



# *Funeral Consumers Alliance of the Finger Lakes*

*Fall 2021 Newsletter*

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## **A Note from the Acting President by Donna Scott**

The cool days of Fall have been accompanied by personnel changes at FCAFL. Diana Nathanielsz stepped down as President, and I have assumed the role of Acting President, while also continuing as Corresponding Secretary. Diana has served us well as President and previous to this, she was a most able and efficient Corresponding Secretary. Diana also coordinated getting FCAFL post office mail to various other board members. She continues as a regular board member. We are grateful for her leadership over the years.

Susan Fast has left the board, as has Peggy Haine. Both served in different capacities for several years, Susan as an assistant at live FCAFL educational presentations and Peggy as a source for answers to emailed and telephoned questions, as well as writing articles and advising on obituaries. We thank Diana, Peggy and Susan for their service to the mission of the FCAFL.

During the pandemic lockdown, we have not been able to present live educational programs, but we did one brief presentation via Zoom to a local group. We continue to provide answers to funeral planning questions to the public via email and telephone. We have a presence on Facebook, and our excellent website is a great source for information on many funeral-related topics. The website hosts informative data from our 2021 Price Survey of eight local funeral businesses' goods and services. We have left on the website the Price Survey of 2017, since that gives price data for 35 area funeral homes; these prices, though somewhat out of date, would give readers a price comparison among several businesses. We can provide information via our printed brochures, as well.

As you can see by the list of members of the Board of Directors on page 4, we are down in numbers. Please contact us if you are interested in serving on the FCAFL board.  
607-273-8316, [info@fingerlakesfunerals.org](mailto:info@fingerlakesfunerals.org)

## **Remembering Louise Greene Richards by Barry Adams & Donna Scott**

Former FCAFL board member, Louise Greene Richards, a Cornell alumna with both undergraduate and graduate degrees from the University, retired to Ithaca after a distinguished career in federal government. She was a national leader in the field of Social Psychology and became the Chief of Epidemiologic and Psychosocial Research for the federal National Institute on Drug Abuse. In this role in 1974, she launched the National Survey on Drug Abuse, which continues to be conducted today.

After moving to Ithaca, she became an active member of the FCAFL, serving several terms on its Board of Directors. She was a thoughtful and articulate advocate of the Alliance's mission to promote dignified and affordable end-of-life arrangements. Her expert survey work for the FDA and NIH led her to offer valued assistance in the FCAFL's bi-annual price survey of goods and services offered by our local funeral homes. In addition, she conducted a "satisfaction" survey of Alliance members by means of a questionnaire included in the Spring 2013 Newsletter. You can see the results of this survey in an article by Louise and board colleague, Barry Adams, in the Fall 2013 Newsletter at

[www.fingerlakesfunerals.org/newsletters](http://www.fingerlakesfunerals.org/newsletters).

Those who came to know Louise "at home" on Hanshaw Road in Cayuga Heights appreciated the skill and artistry in her use of textiles in sewing her own clothes and producing decorative wall hangings. She also loved opera and followed the Boston Red Sox. Louise died May 8, 2021 at age 97, at home. Services were held May 13 at Perkins Funeral Home, Dryden, NY with Unitarian Minister, Rev. Margaret Weis, officiating.

### ***What's Inside:***

- Page 2: Drawing in the Meadow
- Page 3: Upcoming Workshop, Donations
- Page 4: About FCAFL
- Insert: Greensprings at 15

## Drawing in the Meadow, Reflecting on Impermanence by Angela Mennitto

“Doesn’t everything die at last, and too soon?  
Tell me, what is it you plan to do  
with your one wild and precious life?”  
– Mary Oliver

This summer I had the opportunity to participate in, and help lead, a workshop at Greensprings Natural Cemetery Preserve called Drawing in the Meadow, Reflecting on Impermanence. We met every other Saturday afternoon between mid-July and early September for five sessions.



Our instructor, Camille Doucett, has been teaching landscape and botanical painting in the Ithaca area and beyond for many years. Over the first four sessions we were invited to observe and sketch the natural world around us. We also learned about how to use watercolors. Greensprings, with its rolling hills, expansive views, and wildflower meadows, provided a perfect classroom.

We opened each session with a different poem by Mary Oliver to help set the tone for both observing nature and reflecting on impermanence and ended with different prompts to contemplate until the next time we met. Participants were invited to write if so moved. There was no need to know how to draw, paint or write to participate.

The format of the fifth, and final, session was a bit more like a Death Café, with free-flowing conversation not only reflecting on our mortality, but on what it had meant to each of us to spend that time in a cemetery. Participants shared some of their work—sketches, watercolors, and poems.

Several participants noted that the time spent focused on drawing and painting provided a lovely respite from the busyness of their lives and their minds. They found it profoundly relaxing.

One prompt invited everyone to consider writing

their own obituary—to step back from a traditional format and instead focus on a summary of one’s life based on three things for which you want to be remembered (or three pivotal moments in your life). Then to weave those into your story so that someone who knows you would still recognize you, but perhaps learn something new. Or so someone who never met you, might gain a sense of your essence.



Several participants started working on that before our last meeting and commented how revelatory, and challenging, it was to do something like that for yourself. Everyone who started on it was very interested in continuing to work on it after the workshop was over.

The workshop was supported by Greensprings, Hospicare and Palliative Care Services, and On Dying Well—a local non-profit working to normalize conversations about death and dying in the community.

The folks at Greensprings hope to make this an annual event.



# Upcoming Workshop

## SOUND & VISION WHAT DOES DYING WELL MEAN TO YOU?

What would make your last weeks, days or hours most peaceful?

What do you want around you at the end of your life—  
music, readings, art, smells, photographs, people?

Join us to work on your aesthetic, spiritual, emotional  
advance directives rather than your medical ones  
(i.e., health care proxy, living will).

They say that hearing is the last sense to go before we die.  
We will use sound—singing bowls, humming, guided meditation—  
as a tool to help explore what dying well means to you.

Experience—contemplate—share your vision.

Saturday, November 13, 1-5PM

Cost: \$30; proof of vaccination required

Registration required, email:  
amennitto@gmail.com

*Angela Mennitto is a death midwife who  
also organizes community education events  
to promote death literacy and to normalize  
conversations about death and dying.*

*Bernadette Fiocca, a licensed massage  
therapist for over 30 years, has a deep interest in  
exploring how sound frequencies promote  
peace, awareness, health and harmony.*

Learn more at [theartofdyingwell.com](http://theartofdyingwell.com) or on [facebook.com/theartofdyingwell](https://facebook.com/theartofdyingwell)

## Donations gratefully received

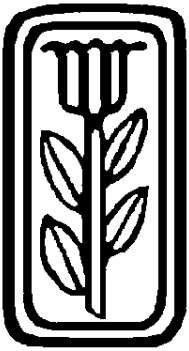
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***Sincere thanks to all our donors.  
We couldn't do it without you!***



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## Fall Newsletter 2021 - FCA of the Fingers Lakes - Page 4

**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](http://fingerlakesfunerals.org) AND “LIKE” us on Facebook**

### **The Board of Directors**

Donna Scott, *acting president  
& corresponding secretary*  
Bronwyn Mohlke,  
*recording secretary*  
Joel Rabinowitz, *treasurer*  
Carol Hardy  
Deborah Harper  
Angela Mennitto

Tim Mount  
Diana Nathanielsz

### **Advisors:**

Barry Adams  
David Bandler  
Jack Booker

### **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](mailto:info@fingerlakesfunerals.org) or go to: [fingerlakesfunerals.org](http://fingerlakesfunerals.org)

### **FCAFL presentations**

Volunteers can give Zoom presentations to groups of 10 or more people. Presentations include information on funeral planning and price comparisons.

## Greensprings at 15 by Joel Rabinowitz

On August 14, Greensprings Natural Cemetery Preserve celebrated 15 years of operation. In conjunction with its annual meeting, the cemetery honored its four founders, Jennifer Johnson, Carl Leopold, Susan Thomas and Mary Woodsen. A large glacial-erratic stone—the only one found on the cemetery property—was unveiled, engraved with their names and the date of Greensprings’ incorporation (2004). Carl Leopold, who died in 2009, was represented by his wife, Lynn, who currently serves as the cemetery’s vice-president.

When it first opened and began operating in 2006, Greensprings was one of only five natural or “green” cemeteries in the United States, and was the first such cemetery in New York. Now, according to the Green Burial Council’s website, there are 90 certified green cemeteries in the U.S., although only a minority of these are stand-alone natural or conservation burial grounds. (Most are “hybrid” cemeteries, meaning they are sections of conventional cemeteries that operate using accepted green practices.)

At Greensprings, the bodies of loved ones are buried in biodegradable coffins or shrouds, and are not embalmed. Typically, family and friends of the deceased serve as pallbearers and manually lower the body into the grave. Concrete vaults are not used, and standing stone monuments are not allowed. Families may choose to have natural fieldstones engraved as memorials and set flat in the ground, and they may plant native perennials on the burial mound as well. Greensprings does accept cremated remains, but in its educational outreach it gently advocates for natural burial as the most environmentally sustainable form of disposition of a body after death.



*Lowering the coffin.*



*Procession with cart.*

Greensprings has a second, and complementary, mission, that of preserving and enhancing the natural environment. The cemetery’s trustees, volunteers and ecological advisers have worked to remove invasive plants and to make its meadows more habitable for grassland birds and pollinators such as monarch butterflies. Every spring a large flock of bobolinks returns and sets up nests on the cemetery grounds. Indeed, the place has much more the feel of a nature preserve than of a cemetery.



*Monarch butterfly enjoying the beautiful meadow.*

In the interest of “full disclosure” (as media folks like to say), the author of this article served as executive director of Greensprings during its “infancy” and early years of growth. One of my proudest accomplishments was the purchase (in 2014) of an inholding of 30 acres that was surrounded by cemetery property. An old, dilapidated farmhouse on the inholding was later torn down, along with other outbuildings, and large amounts of trash were removed.

## Greensprings at 15 (continued) by Joel Rabinowitz

One of Greensprings' founders, Jen Johnson, served as its burial coordinator for 12 years. She was honored at the August anniversary event for having established Greensprings' reputation of providing sensitive, caring support to families burying their loved ones. These days, the work that Jen and I did is now carried on by two part-time burial coordinators and a manager, Michelle Menter, who handles administrative duties as well as burial coordination. Paid staff are assisted by dedicated volunteers who help with the burial work and maintain and operate the tractor and other necessary equipment.

At the August annual meeting, Menter reported that the cemetery has had 413 burials and sold 1,220 gravesites over the 15 years of operation. The beginning of the coronavirus pandemic presented unique challenges, but Greensprings responded with a Covid-19 safety plan and guidelines for burials and cemetery tours. During the worst period of the pandemic, pallbearing and lowering of the coffin by family members had to be replaced by a tractor, operated by volunteer Bruce Johnson, who would carefully lower the coffin into the grave. Staff also filmed burials to enable remote attendance by Zoom. As Menter reported, "In 2020 we gathered in smaller groups, we stood further apart, we wore masks, and we remained committed to natural burial."



*Pallbearers carrying coffin to rest on the grave.*

A new feature of the Greensprings landscape this year is the Remembrance Grove, "a place of solace for bereaved parents who have suffered pregnancy and childbirth loss or the loss of a child." Located in an existing stand of locust trees in the West Meadow burial ground, the grove features two stone benches

and the beginnings of a cairn of rocks. Visitors are invited to contribute a palm-sized stone to the cairn "as a symbol of our shared loss." The Remembrance Grove is an ideal setting for introspection, meditation and connection with the natural world.

At the end of the 15th anniversary event, the attendees filed down the path to the Remembrance Grove. There, the two stone benches were dedicated as an additional tribute to the four founders of Greensprings, who had the vision to create a place that honors the memory of our loved ones as well as the earth to which they have returned.



*One of the dedicated stone benches in the Remembrance Grove.*

For more information about Greensprings, please visit [www.naturalburial.org](http://www.naturalburial.org)

