



# FUNERAL CONSUMERS ALLIANCE OF WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS

P. O. Box 994 ♦ Greenfield, MA 01302-0994 ♦ (413) 774-2320  
www.FuneralConsumersWMass.org

Newsletter

Fall 2015

## ANNUAL MEETING & PROGRAM

**Sunday, October 18, 2015**

**2:00 - 4:00 p.m.**

Rockridge Retirement Community  
Community Room  
25 Coles Meadow Rd, Northampton, MA

FCAWM Membership Meeting  
to elect Trustees and Officers  
(see slate of nominees, p. 3)

Program 2:30-4:00 p.m.

## 5 (or more) Shades of Green

Let's consider the environmental aspects  
of burials, cremations, and other final  
arrangements.

Which methods are more "green or natural"  
than others? What is Green burial anyway?

Is cremation green?

Can I change my mind  
about plans already made?

**Panelists** will include:

- Carol Coan, Cofounder of Green Burial MA, Instructor, "Funeral Planning for the Living"
- Candace Currie, Director of Planning & Cemetery Development, Mount Auburn Cemetery, Cambridge, MA; Director of the Green Burial Council
- Judith Lorei, Cofounder of Green Burial MA, member of Montague Cemetery Commission
- Sandra Ward, President of FCAWM.

Bring your questions! Bring friends.  
Light refreshments will be provided.

## **Shades of Green** by Joan Pillsbury

There is a whole spectrum of alternatives to conventional burial. We will introduce them to you; then you can choose.

Come hear about the range of options available for your very own final arrangements. The focus is to educate yourself, choose what appeals to you, set aside the money to support it, and communicate your wishes with your loved ones. This is a great gift you can leave to your family.

What Is Green Burial? Green burial is a new alternative for disposing of bodies after death—or an old tradition, depending on your perspective. Called "green" burial for its ecological soundness, it is also commonly known as natural burial, or sometimes, low-impact or sustainable burial. A green or natural burial uses no embalming, no metal casket, and no burial liner or vault; the marker, if used, is typically flat natural fieldstone or indigenous rock. Proponents often refer to it as "traditional" burial because it reclaims the way in which nearly all were buried prior to the Civil War, and is a practice still used by some 90% of people elsewhere in the world. By using only biodegradable materials, green burial returns a human body and its burial container into the earth.

How is this different from Conventional Burial? Conventional burial, with embalming, metal or hardwood casket, and a burial vault, is the most common means of body disposition in the United States. For many, it is a comfortable, predictable choice. But it can be very expensive, often at a time when families are unprepared for that expense. It also inhibits decomposition of the

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*(Shades of Green, continued from previous page)*

body, creating “landfills” of non-biodegradable and sometimes hazardous materials. By one estimate, we bury each year approximately

- 4.3 million gallons of embalming fluid
- 64,500 tons of steel
- 2,700 tons of copper and bronze
- 20-plus million board feet of hardwoods, much of it tropical (for caskets), and
- 1.6-plus tons of reinforced concrete and 14,000 tons of steel (for burial vaults and foundations).

*(source: M. Woodsen, 2014)*

We need to consider the byproducts of the manufacture of these buried materials, too.

**What About Cremation?** Cremation is generally much less expensive than a conventional burial. It permits greater flexibility, as cremated remains may be buried or scattered when and where the family desires. Alternatives are numerous and creative; cremated remains may be incorporated into various art forms, placed in coral reef balls, even shot into space.

But cremation requires sufficient fossil fuel to sustain a temperature of 1400°-1600° F. for about four hours; the heat produced by this process could be captured and used productively, but it rarely is. Cremation also produces a variety of air pollutants—particulate matter, carbon monoxide, mercury and dioxin, among others—resulting partly from the substances burned and partly from the combustion process itself.

In the context of an individual’s lifetime use of fossil fuels, a single cremation has a relatively small carbon footprint. Nationwide, however, the energy consumed by cremations would drive a car the distance to the moon over 2500 times, according to M. Woodsen (2014).

Come to our program October 18, and hear the panelists discuss these issues. Bring your questions. Come learn about different shades of “green” in the final choices before us.



## Revision of State Regulations

Carol Coan, Susie Maddern and Sandy Ward traveled to Boston on June 16 to participate in a public outreach meeting of the Massachusetts Board of Registration of Funeral Directors and Embalmers, a five-member board that oversees licensing and inspection of funeral services.

We were welcomed, listened to, and thanked for our participation. When Sandy spoke in favor of a "fresh re-write" of the long complex regulation documents, Dahria Williams-Fernades, Chair of the Board, grinned. The full board was present, and we were able to talk briefly with Carol Lindsay of Boston, the designated consumer representative, who was glad to meet us and learn of our work.



Revision of the documents proceeded in July, August, and September meetings, and is scheduled to continue October 6 and 13 (Tuesdays, 10:00 am, at 1000 Washington Street, Boston). Sandy has been communicating with the Boston office, and requesting a copy of the revised draft. (Not available yet.) Ultimately, the revised regulations will need to come up for official approval.



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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 of memorial services.

## Candidates for Election on October 18

These candidates have been nominated and have agreed to serve if elected at our Annual Meeting:

### Board of Trustees

3-year term: Sandy Ward

3-year term: Susie Maddern

3-year term:

2-year term: Joanna Brown

1-year term:

1-year term:

Nominations for Trustees or any officer positions may be made from the floor during the Annual Meeting. Those elected will join continuing trustees Joan Pillsbury, Trevor Boeding, and Kathleen Winkworth.

### Officer candidates for the coming year:

President - Sandy Ward

Vice-President -

Treasurer - Joan Pillsbury

Secretary - Kathleen Winkworth

Please contact Sandy Ward at 413-532-4306 or [sandy@nonotuck.us](mailto:sandy@nonotuck.us) if you have questions about these roles or wish to nominate a candidate for any of the above positions. THANK YOU.

The Board now meets only every other month, conserving gas and time of our volunteer trustees. We communicate by email or phone as needed between meetings. The meetings are usually held in Greenfield or at the Rockridge Retirement Community in Northampton, MA. During the past year lunchtime meetings at the Green Fields Market in downtown Greenfield have been convenient, as many of our board members live or work in that area.



## Death, Up Close and Personal

by Joanna Lillian Brown

When I cared for my 97-year-old grandmother at the end of her life, I was terrified that she would die on a night during my care. I asked more than 50 colleagues, relatives and friends if they had ever been with someone at the moment of death, but none had had that experience. I read Elisabeth Kubler Ross's books, but in that pre-internet time, I could not easily figure out how to learn from others who had experienced being present at the death of a loved one.

I am fortunate that I was with my grandmother when she died, for it was a very spiritual experience for me, one that completely removed my fear of death. What do I mean by spiritual? Right at the time when she took her last breath, I (and one other relative who was with me) sensed that her spirit exited out the top of her head and was floating near the ceiling. We could not see anything, but we could sense her essence still being in the room with us, looking down at us, not quite ready to move on. We honored her spirit-presence and continued to talk to her and say that it was all right, that she had died and we would sit right there with her until she was ready to leave. Whether it was 30 seconds or longer, I cannot say, but all of a sudden, I sensed her spirit fly away, upward, very quickly.

Her death had been gentle, thankfully, due to the hospice pain medicine that had relieved her intense pain of earlier that night. My fear of being with her when she died – a fear I had carried with me in the last months of her life – was now gone. I had discovered that the moment of death was not terrible to witness, but rather a very quiet and natural transition.

Shortly after her death, I called into the room my mother and aunt, neither of whom had wanted to be with their mother at the time of her passing; they asked me to call "the undertaker" to come to get my grandmother's body. I did as they had requested, and soon the funeral director and his assistant arrived and asked us to leave the room; they then removed her body and brought it to their hearse.

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Ten years later, as my father was nearing the end of his life, I was no longer fearful, and I had been blessed with a story that would make his death even more meaningful. A close colleague had told me about her experience being with her mother as she died in Lithuania, and how she had lovingly washed her mother's body after death and dressed her in the clothes in which she wished to be buried. Hearing her story, I told her that I didn't know if I would ever be brave enough to wash a loved one's body after death, and I asked her if it was difficult. She replied that in her Lithuanian culture, one would never allow an undertaker to do such an intimate task, that it should always be done by a family member. Hearing that, I made my own promise to do so for my father after his death.

My father died within the next year, and my sister and I lovingly washed his body while we played music he would have loved. To my great surprise, it was not difficult to move his limbs and turn him over. I had expected that rigor mortis would set in immediately and his body would become cold and immovable, but that was not what happened. Washing him was as if we were washing someone who was sleeping. His body remained warm and supple throughout our ritual and while dressing him, according to his wishes, in a clean pair of pajamas. This time, we stayed even longer in his bedroom before calling the funeral director to take my father's body.

Since my father's death, I have participated in ritual washing of the body for my closest childhood friend who died of cancer at age 54, and also for my mother, who died at age 91. In both cases, taking the time to lovingly wash the body while playing music and singing was an act of love and service and was deeply meaningful.

Since my mother's death seven years ago, I have learned more that will be helpful the next time I am able to help someone at the end of their life. A funeral director with whom I had the opportunity to talk about my experiences shared with me that he welcomed having the assistance of relatives or friends in moving the body from the bed to the stretcher, for it can be difficult to do even with one assistant. I will be glad to help Funeral Consumers Alliance of Western Massachusetts

with that heavy lifting task in the future, if I am able to do so.

I share these stories with you because they may be helpful to you as you think about your role in helping a loved one before and after their death. While the loss of losing a loved one is never easy, I have learned that being personally involved with after-death care of a loved one's body is a very deep and loving experience, and I encourage you to think about whether that would be something that you might do, as well.

**If you have a story that you would like to share** in a future newsletter, a story that you feel could help someone else, please do write it up and send it to us.

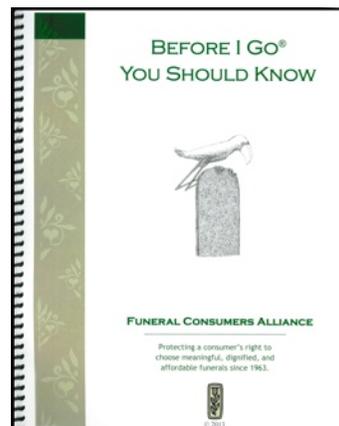
Send mail to FCAWM, P. O. Box 994,  
Greenfield, MA 01302-0994

or e-mail to [fcawmass@gmail.com](mailto:fcawmass@gmail.com)

Thank you!



## Before I Go, You Should Know



This 30-page planner is published by the national Funeral Consumers Alliance.

You may order copies from us (see form p.7) or from the national FCA. We provide a free copy to each new FCAWM member.

Note: If you prefer a pdf version (to edit and save on your computer), order it via the FCA website: **funerals.org**. Do print your completed planner when finished, however, because leaving it hidden inside a computer won't help your loved ones when they need to find it.



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## Strategic Planning Retreat

Joanna Brown, right, recommended that the Board of Trustees of the Funeral Consumers Alliance of Western Massachusetts participate in a strategic planning retreat. And so we did, on September 24, 2015.

We are grateful to Michael Burkart, an organization consultant from Amherst, MA, who donated his time to be our retreat facilitator. He and Joanna prepared a detailed survey to gather information from each board member several weeks before the retreat. Former FCAWM officers and board members were also invited to participate in the survey and the retreat, as we wished to bring many perspectives into this examination of our organization. All current trustees and several former trustees completed the survey.

The results of our retreat will be shared at our Annual Meeting on October 18. (Another reason to attend!)



Michael Burkart, our pro-bono retreat facilitator, and Joanna Brown, vice president of FCAWM, who introduced Michael to FCAWM.

## **Spreading the word about Funeral Consumers Alliance resources**

*By Joanna Lillian Brown*

The importance of the work that we do in the Funeral Consumers Alliance touched me personally when I received a call from a former colleague who is now living in eastern Massachusetts. Her mother, who had been visiting her from far away, was killed in a tragic accident. This colleague, an only child with fairly young parents (in their 60s), had not begun to consider what to do when one of her parents would die, and now she was faced with an urgent need to make final arrangements for her mother's body.

She called me for advice because she knew that I had written a book called *Caring for Dying Loved Ones* (Levellers Press, 2010). She had not known that I was a new board member of FCAWM, but in our call, she learned about the mission of FCAWM and the national Funeral Consumers Alliance (FCA) with which we are affiliated. I helped her use the FCA website ([www.funerals.org](http://www.funerals.org)) by going online at the same time she did. She was able to find the local group in her geographical area and view a spreadsheet of services and costs provided by funeral homes in her region.

My former colleague was clear that she wanted to have direct cremation of her mother's body. I pointed out the advice on the website warning that while "direct cremation" costs on the chart are supposed to include professional services fees, sometimes funeral homes will try to convince customers that the cost of professional services are not included and are required. I encouraged her to call more than one funeral home and I also forewarned her about the possibility of being pressured to buy a fancy urn even if she only wanted a simple container. (In the retail world, this practice is known as "upselling.")

A few days later she called back to say how grateful she was for the FCA comparative cost spreadsheet and also for my advice. The first funeral director she called had, in fact, told her that the professional service fee was in addition to the direct cremation costs. She had promptly ended that conversation and instead chose the services of another funeral director for whom all costs were included in the direct cremation cost.

Imagine...if that local FCA group had not taken the time to do the local funeral home survey, and if my former colleague had not called me, she probably would not have been prepared to refuse the first funeral director's attempt to double the cost of the cremation by adding in a separate professional service fee.

This is what the Funeral Consumers Alliance is all about: informing people about options and how to advocate for their rights for dignified and affordable final arrangements, even while in a very vulnerable time of grieving the loss of a loved one.

Everyone deserves to know about the FCA, so please help spread the word about the national FCA website, [www.funerals.org](http://www.funerals.org), which contains helpful information and links to our local group and other FCA groups around the U.S.



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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. 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* -----

PLEASE help us reduce postage costs. We'd love to add you to our email list if you have ready access to email and could receive or view our newsletter electronically. You may respond via email to [fcawmass@gmail.com](mailto:fcawmass@gmail.com) or use the form above.

THANK YOU!

**Film showing:**

**A WILL FOR THE WOODS**  
**Sunday, November 1, 3:00 pm**  
Parish Hall at Grace Church  
14 Boltwood Ave, Amherst.

Free and open to the public.  
Refreshments will be served.

Judith Lorei of Green Burial Massachusetts  
will introduce the film and lead a discussion after the showing.

This event is hosted by the Greening Grace Committee of Grace Episcopal Church.

Address Service Requested

\* \* \* \* \*

***Greetings from the Board of Trustees!***

This photo was taken at a strategic planning retreat on September 24, 2015. Carol Coan, center, is flanked by current FCAWM Trustees Joanna Brown, Sandy Ward, Kathleen Winkworth, Joan Pillsbury, Susie Maddern, and Trevor Boeding. *(See more on page 5.)*



*We hope to see you at our*

**Annual Meeting and Program**

**Sunday, October 18, 2015, 2:00-4:00 pm**  
Rockridge Retirement Community  
Community Room  
25 Coles Meadow Rd, Northampton, MA

Environmentally-friendly options  
for final arrangements is the theme:

**5 (or more) Shades of Green**

*See page 1 for more information.*

Bring your family and friends.  
Light refreshments provided.