



FUNERAL CONSUMERS ALLIANCE OF WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS

P. O. Box 994 ♦ Greenfield, MA 01302-0994 ♦ (413) 376-4747
www.FuneralConsumersWMass.org

Newsletter

Fall 2019

Annual Meeting & Program

Sunday, October 20, 2019, 2:00-4:00 pm

Palmer Historical and Cultural Center
2072 Main Street, Three Rivers, MA

Caskets and Coffins and Shrouds, Oh My!

with Carol's "Five-Fold Path to Funeral Contentment" to ease your fears.

Come to this "show and tell" event. Bring your friends!

Lenny Weake will bring examples of various casket types and do his educational and entertaining "Caskets 101" presentation. He uses a classic hearse to transport caskets to and from his local business, Affordable Caskets and Urns. He also works for the Quaboag Hills Chamber of Commerce.

Ruth Faas of Mourning Dove Studio will show cardboard caskets that can be decorated creatively by loved ones.

A **willow coffin** handmade by basket weaver Mary Lauren Fraser will be on display. She writes, "A woven coffin makes a stunning coffee table. You'll never again have to scramble for a conversation topic!"

Dina Stander will make a quick presentation on the history and practice of shrouding. She'll discuss DIY options and bring a few Last Dance Shrouds so that you can see how shrouding works in real life, offering a hands-on demonstration for anyone interested.

Carol Coan will convey her "Five Fold Path" of practical planning steps.

Light refreshments will be provided by Eileen and David Pratt.
A brief business meeting will precede the program.



Electing Trustees and Officers

Each October, at our Annual Meeting, we elect members to serve on our Board of Trustees. We encourage recruitment and election of interested persons who have not served before, to “**annually reinvigorate**” this organization, as stated in the Bylaws. Ideally, we should have 9 Trustees, electing 3 new ones (for 3-year terms) each year. When vacancies exist, we can elect people for 1-year or 2-year terms.

Perhaps YOU haven’t served before, and would like to be asked? We will ask for nominations from the floor during the meeting.

We thank **Lynn Lovell** for stepping up in 2017 to serve for a year. In 2018 she again volunteered for a year. She is now stepping down, and we THANK her for her help since 2017.

We thank **Jim Couchon** for volunteering last March and filling a vacancy on our board. He is a candidate now for election to a 3-year term.

We seek four additional candidates. Consider joining us!

Slate of Officers for the coming year:

- President: Cecile Richard
- Vice-President: Jim Couchon
- Treasurer: Joan Pillsbury
- Secretary: Kate Mason

Sandy Ward, completing her 10th year as President, will step down from that office, but continue to serve as a Trustee.



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Editor this issue: Sandy Ward

The FCA of Western Massachusetts is a non-sectarian, all-volunteer, non-profit corporation dedicated to protecting a consumer’s right to choose a meaningful, dignified and affordable funeral or memorial service.

Seeking Volunteers, Helpers

We would appreciate help in a variety of ways. FCAWM is an all-volunteer organization, reliant on people willing to support our mission of education and advocacy.

We welcome volunteers for **short-term projects**. Examples: writing an article for our newsletter or a letter-to-the-editor for a local publication; creating a flyer for a workshop; hosting an event with FCAWM speaker; or making phone calls to gather information about cemeteries in a town (using survey form and script developed by Green Burial Massachusetts).

We welcome volunteers for **longer-term roles**. Examples: helping with website maintenance; editing future newsletters; helping with social media; and serving on the Board of Trustees.

We especially hope to recruit people interested in **monitoring state legislation** and alerting our Board of any proposed changes that might impact funeral consumers. Our role as a “watch-dog” on the funeral industry would be strengthened by having more eyes involved. Such work could be done independently on a home computer or in a library (free access to a variety of news publications and online services).

YOU could help by spreading the word, sharing this newsletter, inviting friends to join us, or recommending any of our volunteer opportunities to a friend who is seeks new meaningful work.

As 2020 approaches, we’ll be organizing the next Price Comparison project, soliciting price lists from over 80 funeral homes. Helpers welcome!

Please email us at fcawmass@gmail.com if you would like to help in ANY of these areas, or if you have suggestions of potential volunteers we should contact.

Thank You!



Learning from Caitlin Doughty

By Sandy Ward

Caitlin Doughty, a young mortician in Los Angeles, writes books, makes creative videos, and enjoys educating the public about death. She's an active leader in the "death positive" movement, and the proud founder of "The Order of the Good Death."

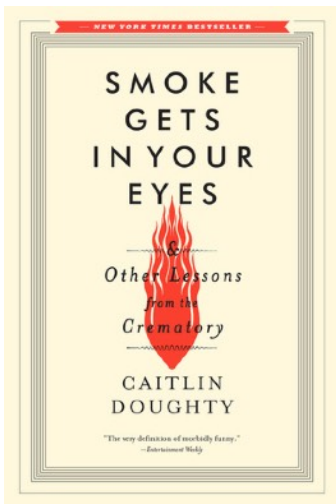
I highly recommend her books, which I'll describe in a moment. First, let's consider her videos.

"Hours of entertainment and valuable information," says FCAWM Trustee Kate Mason, describing Caitlin's YouTube series **Ask a Mortician**. Examples:

Are Dead Bodies Dangerous? www.youtube.com/watch?v=yw7bsNKsABQ

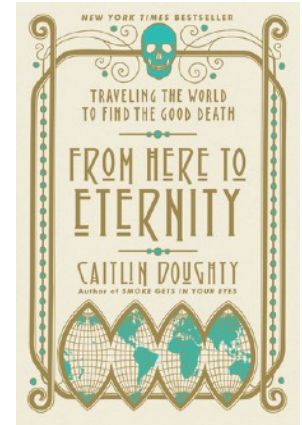
The Morbid Minute: Skeletons in the Closet www.youtube.com/watch?v=FqB_3b8yYDY

Caitlin's sense of humor is infectious. Her videos and her books are popular because they are fun and clever. I like the way she treats serious topics and questions playfully. I also appreciate the historical notes she tends to include. (In college she had majored in medieval studies.)

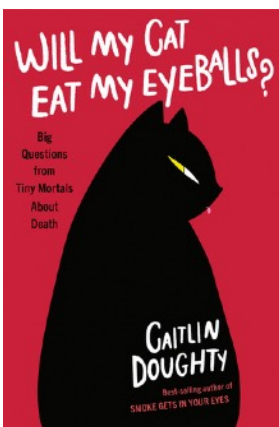


Her first book, *Smoke Gets in Your Eyes & Other Lessons from the Crematory*, was published in 2014. Reading about her adventures, at age 23, working in a crematory taught me about that part of the funeral industry. By the end of that book you understand what she wished to change and why she choose to go to mortuary school.

Her second book, *From Here to Eternity: Traveling the World to Find the Good Death* (2017), describes in remarkable detail death rituals and different deathcare methods she observed in Colorado, Bolivia, Japan, Spain, Indonesia, Mexico, and elsewhere. I learned a lot, and laughed at her awkward predicaments.



Caitlin's newest book is *Will My Cat Eat My Eyeballs? Big Questions from Tiny Mortals about Death* (2019). She writes, "All death questions are good death questions, but the most direct and most provocative questions come from kids."



"Young people were braver and often more perceptive than the adults. And they weren't shy about guts and gore. They wondered about their dead parakeet's everlasting soul, but really they wanted to know how fast the parakeet was putrefying in the shoebox under the maple tree."

"That's why all the questions in this book come from 100 percent ethically sourced, free-range, organic children."

Happy reading! I hope you enjoy Caitlin's books as well as her videos.



The Fun of Building Your Own Pine Box

By Renee Isaacs



Last June Western Massachusetts had its very own Coffin Building Workshop organized by Joan Pillsbury, inspired by the Coffin Clubs of New Zealand. The workshop was jointly sponsored by Green Burial Massachusetts and the Funeral Consumers Alliance of Western Mass. Joan wanted to find a financially savvy final resting place and a DIY coffin seemed just the ticket. Carpenter Chuck Lakin helped Joan and other participants with the construction, using wood he had pre-cut to appropriate sizes. All had fun and were satisfied with the results.

The coffins were assembled with screws. For use in a green burial, the metal screws could later be removed and replaced with wooden pegs. Instructions for green coffins are on Chuck's website www.Lastthings.net at the bottom of his directions for this “Quck” (quick) coffin.



Finding and acquiring a coffin can be stressful for all parties involved, so being able to “check this off the to-do list” was a stress relief for Joan. Not only that, but the whole event turned the chore of making a coffin into an enjoyable social enterprise. The Coffin Building Workshop was a success, building a sense of community as well as building useful, inexpensive coffins.



“I felt a sense of accomplishment when I brought home my own coffin.”

“My coffin is beautiful. I plan to use it as a bookcase until time of need.”

— Joan Pillsbury



Note: The Federal Trade Commission’s Funeral Rule requires that funeral homes permit YOU to provide a casket from a separate source without imposing any additional charge for doing so.



Carpenter Chuck Lakin of Maine provided materials, tools, and expert guidance in the assembly process.

He offers free plans and instructions at www.LastThings.net/coffins

For this workshop each participant paid \$210 and went home with the coffin they had built.

A bargain!

And FUN!

Planning for a future workshop?

Should we do this again? We think so. How soon? Next spring is possible. We already know eight interested people who could not attend last June. If you’d like to be added to the list, or have questions, please contact **Joan Pillsbury** at info@greenburialma.org or **617-393-5011**.



Who Ya Gonna Call? A Helpful Article from 2012

In June 2019 we received a call from Scott Verhagen asking that his father's name be removed from our mailing list. Scott also wanted to thank us for information that proved helpful when his father died.

Mr. William H. Verhagen, a member of FCAWM, had clipped and saved an article from our Spring 2012 newsletter. It was "Who Ya Gonna Call?" by Miryam Ehrlich Williamson. In that article she cautioned against calling 911, writing, "Death itself is not an emergency. Calling 911 will make it one." On this clipping Mr. Verhagen had handwritten a phone number.

In July Scott emailed an image of that clipping and relayed how he had found it. In Scott's words:

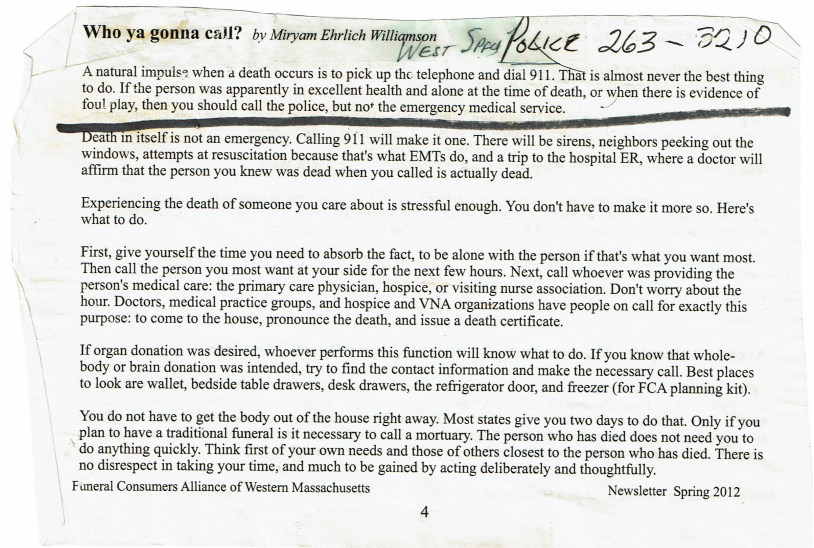
"I am writing to follow up on my story regarding my father passing away on Sunday, June 16, 2019 (Father's Day).

He had suffered a fall on Saturday, May 4, 2019 and then was in the hospital for 7-8 days and then in a nursing home/rehab facility until May 31, 2019 when I brought him home. We were in the process of lining up care providers when I found him dead on 6/16. I had been with him every day in the interim.

The salient part of this story is that my father found out about your organization sometime prior to the Spring of 2012 and at approximately the same time pre-paid his funeral. He made me aware of these arrangements and clipped out the attached article and, for the last seven years, I had it in my folder re: his funeral.

In the last couple of months prior to his passing I had begun to carry lots of information like his will, health proxy, etc, and the folder regarding his funeral with me. When I found him on 6/16, naturally, I was a bit freaked out, but after determining he had passed, the "Who Ya Gonna Call?" article popped into my head and I dug it out of my briefcase. He had even written the telephone number for the West Springfield Police Department on the article and I'm glad he did, because like most people, in the absence of that article, I would have just called 911.

I now realize that the article made a trying time a bit easier and I am grateful for that - thanks!"



Past Newsletters Archived Online

You'll find a list of archived issues (2010 to present) on our FCAWN website at this page:

www.funeralconsumerswmass.org/news--events/newsletter-page/

You may select by date, or scroll lower on that page to browse the topics that were covered.



Please make checks payable to **FCAWM** and send to P. O. Box 994, Greenfield, MA 01302.
Your contributions are tax-deductible. We are a 501c3 organization.

___ YES! I want to renew support for the Funeral Consumers Alliance of Western Massachusetts and its mission of promoting and protecting a consumer's right to choose meaningful, dignified, and affordable final arrangements: funeral or memorial services, care of the body and disposition of human remains (including burial, cremation or donation). I'm enclosing my voluntary contribution of
___ \$15 ___ \$25 ___ \$50 ___ \$100 or \$ _____

___ I'm NEW. Please enroll me and send the "Before I Go, You Should Know" planner and membership package. (Suggested new member donation is \$30.) I am enclosing \$ _____

___ Please send me ___ copies of the "Before I Go, You Should Know" planner. I enclose a donation of \$ _____ to reimburse FCAWM for the expenses of acquiring and mailing the 30-page, spiral-bound planner. (Suggested minimum \$15 per copy.)

___ I have time and interest in helping FCAWM. Please contact me about volunteer opportunities.

Name: _____ Telephone: _____

Address (if different from that on reverse side): _____

E-mail: _____ **Prefer to receive newsletters via email? Yes No**

✂----- cut here -----

THANK YOU!

Funeral Rule Review

Joshua Slocum, Executive Director of FCA, sent us this update about the long-awaited review:

“The FTC announced it would open the Funeral Rule in 2019 for review, public comment, and possible amendments. We have stayed in touch with FTC staff, and the process has not been started yet. My best guess is that the agency will launch the review beginning late 2019, or possibly early 2020. In the meantime, you can help by sending letters (email is fine) expressing your support as a citizen for **mandating that funeral homes post their prices online**. The more testimony I can carry with me to DC from real people like you, the more powerful our case will be.

Drop a line to **josh@funerals.org**, or to Funeral Consumers Alliance, 33 Patchen Road, South Burlington, VT, 05403. Thank you!”

Price Comparisons

As 2020 approaches, we wish all funeral homes would voluntarily post their price lists on the web, to help consumers shop and compare. We had hoped that by now the federal government (via FTC) would require this. We FCAWM volunteers work to fill the gap by collecting and posting price information every two years, but... there are limits to what we can do. See our 2018 Price Comparison Chart on our website; 30 funeral homes (out of 84) failed to send us price lists. We aren't the only ones impatient about this, or trying to fill the void. The Miami Herald published a story 8/19/19 with this headline:

“The cost of dying is shrouded in mystery”
www.miamiherald.com/news/business/article231844288.html

’Tis the 21st century – high time to fix this!

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