



# Funeral Consumers Alliance of Eastern Massachusetts

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

Annual Newsletter

Published January 2011

## With new book on the way, Josh Slocum to bring national agenda to March event

by Emma Crossen

Whether he is traveling across the country to meet with activists, helping Congress to develop legislation, or appearing in national media, Josh Slocum is taking on corrupt practices in the funeral industry. On March 19, he will bring stories from his work and a full agenda to the FCAEM annual gathering at Forest Hills Cemetery in Jamaica Plain.

The gathering in 2010, featuring advocate and joke-teller Lisa Carlson, proved that FCAEM members can laugh at death, and the event rallied an impressive number of new volunteers.

For the 2011 event, FCAEM turns to Carlson's co-author and successor at FCA. Since Slocum took over FCA leadership in 2003, he has become the nation's leading advocate and sought-after expert on national trends and laws affecting consumers of after-death care. As the executive director of FCA, Slocum advocates for the concerns of FCA affiliates nationwide.

His appearance in Boston comes as his latest book hits the shelves. With Carlson, Slocum co-authored *Final Rights: Reclaiming the American Way of Death*. This comprehensive resource provides a state-by-state guide to

consumer laws and trends for each of the 50 states. It is an updated version of Carlson's earlier book, *Caring for Your Own Dead*. FCAEM intends to make copies available at the annual gathering.

Slocum and Carlson met in 1996 when Slocum was a young journalist investigating the nation's largest funeral industry chain. He joined the FCA staff in 2002 and succeeded Carlson as Executive Director after her retirement.

His agenda for March 19 includes the following topics:

- Consumers' "last rights," the ones they don't know they have when it comes to funeral shopping.
- Failure of state regulations to protect consumers from fraud in

prepaid funeral arrangements.

- Cemeteries getting away with behavior that is outlawed among funeral homes.

Rep. Bobby Rush has vowed to reintroduce a bill to fix this, HR3655, which will extend the Federal Trade Commission's Funeral Rule to cover cemeteries.

- Corruption in funeral and cemetery regulation, due to the industry itself wielding

undue influence on regulatory boards.

FCAEM looks forward to a lively and important gathering, with time for questions.

### 2011 FCAEM Annual Gathering

Featuring Josh Slocum,  
FCA Executive Director

Saturday, March 19, 1-3 p.m.

At Forest Hills Cemetery  
Forsythe Chapel  
95 Forest Hills Ave.  
Jamaica Plain, MA

All are welcome!

**FCAEM's own Heather Massey joins the FCA national board of directors. For more, see volunteer bios on page 2.**

Gaining widespread attention for funeral consumer issues, FCA and Josh Slocum have appeared recently in these national media outlets.

*New York Times*  
*NPR's Marketplace Morning Report*  
*Live with Kyra Phillips on CNN*  
*Chicago Tribune*  
*SmartMoney.com*  
*San Francisco Chronicle*

## Workshops, talks deliver message to consumers, nurses, clergy in E. Mass.

by Emma Crossen

FCAEM maintains a network of local educators and practitioners who speak and teach about consumers rights and options in after-death care. In 2010, these educators took their message to consumers, nurses, clergy, and other professional caregivers who influence how families and friends make decisions about caring for the dead.

On October 19-20, FCAEM joined FCA of Western Massachusetts to staff an exhibit table at the New England Hospice and Palliative Care Education Conference in Norwood. Because Hospice caregivers are present with families in the final days of a patient's life, they

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## Business plan, website move green burial forward in W. Mass.

by Judith Lorei, FCA of Western Massachusetts

If you want to be buried in a natural cemetery in Massachusetts, don't die yet. We've reported in past newsletters about the work being done by a dedicated group of volunteers from the Funeral Consumers Alliances of Eastern and Western Massachusetts and other green burial advocates. The work of the Green Burial Committee has been and continues to be about educating the public on the green burial movement while reaching out to land trusts and land owners to find a suitable parcel to allocate for this purpose in Massachusetts.

As many readers know, green burial is interment without embalming, metal or hardwood caskets, cement burial vaults, or large granite headstones. An un-embalmed body may be wrapped in a shroud or placed into a biodegradable casket and lowered directly into the earth. A green cemetery is often located in a forest, field or meadow. The idea behind green burial is to go out naturally and with as little harm as possible to the earth.

**The Green Burial Committee continues to seek out new venues for education and outreach. If you are interested in bringing a green burial talk to your organization, contact Carol Coan at [cncoan@verizon.net](mailto:cncoan@verizon.net).**

In spring 2010, FCAEM, The Essex County Greenbelt Association, and a landowner interested in partnering on a green cemetery funded a site feasibility study of the landowner's 32-acre parcel in Merrimac as a possible green burial site. The study concluded that while the land was

potentially viable, many factors would have made the site unworkable, including wetlands and slopes. This project did not move forward but many lessons were learned that will be applied as other sites become available.

The Green Burial Committee is actively working on two new initiatives. The committee secured the services of a grant-funded business development consultant to create a business plan model for a green cemetery, which will be a valuable resource to jump start a project when suitable land is identified. A first draft of the plan will be reviewed by the committee and finalized in the spring. The committee is also developing a new website after deciding that web presence is critical for keeping people informed and connected to the work..

Committee members continue to deliver presentations on green burial. Last year, these were given at The Massachusetts Land Conservation Conference in Worcester, the Arlington Public Library, and The Green Fields Market Coop Board in Greenfield.

## New volunteers add energy, skills, interests to FCAEM work

**After the annual gathering in 2010, new volunteers stepped up to take an active role in FCAEM. As an all-volunteer organization, FCAEM is only as active and effective as its volunteers. This year, our active volunteer base brings particular interests in green burial, caring-for-your-own (or home funerals), and monitoring funeral home prices. Read the biographies below to learn more about our new volunteers. If you would like to add your skills and interest to the team, please send an email to [fcaemass@gmail.com](mailto:fcaemass@gmail.com) or call our phone line at (617) 859-7990.**

**Tom Einstein** joins FCAEM from Lexington. A retired computer systems engineer, Tom is interested in politics, economics, and alternative energy schemes. With FCAEM, Tom works to identify reasonably-priced funeral homes in the Greater Boston area, and to provide information about organ and full-body donation programs.

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**Sophia Sayigh** lives in Arlington with her husband Rick. They have two grown children, a puppy, and three cats. Sophia home-schooled her children, co-founded the non-profit Advocates for Home Education in Massachusetts, and is still active in that organization as a director and clerk. She is a professional librarian. For fun, she loves to read, walk, cook, do handwork, and spend time with family and friends. She recently organized a program about green burial and is serving as webmaster for FCAEM.

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**Paula Chasan**, of Brookline, joined FCAEM as treasurer and clerk. Commenting on what attracts her to this work, Paula said, "I am drawn to nature and inspired by nature. I want to support efforts to lessen machine influences on our lives, trusting simple human choices, especially in childbirth and end-of-life care, including burial choices." Paula enjoys gardening, playing the cello in chamber music, and her work as a psychiatric nurse specialist.

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**Eva Moseley** serves as the mail collector for FCAEM. From her home in Cambridge, she collects FCAEM mail in downtown Boston and sends it on to the appropriate recipient. When a new member joins FCAEM, Eva is the first to know and sends out the new member packets. She is a retired archivist, former hiker, humanist, and a board member of Massachusetts Peace

Action. Green burial is her main concern among FCAEM's issues; she is part of the group that is spreading the word about green burial and looking for land to start one or more green cemeteries in Massachusetts.

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**Peter Zug** has lived in Somerville since 1996. His career has included working at IBM as a computer programmer, mostly at the Research Division in Yorktown Heights, New York; serving in the Navy as a communications officer on a destroyer; and working for Westinghouse Atomic Power Division as an engineer. He currently is employed by Zug Industries, a small company in Somerville. Peter likes history, literature, opera, mathematics, physics and is a not-very-talented, amateur guitarist. He swims, does yoga, likes to cook and occasionally makes furniture. He also enjoys maintaining the FCAEM database.

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**Heather Massey**, a Home Funeral Guide and Educator from Cape Cod, came to FCAEM through a Crossings home funeral workshop last winter. She is a former hospital Social Services Director and VNA/Hospice Administrator. A lifelong student of thanatology, she has trained with Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, among others. Heather's family background includes home births and deaths, and, more recently, home and family-based after-death care. Heather is working to revive FCA activity on Cape Cod and invites anyone who is interested in this effort to contact her at [inlovinghandshomefunerals@gmail.com](mailto:inlovinghandshomefunerals@gmail.com). In January, Heather was asked to join the FCA National Board of Directors. She will serve on the certification committee and legislative committee.

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(See BIOS, continued on page 3)

# E. Mass. Home Funeral Educators join national alliance in Colorado

by Heather Massey

The newly-established National Home Funeral Alliance (NHFA) held its first annual conference in Boulder, Colorado, in October. Among the nearly 100 attendees were two Home Funeral Guides and Educators from Eastern Massachusetts--Peg Lorenz of Peaceful Passages at Home, in Shirley, and Heather Massey of In Loving Hands, on the Cape.

The NHFA describes itself as "a group of home funeral educators and advocates from all across the United States who have formed a non-profit alliance for the purpose of educating the consumer about the intrinsic value of a home funeral." The Alliance works to "promote education and professional development, networking and community building among home funeral guides, green funeral advocates and all those who support the rights of families and communities to care for their own dead."

The conference provided attendees with the opportunity to meet, interact and brainstorm with other home funeral guides and educators in this new and relatively

undefined profession. Featured speakers were Josephine Speyer, co-founder of the Natural Death Centre in England; Joe Seehee, executive director of the Green Burial Council; and FCA's own executive director, Josh Slocum.

Many attendees also participated in a two-day pre-conference workshop about "The Sacred Art of Caring for Our Dead." This was

For an introduction to home funerals in the United States, check out the documentary film, *A Family Undertaking*, now available on Netflix.

led by nationally-recognized Home Funeral Educators including Beth Knox of Crossings, in Maryland; Shar Barrett of A Sacred Moment, in Seattle; Karen Van Vuuren of Natural Transitions, in Colorado; and Jerrigrace Lyons of Final Passages, in California.

The mission of the Alliance is "to support the innate rights of families to care for their own dead, and to support an alliance of ethical, responsible, and knowledgeable educators and providers whose primary focus is planning and facilitating home and family led after-death care that is environmentally friendly."

The 2011 NHFA workshop and conference are scheduled for September 21-24. More information about the Alliance and upcoming events is available online at [homefuneralalliance.org](http://homefuneralalliance.org).

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have a unique opportunity to help families understand their options for after-death care.

The response from conference attendees was enthusiastic, and FCAEM's presence raised the profile of FCAEM among hospice caregivers. Looking to next year, FCAEM members are collaborating with others to propose an educational session about after-death care in addition to the exhibit display.

In January, Emma Crossen organized a day-long workshop for ministry students about the role of religious leaders in promoting after-death options. Ruth Faas hosted the event at her Mourning Dove Studio in Arlington. Speakers included Nancy Accola of FCAEM, green burial advocate Judith Lorei, Home Funeral Guide Peg Lorenz, and Rev. John Gibbons from First Parish in Bedford.

Consider inviting FCAEM to speak to your community, professional, religious, or family group.

Accola and Lorenz also gave presentations in 2010 at Groton Unitarian Church, Groton Council on Aging, and St. Anne's Church. As part of a speakers' series on end-of-life issues, Accola presented separately at First Parish Church in Northboro.

For the past three years, FCAEM has promoted Green Burial at the Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition annual conference, with presentations and an exhibit table. In November, new FCAEM volunteer Sophia Sayigh organized a Green Burial informational event at Arlington Public Library, at which several FCAEM members answered audience questions.

Educational events are at the core of FCAEM's mission. FCAEM members can contribute to this mission by scheduling an FCAEM educator to speak to a community group or professional association.

For the upcoming year, events are already scheduled at First Unitarian Society of Newton, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Harvard Divinity School. Updated information about events can be found on the FCAEM website ([www.fcaemass.com](http://www.fcaemass.com)), on the "Events" page.

# FCA: Think twice before dialing 911

by Emma Crossen

When 911 is called after a death, emergency workers must respond, even if the death is not an emergency. For taxpayers, this is expensive; for families confronting a recent death, the sudden arrival of police and EMTs can be disruptive and unhelpful.

Noting that most deaths are not emergencies, Josh Slocum of FCA urges survivors to use the following guidelines when deciding whether to call 911:

Call 911 when there is an unexpected or traumatic death. If it is out of the ordinary, unexpected, or if there is any possibility of suspicion, call the police.

Do NOT call 911 when an ailing or elderly person dies at home expectedly. In this case, call a funeral home (if you choose to use one), or call the doctor if you are planning a family-directed funeral.

In either case, if you want to report the death to authorities to avoid suspicion of foul play, you can call the non-emergency number for your local police department.

and other options for after-death care, and in helping FCAEM to connect with divinity schools and seminaries. Emma works as Executive Director of the Outdoor Church, a church among homeless men and women in Cambridge. With FCAEM, Emma is responding to phone and email inquiries and acting as

board president. Emma also enjoys walking, listening to podcasts, eating, and reading about food.

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Nancy Accola and Richard Kellaway, who were featured in previous newsletters, continue to volunteer with FCAEM.

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Emma Crossen graduated from Harvard Divinity School last May. It was during her studies there that Emma first learned about local efforts to promote funeral options and consumer rights. She is particularly interested in how religious leaders can promote caring-for-your-own

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*Promoting a consumer's right to choose dignified, meaningful, and affordable after-death care in Eastern and Central Massachusetts*

## **FCAEM and FCA - What's the difference?**

FCAEM is a regional affiliate of FCA. As an all-volunteer organization with no staff, FCAEM focuses volunteer efforts on consumer education and consumer protection in Eastern Massachusetts. FCAEM does this by promoting educational events, providing educators and education materials to these events, and monitoring prices and trends in the region's funeral industry.

FCA is a national federation of affiliates like FCAEM. Based in Burlington, Vermont, FCA has a small paid and professional staff and approaches consumer protection from a national perspective. FCA serves as a national resource for media, court cases, and lawmakers, on issues affecting consumers of after-death care. FCA also develops extensive educational resources for use by affiliates nationwide.

Both organizations do important and complementary work to protect and educate consumers of after-death care.

*FCAEM is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit. Your tax-deductible contributions encourage and sustain this all-volunteer consumer alliance.*

## **FCAEM offers help, advice through phone, email**

FCAEM offers both phone and email methods for consumers to inquire about their rights and options in choosing after-death care.

Volunteers check the email account and voicemail several times a week and usually respond within a few days. FCAEM provides this important service in order to make information available to a diverse group of consumers and professionals.

Recent callers have included social workers, individuals, families, and a legislative aide.

Because FCAEM invites these inquiries, FCAEM also provides volunteers with training in order to respond accurately and effectively. Your financial support makes this possible.



## **Online efforts to expand membership, outreach**

With this newsletter, FCAEM continues a long tradition of using print and mail communications. This year, volunteers want to maintain that tradition and add to it by reaching out to more people online, through email and other online forums.

This move will allow FCAEM to supplement our annual print newsletter with more frequent online updates about consumer issues and events. With internet outreach, volunteers also intend to raise FCAEM's profile among younger consumers.

As part of this effort, FCAEM is creating an email list by collecting email addresses from current and potential members. To join, email your email address to [fcaemass@gmail.com](mailto:fcaemass@gmail.com), or write it on the enclosed envelope and send it through the mail, with or without a financial donation.

