



CREATIVE CHOICES

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Summer 2011	

The newsletter of the Austin Memorial and Burial Information Society (AMBIS), a member of the national Funeral Consumers Alliance and a nonprofit, nonsectarian educational consumer organization that encourages and assists Central Texans in making informed, practical end-of-life decisions

AMBIS Library has DVDs to lend

Hendrix, H. & Hendrix, J. (2006), Lasting Images: Alternatives to Traditional Burial [Motion Picture]. United States: Moon Tower Productions.

In *Lasting Images: Alternatives to Traditional Burial*, Joan and Hammond Hendrix present choices in final body disposition, including mixing cremated remains with concrete to create an ocean reef; using cremains in the production of jewelry and art; shooting cremated remains into space; decomposition through cryogenics; and green burial. The benefits of using alternative methods to traditional burial are highlighted.

Families and individuals who chose to deal with death and final body disposition in creative and meaningful ways are interviewed throughout the film. There are many warm and touching moments and a few laughs, too.

Hadaegh, B. & Babcock, G. (2003), A Certain Kind of Death: What Happens to the Unmourned. [Motion Picture]. United States: Wellspring.

A Certain Kind of Death examines what happens to those who die with no identified next of kin. The cases unfold in Los Angeles County and the directors show us the steps taken to locate family or friends. The County also has processes in place to determine financial assets, liquidate assets, and lay the 'unclaimed' to rest. At the end of each vignette we have some sense of who people were when alive, though the loneliness of their last weeks or hours is palpable.

This project is intended to "raise public awareness of this phenomenon, which might encourage citizens to make plans for themselves." (AMBIS can help you and your family with advance planning!)

Belk, D. & Booth, S. (2008), Passing Through Our Hands: Home Funeral Care Guide. [Motion Picture]. United States: www.PassingThroughOurHands.com.

Passing Through our Hands is a training workshop created and presented by home funeral advocates and AMBIS volunteers, Donna Belk and Sandy Booth. It shows people how to care for their own dead in a way that honors the deceased and the living, providing practical advice on moving, washing and dressing your loved one, and using dry ice. It includes ideas for personalizing the home funeral.

Included is a one-sheet *Home Funeral Care Guide* that covers all of the practical points in the presentation and serves as a general checklist for conducting a home funeral.

To borrow DVDs and library books, visit the AMBIS office.

GETTING YOUR DUCKS IN ORDER WHILE YOU CAN STILL QUACK! is a 7-session course sponsored by AMBIS and Lifetime Learning Institute (LLI).

Topics include –

- advance directives for your end-of-life care and disposition of your remains
- the when and why of hospice care
- information about organ, tissue and body donation
- family-directed funerals
- options for natural, "green" burial
- veterans benefits
- benefits of writing an obituary in advance

When: Mondays, Sept.12 to Oct. 24, 2011, 10 a.m. to Noon

Where: Bethany United Methodist Church
10010 Anderson Mill Road (about ½ mi. west of Hwy. 183 North)

Cost: \$20 (for all 7 sessions) plus \$10 for handouts at the first class meeting

Registration:

Go to <<http://liaustin.org/registration>> to print the registration card.

Mail card and a \$20 check payable to Lifetime Learning Institute (not AMBIS) to:
Lifetime Learning Institute
7703 North Lamar, #131
Austin, TX 78752

Don't delay! Class enrollments are made in the order in which signed registration forms and checks are received in the LLI office.

If you attended this LLI course last fall, you know how helpful it was. **Be sure to tell neighbors and friends** about this great opportunity at a very reasonable cost.

From the President –

Getting Your Ducks in Order While You Can Still Quack! is a 7-session course sponsored by AMBIS and Lifetime Learning Institute. Last fall it was a huge success! Here's another chance not to miss this highly-requested course that provides lots of useful information about end-of-life issues. See page one for details.

Wondering what you could do to help AMBIS in a way you would enjoy? We've listed a wide variety of opportunities on our website at <http://fcaambis.org>, or call the office to request a copy. Take a moment, take a look ... and let me know what interests you. We need "occasional helpers" as well as regular volunteers.

If you are arranging an out-of-town funeral or burial, do **not** call a **local** funeral home! Instead, contact a funeral home in the town where you want to send the remains. If you are not transporting the body yourself, the "destination" funeral home will arrange the transportation by vehicle or air. Typically, this will save you money because you will not be paying two funeral homes – one in your hometown and one that will be handling the out-of-town funeral and/or burial. If you need assistance selecting an out-of-area funeral home, contact the nearest funeral consumer alliance for advice. You can find a list of local FCAs at www.funerals.org/affiliates-directory.

Sprinkling Ashes on a Cemetery Lot. My Aunt Joyce brought her sister's remains from Seattle to our family lot in Minnesota and put the ashes under a potted plant rather than paying for their interment. Resorting to do-it-yourself measures typically occurs when cemeteries charge families an outrageous price to spread ashes on a plot they have already purchased.

Consumer & Legislative Alerts

Pre-Paid Funeral Contracts: The Texas Dept. of Banking has set up a web site to educate consumers about pre-paid funeral contracts at <http://www.prepaidfunerals.texas.gov>.

Telephone Scam Targets Grieving Families: Here's how it works. A family who recently used a funeral home is contacted by an individual claiming to work for that funeral home. The caller says a balance is due on the funeral and asks them to pay immediately with a credit or debit card.

Do **not** give them your credit or debit card information until you verify that this demand for payment is not a scam. You have the right to say no to anyone asking you to pay a bill over the phone. Ask for the name of the person calling and a call back phone number. Then call the funeral home you used and ask for the billing department to see if you owe any money. If you determine that the call was a scam, inform the funeral home so they will know their name is being used.

HR 900, The Bereaved Consumers Bill of Rights Act of 2011 has been reintroduced into the House of Representatives. Please contact your representatives in the US House and Senate to ask them to support HR 900 when it comes to the floor.

Gold Star for Texas Watchdog! FCA national board member Jim Bates (also with the FCA of North Texas) helped a woman get a \$600 refund from a pre-need funeral insurance company who over-billed her in error. He gets a gold star from Dave Lieber, the consumer watchdog columnist at the Fort Worth Star-Telegram. Read "A Problem Solved" in Dave's column at www.star-telegram.com/2011/04/28/3035743/fort-worth-examining-open-records.html.

Come One, Come All ... AMBIS volunteers are united in their dedication to helping people understand their end-of-life options. We are consumer advocates, supporting laws which support transparency and education that enable consumers to know options. We hold a variety of political opinions, but when we speak for AMBIS we are not political but mission-minded. Similarly, no matter what our personal views about religion, we represent AMBIS as a non-sectarian organization whose mission is to serve our increasingly diverse community.

Rodger Ericson,
AMBIS Governing Council President



NOTEWORTHY NEWS!
AMBIS has changed its mailing address:
3710 Cedar Street, Box 13
Austin, TX 78705-1449

Gone for Good Doing Good

AMBIS has received \$95 to date for items donated to Gone for Good. Gone for Good accepts art, small furnishings, jewelry, and crafts. Once donated, the items are gone for good, out of your home, and out of your life. Gone for Good sells the items and forwards the proceeds, less a modest handling fee, to AMBIS.

What can you donate to help AMBIS raise funds? Contact Retta Van Auken at 657-7210 or Gail Miller at 297-6302 to donate items and arrange for pick up. Items should have a minimum value of \$50 each.

Gone For Good is a fiscal sponsorship fund administered through the Austin Community Foundation. See photos of items and learn more about Gone for Good at www.goneforgood.net.

VOLUNTEER IN THE SPOTLIGHT



DAESENE WILLMANN

Daesene Willmann is our first Volunteer in the Spotlight because, in more than 20 years with AMBIS, her presence and hard work have inspired us all. Daesene served on the Governing Council for 15 years and, in 2007-2008, was its president. Now, as Volunteers Coordinator, she chairs volunteer meetings and ensures that office operations run smoothly. She is also the person to call when an AMBIS presenter is needed or anyone has a question about our history, our volunteers, or our mission.

What does Daesene find most rewarding about her volunteer work? “I enjoy seeing the expression on people’s faces when I give them the price survey and tell them that this helps them ‘Shop before they drop.’ People get a big kick out of that. I like to do outreach, here, there and you, and to talk to people who are enthused about being AMBIS members.”

Daesene says she has made “lots of wonderful friends working for AMBIS. It’s been my pleasure to meet Josh Slocum, our national Executive Director. He’s a real go-getter. The funeral consumers groups are lucky to have Josh. We’re lucky to have Lamar Hankins who’s been doing our newsletter for years and years. He is one of my role models in this work. If I have a burning question, I will get on the phone and ask Lamar.”

Daesene says it’s a pleasure to have an office in the AGE Building. In earlier years, “we were running AMBIS out of our homes. Now we can set up files and get ourselves more organized.”

In addition to her work with AMBIS, Daesene is a volunteer driver for the North Central Caregivers whose volunteers assist older adults to remain independent and in their own homes by offering a variety of no-cost services. “It’s very satisfying to take elderly people to a doctor appointment, a drop-in center, or a beauty shop.” Daesene is also actively involved with Travis Audubon. In June, she and 32 other bird-watching enthusiasts spent a week in Costa Rica observing red macaws and other birds that, interestingly, are also native to Central Texas.

On September 25, AMBIS will have its first Volunteer Celebration Party. Daesene will be honored at this event for her many years of service to AMBIS. **If you would like to thank her, too, please send your comments and reflections to <ngwalker@grandecom.net> or mail to Nancy Walker, 1001 Nile Street, Austin, TX 78702. We’ll make sure they are presented to her at the Celebration.**

Treasurer’s Report to Members and Friends

Income for the first six months of this year is less than half of the amount for the same period last year: \$4,076.59 compared to \$9,191.71. AMBIS is clearly feeling the effects of the economic downturn. This year contrasts sharply with 2010, when the President’s Challenge helped us to replenish reserves rather than withdraw from reserves as we are doing this year.

Expenditures are running slightly less than in 2010: \$9,079.16 compared to \$9,981.46. AMBIS pays dues to FCA, and pays for meetings, events, and training for council members. *Office Operations* expenses include rent, utilities, office supplies, and postage for correspondence with our members. *Outreach & Communications* expenses include expenses for the newsletter, the web site, and presentations. Other recent miscellaneous costs include the unanticipated legal fees to resolve a dispute with Wrench Funeral Home.

Details of AMBIS finances are available upon request to me at <Amy@OnTheRecordOrganizing.com>.

Respectfully submitted,
Amy Praskac, Treasurer

AMBIS BRIEFS

Outreach Report

Nancy Walker presented an Advanced Directives workshop at Unity of the Hills on June 5, which included 10 participants, two of whom were AMBIS members. Everyone not already a member of AMBIS joined, which included 4 individual and 2 family memberships.

Virginia Kniesner and Daesene Willmann staffed an AMBIS table at the 11th annual Employees Retirement System of Texas Annual Enrollment Fair on June 28. AMBIS has attended this event for several years and has always had a good response from state retirees.

AMBIS Mission Statement

AMBIS, a member of the national Funeral Consumers Alliance, is a nonprofit, nonsectarian educational consumer organization that encourages and assists Central Texans in making informed, practical end-of-life decisions.

Please Help Us Keep Our Mailing List Current

To help us keep our mailing costs down, be sure to let AMBIS know if your address changes. If you move out of the area, we can help you transfer your membership. Send changes by email, call the AMBIS office at 512-480-0555, or send this form with the old address to AMBIS.

My new or corrected address is:

Name

Street or P. O. Box

City, State, Zip

Phone

Email address

**Austin Memorial & Burial
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A Funeral Consumers Alliance
3710 Cedar Street, Box 13
Austin, TX 78705-1449**

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CREATIVE CHOICES

CREATIVE CHOICES is published quarterly by the Austin Memorial and Burial Information Society, a nonprofit, nonsectarian consumer and educational organization formed in 1964 to protect a consumer's right to choose a meaningful, dignified, and affordable funeral. AMBIS is a member of the Funeral Consumers Alliance, a federation of about one hundred similar consumer groups operating throughout the United States.

The ideas expressed in *CREATIVE CHOICES* are those of the authors and editor and not necessarily those of AMBIS.

Address changes, editorial items, letters, and inquiries about the benefits of membership should be directed to:

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Telephone inquiries to 512-480-0555

E-mail: AMBIS@grandecom.net

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