



Funeral Consumers Alliance of the Finger Lakes

Fall 2019 Newsletter

www.fingerlakesfunerals.org • info@fingerlakesfunerals.org

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

TALKING ABOUT DEATH WON'T KILL YOU

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

Drop by Saturday, November 9 ♦ 2:00-4:00 pm

The Space@Greenstar ♦ enter parking lot from N. Fulton & Court St.

Explore these topics with staff from local agencies:

- ♦ health care proxies & living wills
- ♦ accessing palliative care
- ♦ hospice care
- ♦ wills & trusts
- ♦ organ donation
- ♦ funeral planning
- ♦ green burial
- and more

www.facebook.com/theartofdyingwell

Brought to you by On Dying Well, Cayuga Medical Center, Finger Lakes Donor Recovery Network, Funeral Consumers Alliance of the Finger Lakes, Greensprings Natural Cemetery Preserve, Hospicare & Palliative Care Services, Human Services Coalition, Ithaca College Gerontology Institute, Visting Nurse Service of Ithaca

Angela Mennitto, Death Midwife: It's not "if," but "when"

By Peggy Haine

From the living room of a tree-shaded Ithaca aerie brightened by birdsong, Oriental carpets and her own inspired sculptures, and anchored by walls of books, Angela Mennitto speaks animatedly of her decision to become a death midwife. In a culture where people are more likely to avoid even the mention of death, much less confront their own mortality, she offers her thoughts on death and dying, encourages her audiences and clients to consider planning for their final days and to consider the possibilities for growth and transformation at the end of life.

Mennitto developed an interest in the field while attending her mother's death when she became aware of the work of hospice. "It's where my practice of trying to be present met, 'Oh, could that be a job qualification?'" she said. She began volunteering for Hospicare, working primarily with people in nursing homes. She was so taken with the work that she did a program in contemplative end of life care through Naropa and studied thanatology through the Association of Death Education and Counseling. "Working with the dying dovetails with my spiritual practice," she said. "I can have a very judgmental mind, and sitting with someone who's dying is one of the few times my mind shuts up so I get to just be grounded in the moment."

She has been hosting a quarterly Death Café since 2013, where attendees gather for tea, cake, and a discussion of various aspects of death and dying. In recent years she has hosted workshops on preparing advance directives, given a talk on the art of dying well at McGraw House, and provided vigil training for a group at the Ithaca Friends Meeting. She is the organizer of the Talking About Death Won't Kill You event featured on the front page.

In her role as a death midwife, she works with those nearing death as a compassionate presence at the bedside providing emotional, spiritual, and practical support. She also works to help people craft their own obituaries or document their stories for family members.

Recently retired from her work at Cornell as a project manager, Mennitto has set up a not-for-profit organization, On Dying Well (on-dying-well.org), through which she continues to organize community education events and workshops to promote death literacy and to help normalize conversations about death and dying.

She is planning some new workshops less focused on the logistics of planning for end-of-life and more on the emotional/aesthetic components. How do you imagine your own "good death?" What comforts do you want? Do you want music or silence? What do you want to see or for others to see when they visit you? Is there poetry or other readings you want to hear?

To those who might find her path odd, even ghoulish, she counsels, "'For me, it's not morbid. It helps me appreciate what I've got...remembering that life doesn't go on forever adds such beauty and poignancy to my daily existence.'

Steve Jobs' Stanford University Commencement Address

(This was after his pancreatic cancer had spread in his body...June 2005)

"Remembering that I'll be dead soon is the most important tool I've ever encountered to help me make the big choices in life. Because almost everything – all external expectations, all pride, all fear of embarrassment or failure – these things just fall away in the face of death, leaving only what is truly important. Remembering that you are going to die is the best way I know to avoid the trap of thinking you have something to lose. You are already naked. There is no reason not to follow your heart."

From: *Steve Jobs*, by Walter Issacson, 2011, Pg. 478-479

Donations gratefully received

Angela Mennitto *in memory of* Patti Papapietro

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Donations received 2/29/19 – 8/8/19

Sincere thanks to all our donors – we couldn't do it without you!

An 1898 Funeral

By Donna Scott

My great uncle Wilfrid Scott (b. 1887) in 1966 wrote a short history of “the old days” in and around East Lyme, Connecticut, entitled, Whistletown Wilds. While reading it again before sending it to the New London County (CT) Historical Society, I came across this on page 19:

“The customs of the times change; when my father died in 1898 he was ‘laid out’ by a neighbor who was also a judge. The casket was brought to our house, he was duly placed in the casket by a neighbor who was the local undertaker [the aforementioned judge?], and the funeral was held in the house. The body was carried to the cemetery in the town hearse, which was brought from a town owned barn in Flanders near Flanders Church.

All funerals were, of course, drawn by horses and many ‘hacks’ were used – I heard of one funeral where the snow was so deep the horses could not get through and a Mr. Lee of Grassy Hill had to get some yokes of oxen to get the body to the cemetery.”

Resources for End of Life Planning

VIDEO Dr. Seuss advance directives/health care proxy important info video on YouTube by Tim Boon, CEO Good Shepard Community Care
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xy-JTh1Vo8o>

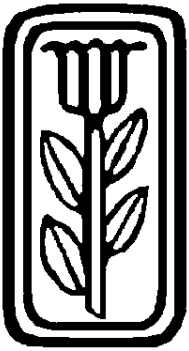
light, but compelling directives to a health care proxy with examples of what you should know.

BOOKS **Advice for Future Corpses (and Those Who Love Them): A Practical Perspective on Death & Dying**
 by Sallie Tisdale

Beginners Guide to the End by Shoshana Berger & BJ Miller
 “It may be the single most important thing you do before you depart.”

Finishing our Story: Preparation for the End of Our Lives
 by Dr. Greg Eastwood, Ethics consultant, Upstate Med. Center, Syracuse

WEBSITE National FCA's *Before I Go, You Should Know*
 Paper spiral bound
 Online type-able copy
www.funerals.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**

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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 the area.

Presentations include information on funeral planning facts with backup fliers on the numerous topics involved for planning ahead.