



CREATIVE CHOICES

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Spring	2010

The newsletter of the Austin Memorial and Burial Information Society (AMBIS), a nonprofit, nonsectarian, educational and consumer association working since 1964 to encourage informed planning about end-of-life issues. AMBIS is a member of the Funeral Consumers Alliance.

Scattering cremated remains in Texas parks and making cremation a little more green

The Green Burial Council (GBC) and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) are near the end of a long joint planning process that will allow the scattering of human cremated remains in designated areas of three existing TPWD parks, including Brazos Bend State Park (SP) near Houston, Cleburne SP near Dallas/Fort Worth, and McKinney Falls SP in Austin by making a donation to TPWD.

While the scattering of cremated remains is allowed under Texas law over uninhabited public land, this program will provide the additional benefit of placing the designated areas for the scattering of cremated human remains under permanent protection from development.

Approximately 50% of the funds generated from this program will go directly to Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation (TPWF), which will use a portion of the funds to acquire additional parkland to be owned by TPWD. The remaining funds received by TPWF will be held by TPWF as an endowment to pay for costs associated with the maintenance and stewardship of the lands.

The program will be made available to the public through a website and in cooperation with participating funeral establishments and cremation services that operate within the markets where participating TPWD parks are situated.

To insure that appropriate lands of high natural and/or scenic quality are chosen for purchase with proceeds of this program, a Qualified Conservation Advisor (i.e., a conservation organization of recognized natural scope and stature, such as The Nature Conservancy, Trust for Public Land, or The Conservation Fund) will be chosen to assist with land acquisitions, but TPWD will have the final authority regarding the selection of lands.

This program will be the first to allow a government agency in the U.S. to let families scatter cremated remains in protected forests for a fee, to help the state buy more land for conservation. Ted Hollingsworth, TPWD's director of land conservation, said "If tens of thousands of people want to take advantage of this opportunity annually, it could easily double the rate at which we're adding lands to state parks."

In another cremation-related story, this summer, a leading industry casket supplier, Matthews International Corp., plans to introduce a recycled cardboard casket especially for the cremation market. The casket will be a greener alternative to traditional wooden cremation caskets. The product avoids the use of virgin hardwood, weighs half as much as a wood casket, and costs 75 percent less. Matthews has also developed computer-controlled heat sensors that make cremation furnaces up to 40 percent more energy-efficient. Later this year, Matthews hopes to install the first bio-cremation system in the U.S., that will use hot water, pressure, and an alkali chemical instead of combustion. This process is sometimes referred to as resomation.

Nearly half of people over 50 indicate a preference for green burial alternatives. If Matthews is successful with its new products, consumers may find them greener than current cremation offerings.

[Information contained in this article came from Joe Seehee, Executive Director, Green Burial Council and American Funeral Financial, LLC, a funeral industry resource.] 

AMBIS member appointed to advisory council

Sandy Booth, a long-time member of AMBIS, has been appointed to a 2-year term with the Prepaid Funeral Guaranty Fund Advisory Council, a part of the Texas Banking Department that regulates prepaid funeral contracts.

Sandy was formerly a physical anthropologist (PhD Univ. of Wisconsin, Madison 1972), and later a natural food store manager. She moved from New York State to Texas in 1998 with her husband David. Since 2003 she has been educating Central Texans about family-directed funerals with Crossings Care Circle, a group she helped form. More information about the group can be found at <www.TexasHomeFunerals.com>.

Sandy has volunteered at a home for the elderly while living in New York, cared for her mother-in-law in Austin, and worked for Family Eldercare of Austin as well. Sandy is also a volunteer with AMBIS, Hospice Austin and the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center.

AMBIS BRIEFS

Fund-raising challenge success

Members generously responded to the President's fundraising challenge issued at the annual meeting. A \$2,000 bond was purchased with the funds donated and matched by Rodger Ericson.

PayPal donations to AMBIS now possible

You can now donate to AMBIS or pay for your membership online at www.fcaambis.org using PayPal™. Note that you can use any major credit card and do not need to set up a PayPal™ account. PayPal™ manages the entire transaction so that AMBIS does not maintain any credit card information about donors.

Financial review of AMBIS records

AMBIS finances and record keeping are reviewed annually by a volunteer from SCORE Austin. SCORE Austin, a local nonprofit like AMBIS, provides business expertise to businesses and nonprofits at no charge. This independent review of AMBIS finances, while less than a full audit, serves as an important check on our financial system. The most recent review conducted in June 2009 found that "the books and records reflect actual results and no problems were found."

Discounts at Our Lady of the Rosary cemetery

Our Lady of the Rosary Cemetery, located near Georgetown, now offers AMBIS members a 15% discount on graves. This cemetery, open to all faiths, was recently named one of 25 best places in Texas to view the wildflowers! You can see their cemetery on the Austin American-Statesman website.

Welcome to new council members

There are four new members on the AMBIS Governing Council for 2010. They are Jill Arechiga (appointed to complete a vacated term), and Tom Arbuckle, Kristi Curry and Nancy Walker, all of whom were elected at the Annual Meeting.

Next year's AMBIS Annual meeting

The AMBIS 2011 Annual Meeting will be on Sunday, February 20, at 2 pm, again at Gethsemane Lutheran Church. Give thanks for their generous offer to use their facility without charge. In 2009 we had to pay \$500 for the church we used.

AMBIS Outreach report

- * Jim Moss spoke at men's group of Lakeside Christian Fellowship at Point Venture Community Center
- * Leo Osterhaus and Sally Rowe spoke with UT Retired Faculty and staff
- * Daesene conducted an Advance Directives Workshop at Austin Zen Center
- * Lamar Hankins spoke at a class at Seminary of the Southwest on the topic "Eight Reasons Funeral Directors (almost) Always Have the Upper Hand"
- * Advance Directives workshop at St. Mary's Cathedral: Gary Lichtenstein, Jill Arechiga & DaeseneWillmann
- * Austin Mennonite Church - Nancy Walker & Daesene Willmann
- * Kristi Curry & Tom Arbuckle conducted a Legacy Planner's Breakfast, which included 6 speakers presenting information on the various aspects of Survivorship Planning, which focused on comprehensive planning for death and disability.

From the President-

Greetings, partner AMBIS members. I just learned that I was elected to our national funeral consumers alliance (FCA) Board. I'm willing, but overwhelmed, to find such support from across the country. Council member Amy Praskac and I are planning to attend the 2010 FCA Biennial conference in Indiana in June.

AMBIS can exist only because of volunteers and voluntary donations. If you wish to volunteer with AMBIS, contact Daesene Willmann, Volunteer Coordinator at <daesene@sbcglobal.net>.

THE CHALLENGE GRANT WAS MET! Over \$1000 was donated as a challenge grant and all of it was matched, yielding \$2000 to support our ongoing mission. Remember, your ongoing gifts are so important to AMBIS. I want us to remain one of the most active and thus helpful chapters of the national Funeral Consumers Alliance (FCA). We serve all of Central Texas and are connected with 100 other FCA (www.funerals.org) chapters.

New Board member Kristi Curry recently wrote: "Reduce your clutter - One of the hardest tasks to do when someone passes away is 'going through their things.' We all have a natural tendency to hold on to our loved-one's things only to discover that we have a house full of stuff we don't need or use." Ease that burden on your family by doing a little "spring cleaning." Is it time to give away some of your treasures? Pass some things on to those who will cherish them and enjoy the giving. Tell the story of the treasure and give that recipient a lasting memory and token of yourself.

Ask your service organization, church or club to announce or print the following public service announcement:

DO NOT CALL 911: When a person is expected to die, calling 9-1-1 brings emergency vehicles and excessive cost to families and taxpayers, and increased trauma when efforts are made to revive the person who is dead. But a 9-1-1 call calls for that action. "Call 9-1-1 if someone dies" seems to be an urban legend that has taken off like wildfire. It sounds so normal, people don't even think about the implications. Call 9-1-1 when there's an unexpected or traumatic death, such as murder, suicide, a 30-year-old lying dead at home. Use your best judgment. If it's out of the ordinary, unexpected, or if there's any possibility of suspicion, call 9-1-1. Do not call emergency vehicles to respond when death happened "as expected." Contact AMBIS, your Central Texas Funeral Consumers Alliance organization, at 480-0555 or <www.fcaambis.org> for further information.

On The Lighter Side: Ashes and Last Wishes

A woman from New York was getting her affairs in order. She prepared her will and made her final arraignments. As part of these arrangements she met with her pastor to talk about what type of funeral service she wanted, etc. She told her pastor she had two final requests. First, she wanted to be cremated and, second, she wanted her ashes scattered over Bloomingdales. "Bloomingdales!" the pastor said. "Why Bloomingdales?" "That way, I know my daughters will visit me twice a week."

**Rodger Ericson,
President, AMBIS Governing Council**

Book reviews

by AMBIS Librarian Donna Terpak

The AMBIS library recently added three new books to the collection, thanks to a donation from Tom Twiss. The books, *The Best Day the Worst Day: Life with Jane Kenyon*, Donald Hall; *A Grief Observed*, C.S. Lewis; and *Share My Lonesome Valley: The Slow Grief of Long-term Care*, Doug Manning, can be borrowed by the AMBIS community.

The Best Day the Worst Day is a memoir about poet Donald Hall's life with his wife of 23 years, poet Jane Kenyon. The book describes how they lived, loved and worked together, Jane's leukemia diagnosis and treatments, and her death at the young age of 47. Throughout the book we experience the peaceful and collaborative life they led at Eagle Pond farmhouse—the house of poetry, the house of grief, the house of love. In describing their relationship and lifestyle, Hall talks about the third thing, “objects or practices... that provide a joint rapture or contentment.” Poetry was the third thing that brought them together, but Hall and Kenyon had other third things, too.

Anyone who has experienced a serious illness or death of a loved one will be familiar with some of the medical lingo, the emotional lows and highs of diagnosis and treatment, the good days, bad days, feelings of powerlessness, the despair, and finally, the difficulty in letting go. *The Best day the Worst Day* is filled with love, art and loss, and gives the reader an intimate view into the lives of two artists. As spring arrives in Austin thoughts of Jane Kenyon come to mind. I think about her planning her own garden and wonder what she might think of the wildflowers blooming in Texas.

Jane Kenyon was a winner of a National Endowment for the Arts poetry fellowship, and at the time of her death was Poet Laureate of New Hampshire. During her life Jane Kenyon published four volumes of poetry. Published posthumously, *Otherwise* contains poems written just before her death along with poems published earlier in her career.

Donald Hall is the fourteenth poet laureate of the United States, a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and recipient of many prestigious

[continued in next column]

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honors. In addition to poetry he's written children's books, edited numerous anthologies, and contributed short stories and articles to a variety of periodicals.

Bibliographic information: Hall, Donald, *The Best Day the Worst Day: Life with Jane Kenyon*, New York, NY: Mariner Books, Houghton Mifflin Company, 2005, ISBN-13: 978-0-618-77362-6, ISBN-10: 0-618-77362-2, US\$13.95. Ω

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When contacting one of these funeral homes, please provide proof of your AMBIS membership by showing a copy of this newsletter addressed to you or your new membership letter. Membership can be confirmed also by calling the AMBIS office at 512-480-0555.

www.fcaambis.org

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.

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