



Funeral Consumers Alliance of the Finger Lakes

Fall 2017 Newsletter

www.fingerlakesfunerals.org • info@fingerlakesfunerals.org

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

President's Update

Donna Scott, FCAFL President

2017 Price Survey: We have made comparing funeral service prices at different funeral businesses easy for you! The Funeral Consumers Alliance of the Finger Lakes (FCAFL) surveys funeral prices in its service area at 2-year intervals. This service area, centered on Tompkins County, includes parts of eight surrounding counties in the southern Finger Lakes region and adjacent Southern Tier. General Price Lists (GPLs) for 35 funeral businesses were obtained in 2017. We gratefully acknowledge the cooperation of these businesses.

Prices for 14 types of services and two categories of merchandise were extracted from each price list. In addition, **an index** related to the price of a full-service funeral was compiled for each funeral home. **This Full-service Funeral Price Index allows the reader to compare quickly the level of pricing for different funeral homes.**

The full report for the 2017 Price Survey is easy to find at FCAFL's new website:

www.fingerlakesfunerals.org/price-survey. The data are presented in two tables. The first table lists prices for the set of four limited services *that each include* a funeral home's Basic Arrangements (overhead) charge. These four services are direct cremation, direct or immediate burial, forwarding of remains from one funeral home to another, and receiving of remains by one funeral home from another. This table also shows prices of the cheapest casket and/or alternative container and the cheapest cemetery burial vault, as well as the full-service funeral price index for each funeral home.

This full-service funeral price index we obtain by adding the prices of eight services (but not merchandise such as caskets). Individual prices for

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TALKING ABOUT DEATH WON'T KILL YOU

...it can help you make informed decisions about
end-of-life plans for yourself and others

Join us Saturday, October 28 ♦ 2:00-4:00 pm

The Space@Greenstar ♦ 700 W. Buffalo Street

Explore these topics with staff from local agencies:

- ♦ health care proxies & living wills
- ♦ accessing palliative care
- ♦ Alzheimer's resources
- ♦ hospice care
- ♦ organ donation
- ♦ funeral planning
- ♦ green burial
- and more

www.facebook.com/theartofdyingwell

Brought to you by The Art of Dying Well, Alzheimer's Association, Cayuga Medical Center, Finger Lakes Donor Recovery Network, Funeral Consumers Alliance of the Finger Lakes, Greensprings Natural Cemetery Preserve, Hospicare, Human Services Coalition, Office for the Aging, Visiting Nurse Service

Many people die in ways inconsistent with their values and wishes. Planning ahead provides an opportunity to think about and communicate what you do and don't want at the end of life.

LIKE us at facebook.com/theartofdyingwell

Join us—Saturday, October 28, 2:00-4:00 pm, The Space@Greenstar, 700 W. Buffalo Street, Ithaca (enter on Court St. at Fulton)—to develop the practical know-how needed to plan well for the end of life.

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President's Update – Continued from page 1

these eight services are given in the body of the second table. This table shows the Basic Arrangements (overhead) charge at each funeral home, followed by the prices of some typical components of full-service funerals, the full-service funeral price index, and several explanatory footnotes.

While you are online, we suggest you also look at the generic Example of a Funeral Home's General Price List in New York State and other resources. It pays to shop around because prices can vary a lot among funeral businesses.

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). Recently, a woman living in France emailed FCAFL because her elderly uncle residing in a nursing home in Ithaca was expected to die soon and she knew nothing about how to plan a funeral in the United States. She wanted to plan some of the arrangements before she traveled here from France. Our volunteers helped her to get all the information she needed in a step-by-step process that helped her with choices for body disposition, funeral businesses, price data, and facts about cemeteries here.

A member of FCAFL whose spouse was dying at Ithaca's Hospicare phoned with specific questions about possibly making cremation arrangements before the death. Two volunteers gave the person much information about the choices of local funeral businesses, price information and answers to specific questions, including some personal experiences and what steps to take after the death occurred.

FCAFL presentations: Volunteers from FCAFL have resumed giving presentations at Lifelong in Ithaca and at other venues in the area, including a full presentation on funeral planning facts at Newfield Library October 17. We also take part in hosting information tables at end-of-life planning events in Ithaca, including "Talking About Death Won't Kill You" on Saturday, October 28 (see details starting on page 1).

"Talking about death won't kill you" cont. from page 1

Staff from local organizations* can help you explore:

- advance directives: health care proxies & living wills
- accessing palliative care
- Alzheimer's resources
- hospice care
- organ donation
- funeral planning and how to control costs
- green burial

The format is open, so you can drop by for a few minutes or stay for two hours.

* *The Art of Dying Well, Alzheimer's Association, Cayuga Medical Center, Finger Lakes Donor Recovery Network, Funeral Consumers Alliance of the Finger Lakes, Greensprings Natural Cemetery Preserve, Hospicare, Human Services Coalition, Office for the Aging, Visiting Nurse Service.*



For more laughs from Amelia Sauter, check out
<drinkmywords.com/tag/death/>

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BOOK REVIEWS

From Carolyn Eberhard, FCAFL Advisor

Live Long, Die Short: A Guide to Authentic Health and Successful Aging. By Roger Landry, MD, MPH. Greenleaf Book Group LLC, Austin TX 2014

Dr Landry draws on a long career as a US Air Force Flight Surgeon and is hopeful that people can take steps to achieve authentic health. We know the

basics of having a healthy lifestyle, but may not know that there is now consensus based on published research by the MacArthur Foundation and the National Institutes of Health (NIH) that much of our self-induced stress can be minimized or avoided. The main goal is to minimize the release of stress hormones. This can promote more successful aging which can reduce physical difficulties by 70% and intellectual difficulties by 50%.

Since we often resist change, to adopt a better lifestyle the author strongly recommends the Japanese concept of Kaizen which is to take steps small enough not to trigger a fear response and stress. There are Ten Tips to help each of us achieve authentic health. There are many personal anecdotes and useful ideas in this upbeat program.

The Masterpiece Living organization has applied these findings by partnering with senior living communities all around the country, including New York State. How we age is mostly up to us.

“The proper function of man is to live, not to exist”
– Jack London

Deathbed Wisdom of the Hasidic Masters: The Book of Departure and Caring for People at the End of Life. Translated by Rabbi Joel H. Barron & Rabbi Sara Paasche-Orlow. Jewish Lights Publishing 2016. “For people of all faiths, all backgrounds.”

This book is intended to contribute to the spiritual lives of elderly people and their caretakers. The introduction explains Hasidism and includes “Jewish End of Life Practices.” An appendix describes the characteristics of active dying. A glossary is provided. The Book of Departure details the “Departure” (death) of many exemplary rabbis thought to be in especially close contact with God. Useful explanatory notes are extensive and are separated from the texts.

Departures (DVD). Director, Yojiro Takita. 2009 Oscar Best Foreign Language Film. DVD: Netflix; Amazon; Barnes and Noble.

A devoted Japanese cellist becomes unemployed and finds a new career as a “Departure” specialist (not a travel agent!) in traditional ceremonial preparation of the dead. In Japan this is done in full

view of the grieving family, thus carried out very respectfully.

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The Legacy of Jessica Mitford

By Barry Adams, FCAFL board member

The British author Jessica Mitford is to the funeral industry what Ralph Nader is to the automobile industry. Her *American Way of Death* (1963), a muckraking exposé delivered with wry sociological commentary, has earned an honored place in the annals of consumer activism. Without her compelling account of abuses in the industry, we probably would never have had the “Funeral Rule” enacted by the Federal Trade Commission in 1982. As a result of this rule and the legislation on which it is grounded, all providers of funeral services are required to give anyone who asks for it a copy of their current General Price List showing itemized prices of merchandise and services in a standardized format, and to do so regardless of whether or not the inquirer expresses an interest in doing business. This rule makes possible the comparative price surveys conducted and published by organizations like the Funeral Consumers Alliance of the Finger Lakes.

Among other consumer-friendly provisions of the FTC Funeral Rule, funeral homes are forbidden to force customers to purchase packages containing unwanted merchandise or services. One component frequently included in a “full” package is embalming, which is hardly ever required by law. Another is a funeral home’s requirement that forbids a customer from purchasing a casket from a third party or building his or her own. The Funeral Rule also attempts to clarify the use of so-called vaults or sealed containers for buried remains. Most cemeteries require such an item for practical reasons of maintenance, but there are no legal requirements for their use.

While Mitford’s classic study was a best seller in its day and has been popular ever since, a second book of hers on the same topic is less well known. Thirty-five years after the publication of *The American Way of Death*, there appeared *The American Way of Death Revisited* (1998). Something between a second edition and a sequel,

composed with the help of Lisa Carlson close to Mitford's death in 1996, it provides instructive analysis of the limits of government legislation dealing with behavior that is so directly involved with such fundamental human concerns as death.

Mitford's book may also be credited with energizing the movement best represented by the Funeral Consumers Alliance, headed by two individuals who are as well known in some circles as Jessica Mitford herself. They are Joshua Slocum and Lisa Carlson, current and former Executive Directors of the FCA respectively and joint authors of *Final Rights: Reclaiming the American Way of Death* (2011), an indispensable consumer's guide to the funeral industry. Although based in South Burlington, Vermont, the FCA is a national organization with close to eighty affiliates, and most of them flying the flag of "Funeral Consumers Alliance." One of these affiliates is our own Funeral Consumers Alliance of the Finger Lakes, which originated as the Ithaca Memorial Society in 1958. Still based in Ithaca, it takes as its service area all of Tompkins County and most of several surrounding counties. Membership in the FCAFL and many other FCA affiliates is free. And like some other affiliates, the FCAFL is not only a tax-exempt, but also an all-volunteer organization, offering information and advice to the general public at no cost. It also acts as a consumer advocacy force in conjunction with the national FCA, which is actively engaged in monitoring compliance with the FGC Funeral Rule. Some results of this monitoring are presented in Chapter 8 of Slocum and Carlson's *Final Rights*, which is entitled "Federal Trade Commission: A fickle consumer ally." As the subtitle suggest (presciently, as it seems today), it may be time for another revisit.

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Arlington Cemetery, Memorial Day 2017

Famous Last Words – Yours

By Peggy Haine

Perhaps the most famous last words are those of Oscar Wilde, who is reported (questionably) to have said, "Either that wallpaper goes or I do." Dylan Thomas' better-documented last words were, "I've had eighteen straight whiskies. I believe that's the record." Economist John Maynard Keynes regretted, "I wish I'd drunk more Champagne," and Beethoven directed "Friends, applaud. The comedy is over."

Many of us, however, would like to leave a text of greater substance, a bit of our history, life lessons, loving words to friends and family. And one of the kindest parting gestures is leaving behind a life story and thoughts worthy of their attention, one that will not only make it easy for them to write a heartfelt and factual obituary, but to allow them to know you better, and to pass your story along.

Several online outlines exist to help with this. Here are some basic questions to ask yourself as you prepare to write your own life story, or tell it into a recorder or to a close friend or relative who can record it manually:

The Basics

1. Dates and locations of birth, marriage, names of parents, spouse(s), children, other close relatives, special friends. Schools attended, and memories of school years.

2. Career and military service; membership in organizations, hobbies, or special interests travel.

History

3. Important world events of your lifetime and how, if at all, they affected you.
4. Favorite times with your children and other family members and friends. Is there anything you wish had been different between you – any regrets?
5. Favorite recollections of your own childhood. Mentors and other important people who affected your life path.
6. Factors in deciding your career path. Early work.
7. Best job you remember. The worst. What you learned from each of them?

Getting to Know You

8. Quirks and passions, unusual pursuits
9. The best years of your life, your greatest sources of happiness and pride.
10. Important message you would like to pass along to your children, grandchildren, and loved ones.

OUR FOUNDER...

By Dave Bandler, former FCAFL board member & advisor

Carman Hill came to Ithaca following WWII combat service in Europe to attend Cornell University. He stayed for the next seven decades, leaving his mark on several non-profits, most notably helping to start our local Planned Parenthood and the Ithaca Memorial Society (now the Funeral Consumer’s Alliance of the Finger Lakes). Carman died in January 2017 at age 91.

Spurred by experiences in arranging his father’s funeral, Carman, with the help of fellow members of the Unitarian Church, organized the Ithaca Memorial Society in 1959. The goal was to make simple low-cost burials available to members through pre-planning and by providing helpful consumer information ... all this for a onetime membership fee of ten dollars!

Carman was a persuasive insurance agent and with all his volunteer contacts, he never missed an opportunity to invite folks to join him in the funeral

Donation received in Honor

Patricia Long *in honor of* Susan Kirby, Atty.

Donations received In Memoriam

Barry Adams *in memory of* Molly Adams

Dave & Lenore Bandler *in memory of* Carman Hill

Louise Bement *in memory of* Bill Bement

Ellen Biesdorf *in memory of*
Carman Hill & Heinz Biesdorf

Janet How *in memory of* Brian How

Charles C Hunt *In memory of* Laura C Hunt

Catherine K Paddock *in memory of* Jean Warholic

Sylvia Williams *in memory of* Iris Barbura

Donations gratefully received

February 28, 2017 to September 26, 2017

Balfour, Fred	Bethe, Rose S
Buckley, Ed & Janet	Caruth, Erin
DaGrossa, Marion Craig	Dimock, T A & B
Gebhart, Francoise	Gould, Lisa
Helmstadter, Fran	Hickman, Donald
Stephen Hopkins	Kahn, Ruth
Kenworthy, Roz	LaForse, Beverly C
Levatich, Antoinette S	Lion, Cynthia
Lounsbery, Lois	Magre, Dr & Mrs L A
Martin, T J & P	Meltzer, Anne
Morgan, Diane E	Norkus, Aldona
Pasternack, Dorothy	Riker, Neil & Helen
Robbins, Nancy	Roy, Donna
Rosenthal, Ann	Savage, Edith Jo
Saltzman, Sid & Dolores	Sokol, Donna
Tottey, Laurie	Tsuji, Yohko
Welch, Mabel	White, Donald & Nonie
Wolters, Euteen	Zaslaw, Neal & Ellen

society. The membership grew to a peak of 1,600 members.

FCAFL is here today, thanks to his leadership.
THANK YOU CARMAN!!!!...

**Funeral Consumers Alliance
of the Finger Lakes**

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Ithaca, NY 14851-0134**

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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.

The Board of Directors, 2016-2017

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Check out our website

www.fingerlakesfunerals.org

AND

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