



CREATIVE CHOICES

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Summer 2009

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

Nationally-known columnist and author Jane Brody to give free lecture Sept. 22

The San Marcos Public Library will host author and nationally-known New York Times health columnist, Jane Brody, on Tuesday, September 22nd at 7 pm. She will speak on the newest of her ten books, "Jane Brody's Guide to the Great Beyond: A Practical Primer to Help You and Your loved Ones Prepare Medically, Legally, and Emotionally for the End of Life."

Brody writes, "We live in a society of death deniers, typified by the failure of most of us to prepare for the inevitable... The result can be undue anguish for ourselves in the course of our dying and those we leave behind, not only during our final days, but for weeks, months, even years thereafter."

She considered death earlier than most; her own mother died when Brody was 17. She strongly believes that those who plan for their final days will reap benefits for themselves and those they love. She will discuss advance directives, living wills, hospice and family support, end of life palliative care, and memorial services.

Her visit is funded by a grant from VistaCare Hospice Foundation and supported by the Texas State University School of Social Work, Vitas Hospice of San Antonio, Hope Hospice of New Braunfels, Hospice Austin, and Central Texas Medical Center Hospice of San Marcos.

The library has several copies of the book for those who would like to read it before Brody's visit.

Brody will sign copies of "Guide to the Great Beyond" after her talk. Books will be available at the library that evening for purchase.

For further information, you may call the San Marcos Public Library at 512 393-8200 or send email

to <smpl@sanmarcoctx.gov>.

Our thanks to Stephanie Langenkamp, AMBIS member and Head Librarian at the San Marcos Public Library, 625 E. Hopkins, San Marcos, TX 78666, 512-393-8212, for alerting us to this event.

The lecture is free for all who wish to attend, but seating is limited.

Directions to the library from Austin: Take Exit 205 on IH-35 in San Marcos and stay on the access road until you reach Hwy 80/RR 12 (becomes E. Hopkins). There is a McDonald's on the corner. Turn right and proceed about three blocks to the library at 625 E. Hopkins.

AMBIS Advance Directives Workshop Saturday, October 3, 2009

You are invited to attend the Fall 2009
AMBIS Advance Directives Workshop

10 am to 12 noon October 3

AGE Building Dining Room

3710 Cedar Street, Austin, Texas

Reservations Required; Attendance Limited

Tel. 512 480-0555

Email: mail@ambis.info

Free notary service provided. If you have advance planning forms, please bring them to the workshop.

Forms will be available at a nominal charge to cover cost of materials.

AMBIS BRIEFS

Advance Planning Workshop full - get on waiting list

An Advance Planning Workshop is scheduled for Saturday, October 3, in the AGE Building Dining Room (3710 Cedar Street, Austin) from 10 a.m. until noon on. Call AMBIS at 480-0555 to reserve a place. A notary will be available to notarize documents at no cost.

Reminders from AMBIS Governing council president

The 2010 Annual Meeting will be held on February 21 at 2 pm at Gethsemane Lutheran Church, at Anderson Ln and Hwy 183. Send us your suggestions for what topics you would like to be discussed or heard at the annual meeting.

Also, check out our AMBIS website—it has been recently updated: <www.fcaambis.org>.

Your donations keep us going—board members and office staff receive no salary, no stipends and no travel reimbursement. Help us to tell the story.

How are you doing in your recruitment? If AMBIS is of value to you, please encourage at least one other person or family to join AMBIS. It is not selfish, but a gesture of giving.

AMBIS presentations at your church or group

AMBIS welcomes the opportunity to do a presentation at your church or civic organization. If your group is interested, call the AMBIS office Monday, Wednesday, or Friday from 10 a.m.-2 p.m. to talk to a volunteer, or leave a message any time. Someone will return your call.

Recent AMBIS activities

The AARP Liveable Community Day Fair on June 13 was ably staffed by Kathy Boas, Leo Osterhaus, Frances Gibich, and Donna Terpack-Palmer. A great deal of interest was generated and lots of materials distributed.

The following AMBIS members were recognized at the 37th Annual RSVP Recognition Luncheon held May 22:

Catherine Benstsen	Sandy Bilski
Nell DuBose	Charlotte Flynn
Daesene Willmann	

President's column continued

thousands or only a few hundred dollars. This is not a time to "be cheap," but how much you spend does not reflect how much you loved the person who died.

Your values and choices may not be shared by others. Mine are not. But what AMBIS wants is not that you make "any one choice" but that you know your options and make your own informed decisions. And we want you to have the best possible healing time when a loved one dies and in the days and years to come. Death brings sadness, but it can also be a positive and joyous time.

Rodger Ericson,
President, AMBIS Governing Council

From the President—

Saving Thousands and Increasing the Therapeutic Benefits

This is what I felt we did—saved a bundle of money and gained a great deal of healing. Instead of paying an estimated \$10,000 for someone else to "do it for us" my family spent about \$200 for the same process. In 2007, I directed the funeral for my mom, with the help of Crossings Care Circle. We did not utilize a funeral home, except to buy the grave liner, which we could not buy directly from Willert Vault. I'll do it again, if the situation arises—without a doubt.

My brother and I made mom's casket, which we called a hope chest. The new name was very beneficial for our two local grandsons. "Ghosts come out of coffins," they said. We washed and anointed her body for burial in my own home; we dressed her and wrapped her up in a family heirloom bed spread. She was not embalmed and did not need to be, though the funeral industry tends to insist that it is essential. We took her to Minnesota in our own truck and with the help of our home pastor had our final rituals – religious and social.

In one way we broke the most common tradition, and in another way, we did it the old-fashioned way, for this was the way it was done when my mom was a little girl. I would never recommend that others undertake the preparation of the body and plan a funeral on their own to save money. It is not only a lot of work, it is work we are not prepared to do. But if it is planned carefully in advance and you have the assistance from someone who "has done this kind of thing before," this could be a healthy option for you. While we saved nearly \$10,000, I had the immeasurable benefit of giving some final gifts to my mom which I otherwise would not have had. I received the soothing, peace-filling satisfaction of doing what my mom valued and giving these final gifts to her. We gave thousands of dollars saved to her favorite charities. I call the process healing; call it therapy, if you wish. Either term you wish, it was a remarkably wonderful experience. Crossings Care Circle is available to help people in our Greater Austin area and can be reached through AMBIS.

One of the aims of AMBIS is to help people know their choices - and to prepare for the inevitable, death. The father of one of our AMBIS Council members died in July. She thought her dad "had everything ready." But that turned out to be a false assumption. But they knew the questions to ask at the funeral home and they scrambled to find the documents they needed. Too often people have not made careful and accurate plans for their own death—with advance directives and with direct conversations with family about death and dying options.

Most of you will want to use a mortuary. They can prepare the body and direct the funeral for you—but you can do some things yourself. You can build the casket, which our family called a "hope chest." You can have a vigil with the body of your loved one after death, and not have it picked up immediately and taken to the funeral home. You can compare prices and chose the funeral hom that reflects your values—spending

President's column continued bottom left on this page

AMBIS donors for first half of 2009 recognized and appreciated

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Vreeland, Vic & Judy
Walcott, Gordon & Billie
Widenor, Robert & Barbara Rae
Wiles, Linda
Worsham, W.A. & Jean

Obit Seminar Gets High Marks

AMBIS's first seminar on obituary writing, held Saturday, June 20, at the AGE Building in Austin, was deemed 'very helpful' and 'highly enjoyable,' according to the dozen-plus participants.

AMBIS Council past president Ed Nichols, encouraging all in attendance to "get started now" on writing their own obituaries, presented an outline on obit writing essentials, options and pitfalls. "It is important that an obituary be a compelling story about a life, not just a report on a death," Nichols said. He contrasted examples of concise, comprehensive and lively accounts of lives lived with excessively detailed – and more costly – obituaries that have been run in newspapers.

Nichols said individuals writing their own obituaries have the opportunity to put in writing exactly the aspects of their lives by which they would like to be remembered and as an example read aloud the concise version of his own obituary. "People should also consider the option of having a concise obituary for newspaper publication and a second, more detailed obituary to be made available in private and in memorial observances," Nichols said.

Finally, Nichols reminded participants that the AMBIS website (www.AMBIS.info) has initiated an obituary page for deceased members. A sample obituary can be viewed on the website at

www.fcaambis.org

Books to loan

AMBIS has a lending library of books related to death, dying, and funerals. One of our books is "Surviving Death: A Practical Guide to Caring for the Dying & Bereaved" by Charles Meyer.

Meyer's combination of spiritual and practical approach provides a valuable guide. He addresses being with someone who is dying and those who are bereaved. He gives practical information in a straightforward manner without any sugar-coating. Yet his caring for the dying and their survivors comes through on every page.

Revised and Expanded 1991; 185 pp with appendices and resources (ISBN 0-89622-486-4). Available at Amazon (new & used), Barnes & Noble, or check Half-Price Books (founded by former AMBIS Council member, now deceased, Ken Gjemre).

Note: The above book review was written by Amy Praskac. Chuck Meyer was a Chaplain at St. David's Hospital; he died too early in a car accident. He was an active and positive voice nationally regarding death and dying, and remains a legend in Austin's end-of-life community.

AMBIS Elevator Talk #2

Here is a suggestion for a 30-second appeal explaining AMBIS—short enough to say in an elevator: "I did something recently that might interest you. I joined a volunteer-run group called AMBIS that is part of the Funeral Consumers Alliance. They have a wide range of free materials about funeral options, everything from advance directives, to information about what to do when a death occurs, to annual surveys of funeral costs in five counties here in central Texas. You can join on-line or by calling 480-0555 just by making whatever donation you can afford. You should check it out."

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

City, State, Zip

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**Austin Memorial & Burial
Information Society
A Funeral Consumers Alliance
P. O. Box 4382
Austin, Texas 78765**

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Summer 2009



To mail an address correction, please clip and mail to AMBIS at P.O.Box 4382, Austin, TX 78765, or take to AMBIS office in the Austin Groups for the Elderly Bldg. at 3710 Cedar St. (at 38th Street), Room 112. Email an address change to <mail@ambis.info>.

AMBIS CONTRACTED FUNERAL HOMES

The following funeral homes offer to AMBIS members a 15% discount off the costs shown on their General Price Lists:

- King-Tears Funeral Home
1300 E. 12th Street (512-476-9128)
- Harrell Funeral Homes
 - 4435 Frontier Trail (512-443-1366)
 - 100 Heritage Drive & Hwy 290W, Dripping Springs (512-858-5666)
 - 2770 & Kohlers Crossing, Kyle (512-268-8200)
- Fish Funeral Homes
 - 2620 S. Congress (512-442-1446)
 - 3125 N. Lamar (512-452-8811)
- All Faiths Funeral Service
 - 8507 North IH 35, (512-339-8878)
 - 4360 South Congress Ave. (512-326-8878)

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.

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 sent to:

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Telephone inquiries may be made to 512/480-0555
E-mail may be sent to mail@ambis.info

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