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Why Not Plan a Planning Party?

By Peggy Chestnut

Another year is coming to a close and as you can see from this newsletter we have had a busy year and have had some success in getting our name out and talking to people about end-of-life choices. Speaking of end-of-life-choices, I wanted to share a personal story with you.

I grew up in Syracuse on the west side, one of seven children. A number of years ago, long before I was involved with FCA of CNY, my parents were aging and some of their close friends had died. There had been some issues about what should be done with their friends' funerals. One day, while on a trip to Maryland, when they were in the car with me and had no place to run, I opened a conversation about what they wanted as far as their funerals and end-of-life choices. My mother really wanted nothing to do with this conversation, and looked out the window and did not say anything. My father on the other hand thought it was a great idea to talk about this and get things figured out. He and I talked about it, and we decided that we would have a funeral home shopping day.

Previous to the appointed day, he called several funeral homes and made appointments to go in and talk with a funeral director. On the appointed day, a sister, dad and I went to three different funeral homes, talked with all the different funeral directors, looked at caskets, went out to lunch, laughed and talked and surprisingly had a great day. After one funeral director told us that if my dad died at the VA Hospital, transportation to the funeral home would be free of charge since he was a veteran, my sister and I joked that no matter where he died we would dump his body off at the Veteran's Hospital.

My dad loved Saltine Crackers. He was not supposed to eat them as he was diabetic and they raised his blood glucose levels, but to my mother's dismay, he stashed stacks of them all over the house. While we looked at caskets, we found several that had drawers in them. My sister and I decided we could stash Saltines in the drawers. We had many laughs like this throughout the day. After our day of shopping my dad spoke to my

mother and with input from my sister and me, made a choice about the funeral director he wanted, the casket that he and my mother would both get, and made all the arrangements. He also purchased gravesites at the Veterans Cemetery and got everything all set for the end, so that we, his family, would not have to make the decisions for him. It would be just as he wanted, and cost what he wanted to spend.

My mother never spoke to me about this at all. It was almost two years to the day after our shopping day when my dad passed away, and we did not have to worry about the arrangements. It was on the day that I took my mother to the funeral home for the calling hours that she finally admitted how happy she was I had talked to them about this, and that my dad had gotten everything in order so she did not have to make the final arrangements at a time when it would have been difficult for her to make those decisions. My sister and I, although saddened by his death, shared our experience of the shopping day with many people at his calling hours and funeral. We shared many happy memories of that day instead of just being sad. I hope my story will inspire some of you to do the same with your family so it's easier for everyone concerned. It also goes to show that I was meant to be a part of this organization; I can help others get the same thing I inspired my dad to get: exactly what he wanted.

I wish you all happy holidays and hope for peace in the New Year.

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Some Reading and Resource Ideas

- Article in USA Today on how Internet shopping transforms funeral planning: <http://usat.ly/1bVmnzJ>
- Try before you die Japanese festival: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2751719/Try-die-Strange-Japanese-festival-lets-try-coffin-funeral-makeup.html>
- Seniors Helping Seniors web site: <http://seniorcaresyracuse.com>
- A Book worth reading: *Smoke Get in Your Eyes and Other Lessons from the Crematory* by Caitlin Doughty.

Are Your End-of-Life Choices Up-to-Date?

There's never a better time to review your end-of-life decisions than right now. Go over your Preference Form with your family/friends. If you need a new form, send us a stamped, self-addressed envelope and it will come right back to you.

NEW ACTIVITY IN AID-IN DYING

Joel Potash

Three new bills have been introduced in the New York State legislature, 2 in the Assembly and 1 in the Senate to allow aid-in-dying (formerly called physician-assisted suicide): A.5261 (Pauli et al); A2129 (Rosenthal et al); and S.3685 (Savino et al). The bills would amend existing Public Health Laws, and allow terminally ill patients with a life expectancy of 6 months or less to obtain medication from a physician in order to hasten death. Patients would have to be capable of decision-making, and would not be considered suicidal for purposes of the law or insurance benefits. Active euthanasia, where the physician or others administer a lethal drug, would not be allowed.

Additionally, a lawsuit in New York has been instituted by several terminally ill patients and their doctors and other consulting physicians to allow aid-in-dying under "equal protection of the law." The premise is that a patient on a ventilator may have the ventilator discontinued to hasten death, but this option is not available to other patients who are dying and may be suffering. New York State law currently requires physicians to offer terminally ill patients a discussion of all options for care, including palliative care and Hospice. There is no information available as to how often such

discussions actually happen. There is also concern that discussing ways in which terminally ill patients may end their life may leave physicians legally culpable.

In a previous decision regarding a New York State case, the U.S. Supreme Court concluded that there was no Constitutional right to assistance in dying, but that patients were entitled to palliative care, including sufficient pain control, even if medications unintentionally caused their deaths. The Supreme Court stated that individual states could enact legislation allowing physician-assisted suicide.

THE FUTURE? CORPSES AS COMPOST?

An article in the NY Times on April 14, 2015 describes a plan by a 37 year old architect, Karen Spade, supported by the Urban Death Project to build a building with an open top into which of corpses could be lowered, a carbon source (wood chips) added. The bodies would decompose over time to form usable compost (about 3 cubic feet per body). Apparently many states already allow the composting of dead livestock and road kill, and a third of dead dairy livestock are already handled his way in Washington state. The cost is estimated at around \$2,500. The process is similar to composting you may do in your backyard. In a second stage the composted remains would be screened and the compost cured. Weeks, or likely months later survivors could collect the compost to use as they see fit. Composting would avoid the increased carbon release of cremation, but might not kill certain disease agents, such as those causing Mad Cow Disease in humans. Currently some bodies are undergoing this process to see if it will work.

LATE BREAKING NEWS!

China says, please stop hiring funeral strippers.

In China, friends and family of the deceased may have to do without a special form of funereal entertainment: strippers.

According to a statement from the Ministry of Culture on Thursday, the government plans to work closely with the police to eliminate such performances, which are held with the goal of drawing more mourners.

Pictures of a funeral in the city of Handan in northern Hebei province last month showed a dancer removing her bra as assembled parents and children watched. They were widely **circulated** online, prompting much opprobrium. In its Thursday statement, the Ministry of Culture cited "obscene" performances in the eastern Chinese province of Jiangsu, as well as in Handan, and pledged to crack down on such lascivious last rites. (From the *Wall Street Journal*)

We Say Thank You!

As we thank those who have donated money to FCA of CNY since the publication of the last newsletter, you might wonder how these gifts are used. Much of it helps defray our routine operating costs, such as the production and mailing of this newsletter.

Please use the form on page four of this newsletter to make your contribution to FCA of CNY.

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