help guide you through.

Kids crave ritual.

A death can make children feel lost. Providing them with a chance to hold a ceremony or ritual promotes their sense of agency. Establishing a predictable, clear routine is especially important given the changes that inevitably accompany death.

Kids struggle to understand.

At any age, disbelief and denial are common responses to death; the natural brain development of children puts them at a further disadvantage in coming to terms with it. Children can't fully grasp concepts, and so, confused, may ask repetitive questions. A clear, consistent message delivered patiently in frank language is best.

Kids tell their stories.

Children are drawn to stories and storytelling. By telling of their own experience, children can attain a sense of competence, better understanding their loss. Allowing them the freedom to tell their stories gives them the confidence to face new challenges. Creating -- journaling, drawing, etc. -- and communicating with others about loss promotes healing from grief and honors the child's relationship with the person who has died.

Kids collect mementos.

Most children are natural collectors, from a desire to reinforce their developing identities and to own objects they identify with. This tendency to collect may intensify after a death, when kids may seek keepsakes and ways to honor and memorialize the lost connection. Many children fear that they will forget those who have died. This is scary, so they cling to mementos as one concrete way to feel connected.

Kids are still kids.

Play is the work of childhood. Children use play to understand the world, work out aggression, manage anxiety, and of course, to have fun! Faced with the death of a loved one, they may alternate between grief and play. Being kids, they love packages, gifts, and mail, which seem to say: I understand that you are suffering, and I wish you well.

Kids feel real pain.

Children may express grief through their bodies rather than with words. You might notice an increase in aches, pains, and nebulous boo boos. Stomach- and headaches are

common. They also may act out anger, anxiety, and sadness. Give them a safe space to do so. Soothing words and gestures will help them understand that they will feel better one day.

Kids seek validation.

Acknowledging the death affirms a child's sense of being a valuable member of a family and a larger society. Speak directly and frankly about loss, using concrete language, avoiding euphemisms. In empathically engaging with children about death, don't worry about upsetting them. Like adults, children benefit from social support: it moderates distress and makes them less prone to anxiety and depression. Try to let children lead, giving only as much information as they ask for or can absorb.

Kids experience fear.

In times of loss, many children regress to behaviors they have outgrown, ones more common in younger children. You may notice sleep difficulties, nightmares, or fear of the dark. They may have difficulty concentrating in school. This should subside over time, so indulge them with such measures as a nightlight to make them less afraid.

Kids feel guilty.

Although it is unwarranted for a child to feel guilty about the death of a relative or friend, guilt is a common response by children (as by adults). Children may worry that their aggressive feelings, while normal, somehow caused the death. They may fear that any anger toward the deceased makes them inherently bad. They need to be reassured that they are not to blame for the death, and that anger at feeling abandoned is not "bad." They also need space to honor and express their love for the deceased, to reinforce the self-perception that they are loving and kind.

Dr. Emily McClatchey, a child psychologist and death doula, is the founder and creator of Kidolences,[®] specially-formulated care boxes to help kids manage loss and change. See www.kidolences.com.





FCA Biennial Conference, June 21-24, 2018

Patti Muldoon

Lucky me! Once I'd been elected president, but before I began to serve, I got the best training I could have hoped for at the Funeral Consumers Alliance national conference held in Rochester, N.Y. Three of us—Bill Thompson, Heather Massey, and I—were chosen to attend by the FCAEM board. Member Ruth Faas attended independently as a vendor. Five members from FCA of Western Mass. Attended.

At a Massachusetts gathering in my hotel room, there was strong support for a FuneralsMA.org website that our western and eastern FCAs could share, maintaining our present websites and using the new one as an umbrella. The FuneralsMA address is easy to remember and echoes national FCA's website. Sandy Ward, FCAWM president, offered to reserve the web address.

FCA Board President Ruth Bennett's workshop, Storytelling to Raise Money, inspired our last fundraising letter. An interesting panel shared stories about death care in their various religions and cultures. Many attendees toured the Memorials Co-op workshop, where dedicated volunteers teach homeless people to make beautiful, affordable caskets and urns. Karen Smith, FCA Vice President gave two excellent workshops. She will be the speaker at our May 11 annual meeting. (Lucky us!)

Opening Address

Josh Slocum, Executive Director.

We have a huge audience - 2.6 million Americans die each year! FCA of Georgia gained 350 new members last year, but 80,000 died there. All the FCAs could grow! FCA offers over 25 brochures: he urged us to use them.

We need to frame death care as a social justice issue. FCA's key advocacy issue right now is to get the Funeral Rule updated to require funeral homes to offer price lists online. The Funeral Rule changed the marketplace in 1994 by requiring funeral homes to provide general price lists. Now consumers expect to get prices online, which few funeral homes provide. With active advocacy we have a good shot now at making cost comparisons more accessible.

Death challenges our decision-making abilities. Many funeral decisions are fear-based, with "learned helplessness." There's an element of trauma in every death; a funeral shouldn't be another trauma. We are often scared silly and so disconnected from death that we cheat ourselves by putting off funeral decisions, which is self-defeating.

How many of you, our own members, have shared your funeral wishes with your survivors (children or others)? Professionalization distances us from death. More of us could be taking care of our own dead, which many find promotes spiritual health.

Keynote

Stephen Brobeck, previous executive director, Consumer Federation of America.

FCA is one of 275 member groups of CFA. Most focus on single issues, such as banking, telecom, privacy, etc. CFA has a \$4 million annual budget with 30 staff.

He commented that consumers have little experience with buying a funeral. Combine inexperience with the strong emotions that usually accompany death, and consumers find it hard to absorb information. Even economists say it's hard to make an efficient decision at such stressful times.

Most states have too many funeral homes, which raises prices, because each funeral has to cover a larger proportion of overhead costs. (In Massachusetts we have 500+ funeral homes; demographics show that we need only 200+.) A 2017 CFA report showed large price differences among cremation costs.

Service Corporation International (the largest funeral provider) has a policy not to disclose prices or even which funeral homes it owns. (SCI keeps the local names of funeral homes it buys.) The need for FCA advocacy is clear; CFA is here to help us.

Post-Convention Reflections

The adage "Buyer Beware" applies to purchases for after-death care, but it becomes extremely difficult to make effective decisions once the need becomes urgent. The moral is to make arrangements well in advance of the need if possible, and to rely on effective advocacy and information from your local funeral consumers alliance.

And FCAEM needs you. Please step up to volunteer. What is doable for you? Here are a few varied possibilities: A few hours to help with our funeral home price survey; increase our social media presence; become a regional coordinator; answer questions on our phone line; invite a FCAEM speaker to an event; become a speaker yourself; suggest that another group you belong to could cosponsor a Death Café with us. Please share your talents and time to help strengthen our outreach.



During the FCA Convention, Michelle Acciavatti of Vermont snuggled into a small handmade coffin during our tour of Memorials Co-op.



Holes 10-18 and Other News

Eva Moseley

For about a decade some of us in Green Burial Mass., Inc. have attended the annual land-trust conferences in Worcester in March, some years with a literature table, once giving a workshop, always bringing up this kind of land use in relevant sessions. At first regarding us with surprise—even dismay, our land-trust colleagues have gotten used to us and understand that we propose a kind of ecologically-sound land use that can bring their organizations some income while burial space remains open space.

Partly as a result of our appearance at the conferences, two land trusts in western Mass. have committed to finding the right land for a cemetery open to all. Meantime, some of us are considering buying land, possibly a golf course for sale in eastern Massachusetts. Part of its extensive acreage might be developed to help with the purchase price, while much of the gently rolling, partly wooded terrain could accommodate burials.

This may be a sign of a trend. Kenyon College in Ohio, in association with a land trust, turned part of a golf course into a green burial ground, while one can still play holes one to nine. Ed Bixby, owner of Steelmantown green cemetery in New Jersey, has sought out other about-to-be-defunct golf courses around the country. The greens portions are likely to have been abused by chemical weed killers and fertilizers; green burial is a way gradually to restore natural fertility in place of the usual Astroturf look.

A major 2018 event was a speaker training on an October Saturday at the Greenfield Public Library. More than a dozen green-burial enthusiasts came from all over the state for lectures, videos, slide shows, and discussions that explained both technical and philosophical aspects of green burial, so as to prepare them to join board members in spreading the word about this traditional burial method that replenishes the soil (and often one or more souls).

One result is a nascent GBM East committee. We're waiting for warmer weather to meet and, we hope, welcome additional eastern members. Meantime, there is a fairly easy volunteer task that anyone interested can perform, as part of GBM's cemetery survey. The aim is to map cemeteries all over Mass. (public or private, municipal, faith-based or secular), recording which ones allow green burial. To participate, please write to info@greenburialma.org. It's a chance to meet local cemetery officials and make them aware of your interest.

The author is newsletter editor and a board member of FCAEM and Green Burial Mass., Inc.



Direct Cremation; Blue Burial

Heather Massey

Heather Massey of Falmouth reports that, because FCAEM continues to receive inquiries about direct cremation, she decided to get a sense of current costs so she could respond to these questions. She confirmed prices as follows (all these providers will travel anywhere in eastern Mass. for the stated price):

- 1) Southeast Funeral and Cremation Services, North Easton, \$1250
- 2) Anderson-Bryant Funeral Home, Stoneham, \$1350
- 3) Casper Cremation, Boston, \$1395
- 4) Boston Cremation, Malden, \$1495

Fellow FCAEM volunteer Jasmine Tanguay of Stoughton, Massey, and a neighbor who used the new service when her mother died recently met with funeral director Robert Stockwell of Southeast Funeral Home and toured his new facility, a converted church in North Easton.

“Direct (or Simple) Cremation” entails removal of the remains from the place of death, storage until cremation, making arrangements for the cremation, transportation to and from the crematory, and the required paperwork. The charge includes the cost of the cremation itself, a cremation container, the required Medical Examiner's fee, and a basic container for the cremains.

* * *

Some in this small state with its 1519 miles of coastline are interested in full body burial at sea, which is less common and more obscure than sea scattering of cremains. Some licensed boat captains provide this service using Environmental Protection Agency regulations and guidelines. Some like-minded advocates are forming a “Blue Burial Committee.” A Blue Burial exploratory group on Cape Cod has been meeting with both providers and potential consumers. The term Blue Burial was coined by committee participant Dawn Walsh of Provincetown's cemetery commission and Day of the Dead Festival.

Anyone with relevant contacts and/or an interest in gathering information on affordable full body burial at sea or in serving on the committee, please contact Heather Massey, PO Box 1072, West Falmouth, MA 02574; inlovinghandshomefunerals@gmail.com; or 508-457-1612.





Conversations and Education About Death

Heather Massey and Jasmine Tanguay



Editor’s Note: If there were an Oscar for death education, Heather Massey of Falmouth would go home with the trophy, while Jasmine Tanguay of Stoughton would be a close runner-up. Their outreach efforts are so numerous that in what follows they are identified as **HM** and **JT**.

Recent outreach efforts fall into the following categories:

Academic

Ruth Faas (of Mourning Dove Studio, LLC) and HM taught green burial and natural death-care options as guest lecturers in the Anthropology department of Brandeis University last year, and HM conducted two Death Cafés for students there, with faculty as co-facilitators.

Boston University's School of Public Health held its first conference on "Death and Dying: A Public Health Perspective" this winter; FCAEM volunteers JT, Ruth Faas, and HM, fortunate to be included, gladly participated with offers of resources and collaboration on future death and dying forums.

Environmental

HM and JT again tabled at the Waquoit Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve's Watershed Block Party, an environmental impact awareness event, along with the Southeastern Massachusetts Pine Barrens Alliance, and again at the Northeast Organic Farming Association’s winter conference. In the fall, they appeared for the first time at the New England Grassroots Environment Fund’s conference in Worcester.

End-of-Life/Medical/Hospice

HM and JT spoke at the Hospice and Palliative Care Federation of Massachusetts for the 8th year, in a workshop on “Rituals and Rites: Family-led Care and Ceremonies for After Death.”

Partners In Perinatal Health requested that HM create a workshop on Family-Directed Post-Death Care of Infant/Fetus at Home or Hospital for its 30th anniversary conference.

HM continues to collaborate with Cape Cod Healthcare's Quality of Life Task Force about efforts to educate the local population at large, by targeting audiences for end-of-life educational programs.

Senior Centers

The Massachusetts Councils on Aging (and senior center directors) conference was in Falmouth this year, and Massachusetts FCAs offered a panel for the second year, consisting of Sandy Ward of FCAWM (about FCAs), Eva

Moseley (Green Burial), HM (home/natural death-care), and JT (commemorative options).

Falmouth Senior Center and Neighborhood Falmouth launched a “What's Your Plan?” end-of-life series with HM presenting “What's your Funeral Plan?”

Barnstable Senior Center's “Dying to Know” program featured HM and JT with talks on final disposition and ceremony.

Do-it-Yourself

HM and JT had a booth at the Cape Cod Makers Faire for the third year, representing and illuminating DIY death-care—with homemade coffins and shrouds and information on such containers and on how to care for your own dead.

* * *

As an FCAEM volunteer on Cape Cod, HM reports that she and others continue to host monthly Death Cafés, Death Education classes, and Living with Dying programs on the Cape throughout the year.

Educational program topics this year included *Grieving after Suicide; What if...Workbook, a comprehensive guide on organizing affairs and final wishes as a Gift of Preparedness; Ways the Community Can Come Together and Heal After Tragic Loss; Making Your Own Coffins; How to Talk to Children about Death; What to do When Someone Dies in your Home; DieWell Cape Cod: Helping Families Prepare for End-of-Life Issues; and Honoring Grief and Gratitude at the Holidays*, by JT.

HM also collaborated with Falmouth Reads Together, which selected two texts to help residents with difficult conversations about mortality: *Being Mortal* by Atul Gawande and *Can't We Talk About Something More Pleasant?* by Roz Chast. This reading program culminated in a town-wide Death Café. Three films were shown and discussed: about end-of-life choices; natural death care; and "Zen and the Art of Dying," with an informal talk by the documentary's subject, Zenith Virago of Australia.

HM and JT also presented programs emphasizing DIY after-death care and “inspired” funerals at West Tisbury Library in February 2018; Cotuit Library in August; Provincetown Day of the Dead festival in October; and a retirement community in Hingham in January 2019.

* * *

As co-curator of Death Salon™ Boston (2018), the national conference of the Order of the Good Death, held at Mt. Auburn Cemetery over four days this past fall, HM

helped introduce many attendees to the FCA, noting its many intersections with the “death positive” movement. The Natural Deathcare Collaborative (representing national perspectives on funeral rights, DIY deathcare, green burial, commemoration and reclaiming traditional deathcare practices) presented a workshop (a Death Salon™ first), a one-day hands-on training on home-, family-, and community-based after-death care; and a panel on Reclaiming Funerals from Commercialized Culture. Karen Smith (Vice-president of national FCA) spoke on the FCA’s past and present “Holding the Line” for consumers; HM on reclaiming do-it-yourself deathcare; Noorud Dean Rabah (newest FCA board member) on a project to make funerals affordable or free according to need; JT on reclaiming ways to memorialize the dead; and Judith Lorei (president, Green Burial Mass., Inc.) on local natural-burial education, advocacy, and activism.

* * *

Art for our tabling and outreach events

After a beloved Woods Hole institution, the Fishmonger restaurant, closed for good, the town’s library held an art show comprised of Fishmonger chairs. HM challenged herself to turn one of the donated chairs into an educational piece about death. The result, *Pull Up a Chair, Let’s talk about Death*, she writes, “has served us well as a prop at Death Café and Death Education events, as well as tabling events, where we want to entice folks to pull up a chair and talk with us about the FCA!”

HM, JT, and other FCAEM speakers welcome chances to spread the word about consumer choices to audiences in eastern Mass. To arrange or discuss such a program, contact Heather Massey at inlovinghandshomefunerals@gmail.com, 508.457.1612, or leave a message on FCAEM 617.859.7990.

Coming from a medical social work background, Heather Massey has long worked with FCA and FCAEM in advocating for funeral reform and families’ rights to care for their own dead. She responds especially to Cape and Islands phone and email inquiries and requests for presentations.

Jasmine Tanguay is a hospice volunteer, funeral celebrant, green burial advocate, legacy writing coach, and, since 2015, a volunteer with FCAEM.



A chair becomes a conversation starter for talking about death.



Patti Muldoon, Kat Kimball, and Eva Moseley at Northeast Organic Farming Association conference in Worcester in January 2019.



**Funeral Consumers Alliance of
Eastern Massachusetts (FCAEM)**
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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Welcome to the
**Funeral Consumers
Alliance of
Eastern Massachusetts**
Annual Meeting

Guest Speaker Karen Smith

Saturday May 11, 2019

**Join us at Bigelow Chapel,
Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge**

- 1:00 Garden Cemetery Tour "Changing attitudes towards death from Puritan to Victorian to now" followed by a Crematory Tour of the newly installed, more environmentally friendly system. (separate registration required)
- 2:30 Refreshments.
- 3:00 Annual Meeting with Guest Speaker Karen Smith, LCSW, PhD, Vice President of FCA, and Principal Clinical Ethicist for the Henry Ford Hospital System in Detroit Presents "How to Get the Death You Want". Bring your questions and concerns.

For more information and to RSVP visit:
[FCAEMASS.org /events](http://FCAEMASS.org/events) (this event is FREE!!)




