



Funeral Consumers Alliance of the Finger Lakes

Spring 2019 Newsletter

www.fingerlakesfunerals.org • info@fingerlakesfunerals.org

P.O. Box 134, Ithaca, NY 14851-0134 • (607) 273-8316

Public Presentation and Annual Meeting of the Funeral Consumers Alliance of the Finger Lakes

“Yes You Can – Overcoming Self- Sabotage In Funeral Planning”

* * * * *

2 PM, Sunday, April 7, 2019
Auditorium, Kendal at Ithaca
Free and Open to all

Speaker: Joshua Slocum
*Executive Director of the national
Funeral Consumers Alliance*



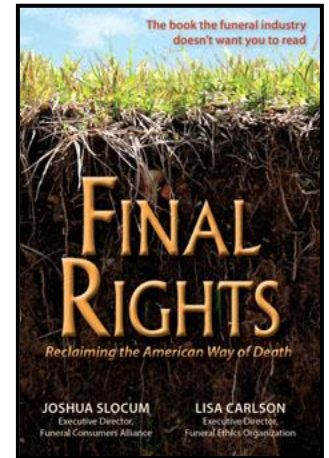
We all know Americans have a hard time saying the word “death,” let alone planning for its eventual knock on the door. Even some FCA members have trouble bringing up the subject with their grown children, the very ones who need the information most. The result? Confused and

anxious survivors are left without the thoughtful tools they need from their families.

Funeral Consumers Alliance national Executive Director Josh Slocum will help you examine whether “I can't” really means “I'm afraid to.” We all tell ourselves stories about what we “can't” do, and what we “must do.” Some of these stories are self-defeating, dis-

empowering tales that aren't, well, really real. Join us for some candid, heart-to-heart discussion of moving past our fears and taking on funeral planning with calm and confidence.

Josh Slocum, 44, is a staunch advocate for protection of consumers of funeral services. He was born and raised in Central New York and the Finger Lakes region and holds a BA degree from Sarah Lawrence College (1999). A former newspaper reporter, he has been Executive Director of national FCA since 2003. In 2011 he and Lisa Carlson published their book, entitled, *Final Rights: Reclaiming the American Way of Death*. Both authors are prominent leaders of the funeral consumer movement and are widely sought by journalists, lawyers, and legislators for their expertise on funeral issues.



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Annual Business Meeting

A short business meeting will follow Mr. Slocum's presentation. **Please stay for this meeting – it's important.** The main item of business will be election of officers. Your attendance will be important to achieve the quorum required to conduct business.

Election of officers and directors:

A nominating committee offers the following slate of candidates for 3-year terms.

President: Diana Nathanielsz

Vice-President: Dorothy Pasternack

Treasurer: Joel Rabinowitz

Corresponding Secretary: Donna Scott

Acting Recording Secretary: Angela Mennitto

Nominations from the floor will be invited.

Continuing members of the Board are John (Jack) Booker, Susan Fast, Deena Freed, Patricia Gaines, Peggy Haine, Carol Hardy, and Bronwyn Mohlke. Advisors are Barry Adams, David Bandler and Helene Croft.

Board nominees for 3-year terms:

Diana Nathanielsz, a retired medical secretary and medical publishing manager, has volunteered in organizational and administrative capacities with several not-for-profit (NFP) arts organizations in Tompkins County. She also held leadership positions prior to moving to Ithaca from southern California, and also in her native England. Diana sings with the Ithaca Community Chorus & Chamber Singers, is an avid gardener, has an administrative part-time job, and enjoys walking with her dog.

Dorothy Pasternack, long time Ithacan, arrived as a freshman at Cornell in 1955. After graduating in 1959 she worked at the Graduate School of Business Library while her husband studied for his Ph.D. in chemistry. After a year at the University of Illinois, they returned to Ithaca to work at Ithaca College. She has travelled widely and enjoyed the privilege of living in Rome, Paris, and London. In the mid 1970s Dorothy began her career trajectory as a worker with words, beginning in 1974 as an editor in the Cornell Office of Publication Services and retiring as director of that office in

2000. She now lives at Kendal, where she is an active member of that community.

Joel Rabinowitz grew up in Ithaca and is a graduate of Cornell. He also holds a Masters degree from the University of Texas. Following a career as a research analyst and database manager in the development offices of Cornell and Ithaca College, Joel served as executive director of Greensprings Natural Cemetery Preserve for nearly eight years. In that role, he led a successful multi-year effort to acquire the neighboring 30-acre property and farmhouse. Prior to being hired as executive director, Joel served as a Greensprings trustee from 2005-07, during which time he helped the cemetery gain permission from the NY State Cemetery Board to begin operating in 2006. Upon retiring as Greensprings' executive director in 2015, Joel rejoined the board, serving as secretary and treasurer. In 2014-15, Joel was a volunteer and board member for Ithaca's Lake View Cemetery, assisting with burials and fundraising. A member of the Finger Lakes Land Trust, he served on its board from 1998-2002, and chaired its development committee. Joel and his wife, Dorothy, live in Groton and enjoy traveling, hiking, cross-country skiing and birding.

Donna Scott: A former Cornell Cooperative Extension educator at Cornell University, Donna volunteers for many groups and has given talks about many topics, including funeral planning. She helped found and build the Lansing Community Library. Besides being President of the Funeral Consumers Alliance of the Finger Lakes, she is also a Director for the Lansing Friends of Salt Point, and Vice President of the Cayuga Bird Club.

Angela Mennitto has worked at Cornell for the last 30 years in a variety of roles, involving some combination of communications, project management and technology. She became passionate about death education shortly after

she started volunteering with Hospicare ten years ago. She went on to complete a certificate program in Contemplative End-of-Life Care, studied to be a thanatologist through the Association for Death Education and Counseling (ADEC), and now does community outreach organizing community education events to promote death literacy – the practical know-how needed to plan well for the end of life – to help normalize conversations about death and dying. In late 2013, she hosted the first Death Café* in Ithaca and continues to host and facilitate the event on a quarterly basis.

**At Death Cafes people drink tea, eat cake and discuss death. The aim is to increase awareness of death to help people make the most of their (finite) lives.*



Easter Island Surprise

By Donna Scott, FCAFL board president

Mention Easter Island, a remote bit of land 2,300 miles west of Chile in the vast Pacific Ocean, and most people think of its giant statues, called “moai”. The statues were originally mounted on rectangular stone platforms called “ahu” and were almost all near the coastlines of Easter Island. The ahus and their statues faced inland to a clan territory; they did not look out to sea, according to Jared Diamond in his haunting and thought-provoking book, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* (2005, Penguin Books Ltd.).

The surprise is that on the rear (seaward) side of the ahu are crematoria containing the remains and bone ash of thousands of human bodies. In the practice of cremation, Easter Island inhabitants were unique in Polynesia where body burial was the usual custom. Diamond concluded that massive amounts of trees were consumed for the purposes of cremation between AD 900 and sometime before the 1700s when European contact occurred.

This use of trees, as well as all the other usual uses for wood in human settlements, helped to cause complete deforestation on Easter Island and, partly because of its remoteness, the ultimate collapse of its society. Diamond wrote that “Easter is the most extreme example of forest destruction in the Pacific, and among the most extreme in the world: the whole forest gone, and all of its tree species extinct.” As the society was collapsing, most of the moai were purposely knocked over and broken by rival clansmen. Some have been re-erected in modern times. By c.1650 cremation as a funerary practice yielded to mummification and bone burials due to lack of wood for burning. For some of the more haunting details of this collapse, read the book!



Obituary from a Florida newspaper Contributed by an FCAFL board member

Names and dates have been changed for family privacy

Doe, John: If you are reading this, I am dead. I died on January 5, 2019. I was not “called home.” I did not “go to be with the Lord.” I died. Get over it, I have. I never believed in life after death. I hope that I was right. But if not, then remember what Mark Twain said, “Heaven for the climate, Hell for the company.” I was born on March 10, 1950, in Dade City, FL. I was preceded in death by my loving parents, Edward and Margaret Agnes “Maggie” Doe. They were very loving parents. They had to have been loving, otherwise they surely would have either drowned my brother Ed and myself, given us up for adoption or sold us to the CIA for lab experiments. I have no biological children of my own. However, I do believe that I made up for that through my efforts with Rotary’s Camp Florida and the Teddy Bear Runs with the Rough Riders. That and my having continued to act like a child myself on many occasions. Besides, there is a persistent rumor that the FDA and other government agencies had a double secret ban on the procreating. To quote the rock band

Blood, Sweat and Tears: "I swear there ain't no heaven and I pray there ain't no hell. I'll never know by living, only my dying will tell." As one of my law professors used to say: This world is a tricky place, and very few of us get out of it alive." I didn't. You won't. Enjoy life a little each day. I like to live by the theory: "I would rather regret the things that I did rather than the things that I did not do." I think that I accomplished that. Sometimes to the chagrin or embarrassment of my friends. If my wishes

are followed, I have been cremated and my ashes tossed off the dock of my home on River Street. Personally, I do not believe in burial. Cremation makes much more sense. My only true regret in having my body cremated is that there are a certain few people whom I would like to have been able to invite to apply Chap Stick to their lips before kissing my you-know-what. But it's the thought that counts. There will be a farewell party in the next 20 to 50 days. If you were a friend, you will receive an invitation from an amazing woman who I was lucky enough to call my wife, Mary Peach. No flowers, no crying. Eat, drink and tell stories about me. Stick to the truth - with me, the truth was always stranger than fiction. Remember: Life should not be a journey to the grave with the intention of arriving safely in a pretty and well preserved body, but rather, it should be a wild ride skidding in broadside, thoroughly used up, totally worn out, loudly proclaiming: "Wow!! What a ride." If you feel compelled to do something don't waste your money or flowers. Send a check to your local Rotary Club. John leaves behind his wife, a brother, two stepchildren, his son-in-law and his dog, Cassie; all of whom he loved very much, as well as too many friends to count. He will be deeply missed.



Common Funeral Myths

You must hire a funeral director.

Unfortunately in New York, this is not a myth. New York is one of nine states that requires a family to hire a funeral director to file paperwork, transport the body, and supervise the disposition of the body.

Embalming is required by law.

Embalming is never required for the first 24 hours. In New York, as in many states, it's not required at all under any circumstances. Refrigeration is almost always an alternative to embalming if there will be a delay before final disposition.

Donations gratefully received

Barry Adams *in memory of* Molly Adams
 Elizabeth Earle *in memory of* Clifford Earle
 Dianne L Goehring *in memory of* Ken Gonyo
 Peggy Haine *in memory of* Phil Lempert
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 Rhoda Linton *in memory of* Nina C Linton
 Donna Scott *in memory of* Lynn Carol Scott
 Dorothy & John Sholeen *in memory of*
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 Bruce Stewart *in memory of* Philip Lempert
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Donations received

10/1/18 to 2/28/19
Sincere thanks to all our donors – we couldn't do it without you!

Embalming protects the public health.

There is *no* public health purpose served by embalming. In fact, the embalming process may create a health hazard by exposing embalmers to disease and toxic chemicals. In some cases, disease can still be found in an embalmed body. A dead body is less of a threat to public health than a live one that is still coughing and breathing.

An embalmed body will last forever.

Mortuary-type embalming is meant to hold the body only for a week or so. Ultimately, the body will decompose, even if it has been embalmed. Temperature and climate are more influential factors affecting the rate of decomposition.

“Protective” caskets help preserve the body.

While gasketed caskets may keep out air, water, and other outside elements for a while, the body will decompose regardless. In fact, a gasketed or “sealer” casket interferes with the natural dehydration that would otherwise occur. Fluids are released from the body as it begins to decompose, and the casket is likely to rust out from the inside.

Vaults are required by law.

No state has a law requiring burial vaults. Most cemeteries, however, do have such regulations because the vault keeps the grave from sinking in after decomposition of the body and casket, and thus reduce maintenance for the cemetery workers. Grave liners are usually less expensive than vaults. New York State forbids cemeteries from requiring vaults or liners, in deference to religious traditions that require burial directly in the earth. Vaults and metal caskets are not permitted in green burial grounds.

Cremation reduces the body to ashes.

When people think of “ashes” they envision

what you’d find in the fireplace or what’s left over after a campfire. However, what remains after the cremation process are bone fragments, like broken seashells. These are pulverized to a smaller dimension, not unlike aquarium gravel.

It is a good idea to prepay a funeral.

Funeral directors selling preneed funerals expect the interest on your money to pay for any increase in prices. They wouldn’t let you prepay unless there was some benefit for the funeral home, such as capturing more market share or being allowed to pocket some of your money now.

Prepaid funeral money is not well protected against embezzlement in most states. Furthermore, if you were to move, die while traveling, or simply change your mind – from body burial to cremation, perhaps – you may not get all your money back or transferred to a new funeral home. The interest on your money, in a pay-on-death account at your own bank, should keep up with inflation and will let you stay in control.

With a preneed contract, I took care of everything.

There are over 20 items found on many final funeral bills that cannot be included in a preneed contract because these items are purchased from third parties and cannot be calculated prior to death. Extra charges after an autopsy, clergy honoraria, newspaper notices, flowers, the crematory fee or grave opening are typical examples. All such items will be paid for by the decedent’s estate or family, in addition to what has already been paid for in the preneed contract.

Explore our website to learn more:
www.fingerlakesfunerals.org



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of the Finger Lakes**

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The Funeral Consumers Alliance of the Finger Lakes, Inc., founded in 1958 as the Ithaca Memorial Society, is a non-profit, tax-exempt, public-service organization that promotes advance planning of funeral arrangements and consumer education and protection with respect to funeral-related issues. Membership is free and open to all. Volunteers provide all services and programs. A Board of Directors is elected by the members. The FCAFL is supported entirely by donations and is a member of the national Funeral Consumers Alliance, Inc., which has more than 80 affiliates. This Newsletter is published twice a year and is freely available.

Check out our website: *fingerlakesfunerals.org* AND "LIKE" us on Facebook

The Board of Directors, 2018-2019

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|--|-------------|--------------------|
| Donna Scott, <i>president</i> | Jack Booker | Bronwyn Molhke |
| Barry Adams, <i>vice president</i> | Susan Fast | Dorothy Pasternack |
| Joel Rabinowitz, <i>treasurer</i> | Deena Freed | |
| Angela L Mennitto, <i>acting secretary</i> | Pat Gaines | <i>Advisors:</i> |
| Diana Nathanielsz, <i>corresponding secretary</i> | Peggy Haine | David Bandler |
| | Carol Hardy | Helene Croft |
| | | Carolyn Eberhard |

**Ways FCAFL helps
the public**

Those with questions about funeral planning can talk to an FCAFL volunteer by phone (607-273-8316) or by email *info@fingerlakesfunerals.org*

FCAFL presentations

Volunteers from FCAFL give presentations at Lifelong in Ithaca and at other venues in Tompkins County. Presentations include information on funeral planning facts with backup fliers on the numerous areas involved for planning ahead.