



CREATIVE CHOICES

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2019 Issue 3

This newsletter with clickable links is on our website at

www.fcactx.org/newsletters.html

The Newsletter of the Funeral Consumers Alliance of Central Texas



No matter how you say it,
we are truly grateful
for your supportive response
to our annual fundraising appeal!

Gearing up for the 2020 Funeral Home Price Survey

Every year, January is a high activity month for our FCA. We have a timeline and a deadline. In addition to our usual activities — responding to email and phone inquiries and providing presentations — we collect price lists from the 50+ funeral providers physically located in Bastrop, Caldwell, Hays, Travis, and Williamson counties. The figures in these price lists provide data for our annual Funeral Home Price Survey, which we present at our annual meeting.

To ensure that we are providing reliable survey figures for comparison, we don't just copy figures from the price lists to our survey chart. For example, Direct Cremation charges at some funeral homes include the crematory fee. Other funeral homes list the fee elsewhere on their price lists. Our task is to make sure that Direct Cremation figures in our chart always include the crematory fee.

2020 ANNUAL MEETING

Saturday, February 29
2 to 4 pm

Hyde Park Christian Church
610 East 45th Street
Austin



Happy Holidays

FCA of Central Texas, an all-volunteer 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization

Our mission is to help people make educated, practical choices that will meet their needs at the end of life.

[New Research Explains Why We Don't Live In Constant Fear of Death](#)

Kristin Houser

You are going to die.

It's an undeniable fact of life that could send practically anyone spiraling down into a permanent pit of despair where nothing matters and everything is pointless. Yet despite knowing deep down that our days are numbered, most of us still go to work, hang with friends, and generally just live life. Now, a [study](#) set for publication in the November issue of the journal *NeuroImage* may explain why we aren't constantly in the midst of an existential crisis: our brains are hardwired to prevent us from considering our own deaths.

"The brain does not accept that death is related to us," researcher Yair Dor-Ziderman told [The Guardian](#). "We have this primal mechanism that means when the brain gets information that links self to death, something tells us it's not reliable, so we shouldn't believe it."

Dor-Ziderman and his colleagues at Bar Ilan University and the Lyon Neuroscience Research Center reached that conclusion by developing a test designed to produce brain signals linked to surprise.

For the test, volunteers looked at a screen while scientists monitored their brain activity. They then flashed images of a face — sometimes the volunteer's own — on the

screen several times before changing the image to another face.

When the new face flashed, the brain produced surprise signals because it wasn't the image the volunteer mentally predicted they would see next.

The researchers also had words appear on the screen next to the faces, and half the time the words were related to death, such as "funeral" or "burial." When a person saw their own face with one of those death-related words on the screen, their brain's prediction system shut down and registered no surprise signals.

"This suggests that we shield ourselves from existential threats, or consciously thinking about the idea that we are going to die, by shutting down predictions about the self," researcher Avi Goldstein told [The Guardian](#), "or categorizing the information as being about other people rather than ourselves."

Obviously, the brain doesn't make it impossible to contemplate one's own mortality, as anyone who's ever lain awake at night pondering the meaning of life can attest. But, hey, at least our biology seems to know no good can come from a person fixating on their impending death — The Cure's discography excluded, of course.

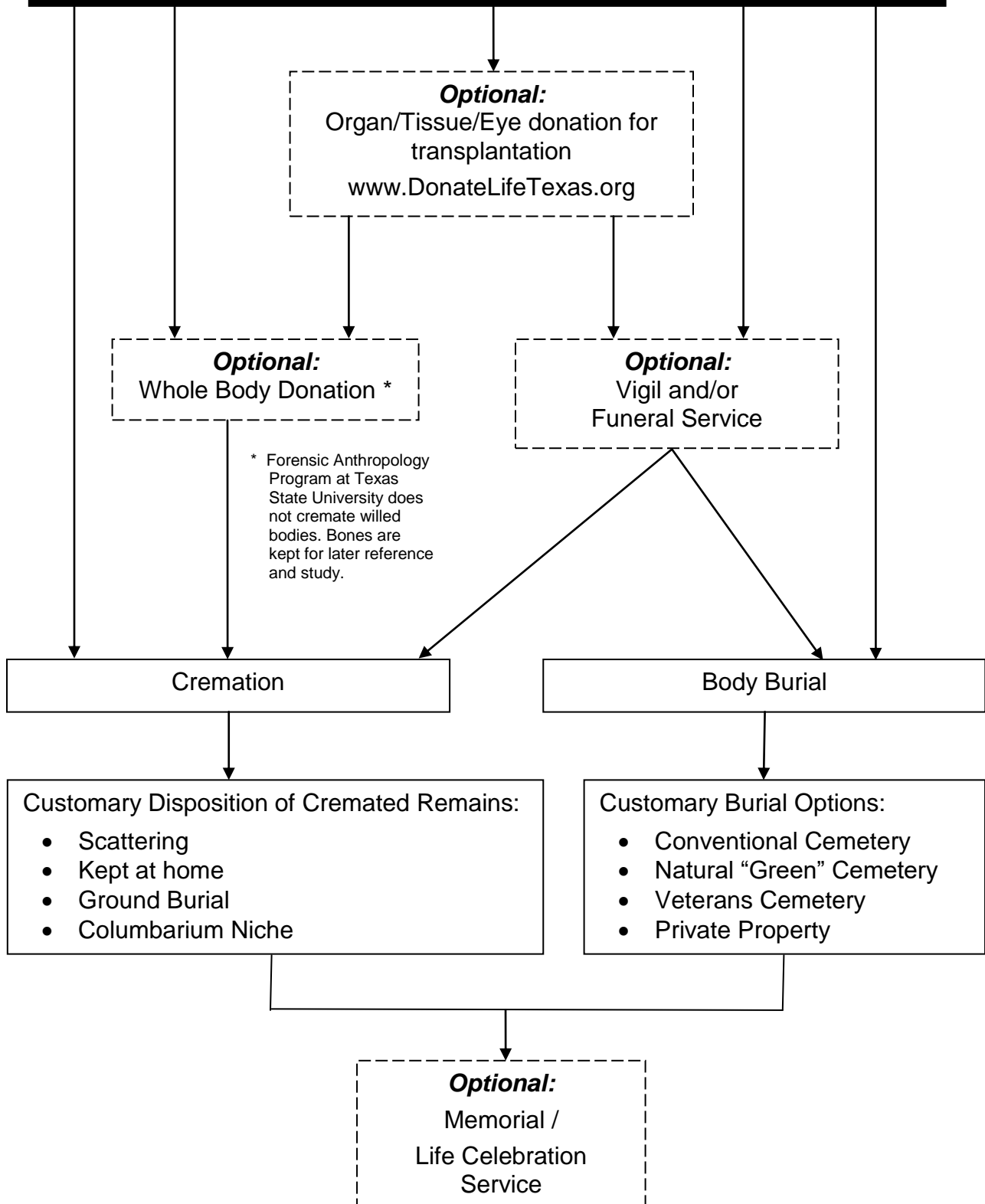
The report outline is available at [ScienceDirect.com](#)

You may read the full report at no charge by signing up for a 14-day free trial membership at [DeepDyve.com](#).

#1 REGRET OF THE DYING

"I wish I'd had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me."

After-Death Disposition Options in Texas



For information about any of these options, please call us at 512-480-0555 or email us at office@fcactx.org.

We are always delighted to hear from you!

Why we need to take pet loss more seriously

How to handle grief after a pet's death—and why we all need to change our attitudes about it
Dr. Guy Winch, Psychologist, Author



Doug's amateur soccer team had just lost its playoff game, and Doug needed a pick-me-up. He decided to stop by the local animal shelter on his way home because puppies always put a smile on his face. He was by no means looking to adopt an animal, but Delia, a five-month-old mutt, changed his mind. "I had her for 17 years," Doug said, wiping away tears in our psychotherapy session. "I knew it would be rough when she died, but I had no idea. I was a total wreck. I cried for days. I couldn't get any work done. And worst of all, I was too embarrassed about it to tell anyone. I spent days at work crying in private and muttering 'allergies' whenever someone glanced at my puffy eyes."

Losing a beloved pet is often an emotionally devastating experience. Yet as a society, we do not recognize how painful pet loss can be and how much it can impair our emotional and physical health. Symptoms of acute grief after the loss of a pet can last from one to two months, with symptoms of grief persisting up to a full year (on average). The *New England Journal of Medicine* reported in October 2017, that after her dog died, a woman experienced "broken heart syndrome" — a condition in which the response to grief is so severe the person exhibits symptoms that mimic a heart attack, including elevated hormone levels that can be 30 times greater than normal.

Although grief over the loss of a cherished pet may be as intense and even as lengthy as when a significant person in our life dies, our process of mourning is quite different. Many of the mechanisms of social and community support are absent when a pet dies. Few of us ask our employers for time off to grieve a

beloved cat or dog because we fear doing so would paint us as overly sentimental, lacking in maturity or emotionally weak.

Studies have found that social support is a crucial ingredient in recovering from grief of all kinds. Thus, we are not only robbed of invaluable support systems when our pet dies, but our own perceptions of our emotional responses are likely to add an extra layer of distress. We may feel embarrassed and even ashamed about the severity of the heartbreak we feel and, consequently, hesitate to disclose our feelings to our loved ones. That additional shame complicates the process of recovery by making it more lengthy and complex than it should be.

Losing a pet can leave significant voids in our life that we need to fill: it can change our daily routines, causing ripple effects that go far beyond the loss of the actual animal. Caring for our pet creates responsibilities and a schedule around which we often craft our days. We get exercise by walking our dog, and we socialize with other owners at the dog runs. We awake early every day to feed our cat (or we are woken by a pet if we forget!), but we get a lot more done because of it.

Losing a pet disrupts these routines. Cats, dogs, horses and other cherished pets provide companionship, reduce loneliness and depression, and can ease anxiety. They support our emotional well-being and imbue our actions with meaning. This is why, in addition to emotional pain, we feel aimless and lost in the days and weeks after our pet dies.

Recovering from pet loss, as in all forms of grief, requires us to recognize these changes and find ways to deal with them. We need to seek social support from people we know will understand and sympathize with our emotions and not judge us for them. Many animal clinics offer bereavement groups for pet owners.

It is time we gave grieving pet owners the recognition, support and consideration they need. Yes, it is up to us to identify and address our emotional wounds when our pet dies, but the more validation we receive from those around us, the quicker and the more complete our psychological recovery will be.

Just so you'll know ...

A sampling of funeral home marketing strategies

Source: [Connecting Directors Blog](#)

Educational Seminars

Holding free pre-need educational seminars is a step up from blogging free informational content. In fact, it's probably a good idea to promote your free in-person seminars to the people who are reading your free blog content online. I know, this seems like a lot of FREE work you are doing in your funeral home marketing strategy, but it will pay off. You are building an invaluable bond with people in your community. When they decide to plan their own funeral or the funeral of a loved one you will be the choice provider because they already know you by name. The average person plans only two funerals in their lifetime so your funeral home marketing strategy is for the long-term.

Community Events

Community events can be incredible ways to shape your public image and grow awareness for your funeral home. These types of events need to be designed around the interests and [other] events in your specific community.

Contests

Funeral homes marketing on social media have a tough problem: How do you engage with people who don't want to think about death? A great way to engage with your community is to promote local causes and get your brand in front of people in your community without ever talking about your services or advertising. The goal is to get your brand top-of-mind in the time of need. One radically successful strategy we've run with our funeral home marketing clients is the Facebook contest. The idea is simple: find a local cause or common local hero (like a football team) and show your support by giving away something desirable to your community. This could be sporting event tickets, art by a local artist, an Easter basket, or a gift certificate to a local restaurant.

Offer Local Artist-Made Pieces

Featuring locally-made artisan urns in your memorial product showroom is a great way to increase revenue and get free press. Families want highly personalized memorials for the people and pets they loved and a one-of-a-kind piece by an artist they admire is often the perfect solution. The press will love the story of a local artist making deeply meaningful pieces for people in your community and your partnership with them will be highlighted and rewarded.

Eco-friendly Options

With increasing concerns about global warming and the environmental impact of our everyday decisions, we have seen a massive social movement towards sustainable and environmentally friendly products. The ideology has impacted every industry including death care. Offering eco-friendly options like natural burial, tree-growing-urns, and wicker caskets is a great way to show your community you care and identify with the modern concerns of your families.

Crowdfunding

Crowdfunding is not typically thought of as a marketing tool, but it can help shape your company brand and extend the reach of your message. Crowdfunding for funeral homes is relatively new but there are multiple platforms that focus specifically on raising money from friends and family online to cover funeral costs. These are brilliant tools for funeral homes because they have been proven to get you paid faster, get your funeral home name in front of each of the fund contributors, [who] can help paint your public brand as the funeral home that helps families.

Furniture with the end in mind



[How to help your loved one understand the bad news](#)

Dr. Charles Garfield; author, *Life's Last Gift: Giving and Receiving Peace When a Loved One is Dying*

My brother Jon and I were at the hospital with my parents when my father's doctor broke the news that Dad's liver cancer was advanced, spreading and untreatable. Dad began to cry — the first time I'd ever seen him in tears — and he haltingly asked Jon and me to leave the room while he and my mom got the details. In part, I think, he was embarrassed and ashamed to be crying in front of us. And he probably wanted to shield us from the news, though of course there was no way to do that.

By the time he and my mom emerged from the doctor's office, he was composed and smiling. "Let's get some breakfast," he said, as though nothing had happened. The disconnect was jarring.

As I visited him two days later, I wondered how much he'd actually taken in from the doctor's meeting. Mom had told me that "the doctor gave your father three to six months at most," and Dad seemed too happy for a guy who had just learned he had so little time left. "How are you feeling about what the doctor said?" I asked him.

At first he tried to put a positive spin on everything. "You never know how things will turn out," he said. Such words are often people's way of keeping themselves, and loved ones, from drowning in the sadness that comes with a dire prognosis.

But when you signal your openness to the other person's reality, and share your own feelings, you often clear the way for him or her to express more vulnerability. "I'm willing to talk about anything that's on your mind, Dad," I told him, "and if I cry or if you do, it's because we love each other."

Finally, he asked me, "How do you think things will play out for me, Son?"

"I'm not sure, Dad," I said. "I know that liver cancer is serious, but I also know that hospice is very good at treating pain and making people in exactly your situation comfortable. I'd like to stay closely involved in your care as part of the team. Is that okay?"

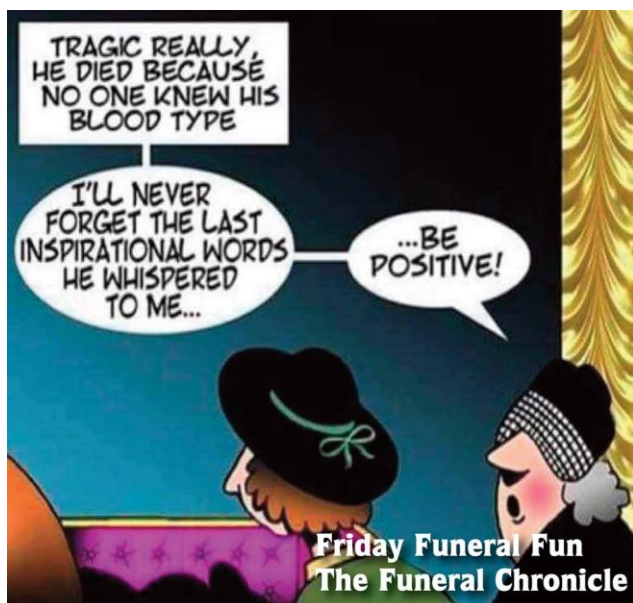
Dad beamed and replied, "It's more than okay. I'd really appreciate that a lot. After all, between you and me, all those people in white coats give me the creeps. I haven't gotten much good news from them lately."

That opening let us begin to talk about specifics. I asked what the doctor had told him about the prognosis, and also if he was in pain. His most pressing concern was what would happen if the pain increased, and I told him that we could ask his hospice nurse to intervene immediately anytime he needed relief.

We talked later about how he'd like to spend his remaining time. It can feel strange to acknowledge the reality that comes with the words, "What would you like to do in the time you have left?" But asking lets you know, instead of guess, what the other person really wants. Some want to travel to see beloved places or people; others have projects in mind to complete while they still have the strength. My father's desires were simple. He wanted to watch old movies with me, Mom and Jon, go anywhere he could to "see natural beauty," and teach his class on "telling a good joke" at the North Berkeley Senior Center for as long as his energy permitted.

We made it a priority to do all those things. May love continue to guide us all.

On the Lighter Side



Death Awareness Turns the Corner



WE'RE HERE TO SERVE YOU



Call us at **512-480-0555**
(If no one answers, leave your name and number. We check for messages at least once a day.)



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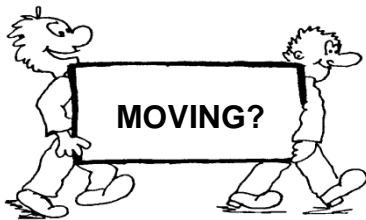
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**Funeral Consumers Alliance
of Central Texas**
3710 Cedar Street, Mailbox 13
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CREATIVE CHOICES

***The Newsletter of the Funeral Consumers Alliance
of Central Texas (formerly AMBIS)***



Inside this issue . . .

- Is our brain hardwired to deny death?
- Disposition options chart
- Taking pet loss more seriously
- Funeral home marketing strategies
- Helping your loved one with bad news

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