



In Touch

Funeral Education Foundation & Funeral Consumers Alliance Of San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties
 Nonprofit organizations educating consumers www.fcapeninsula.org

Going Out Green— Bestselling Author in San Mateo on Friday, Oct. 22

Mark Harris, author of *Grave Matters: A Journey Through the Modern Funeral Industry to a Natural Way of Burial*, will speak at the Silicon Valley Community Foundation, 1300 S. El Camino Real, San Mateo, at 3:30 p.m. on Friday, October 22. Free and open to the public, this talk is sponsored by the Funeral Consumers Alliance (FCA) of San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties and the Funeral Education Foundation (FEF).

In “A Visual Tour of the Growing Green Burial Movement”, Harris presents images drawn from his research and travels of natural funerals including those that take place in backyard gravesites, at sea, and in “natural” cemeteries.

“Green burial looks to return one’s remains to the elements, as directly and simply as possible,” says Harris. “Avoiding chemical embalming and fancy caskets, elaborate and costly funerals, it takes a natural, economic and highly personal approach to death and burial that

was once standard practice in this country.”

He will speak of his effort to develop a green cemetery movement and a green burial section within an existing cemetery in his own Pennsylvania hometown. He’ll also be available to talk and sign books following the presentation.

Mark Harris is a former environmental columnist with the Los Angeles Times Syndicate. His articles and essays have appeared in the Chicago Tribune, E: The Environmental Magazine, Reader’s Digest, and Hope. He is a member of the Society of Environmental Journalists. His book generated a lively interest in the subject of green burial, and he was interviewed by NPR, CNN, ABC World News, and many others. He lives in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

A wine and cheese reception follows the slide show. Guests may pick up FCA literature and learn about local efforts to start a green burial cemetery near

Half Moon Bay, a project that is actively supported by your local FCA chapter in order to expand the options available to eco-conscious funeral consumers. Examples of environmentally-friendly caskets and urns being sold locally by Final Footprint (www.finalfootprint.com) will be on display. Jane Hillhouse, owner of Final Footprint, has kindly agreed to donate 10% of any orders generated during the event to FEF.



Harris’ presentation is one of three lectures to be held in the San Francisco Bay Area in late October. He will speak the following day at Berkeley and Santa Rosa. See <http://www.fcapeninsula.org/MarkHarris.html> for more information about these other Bay Area engagements.



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Fall 2010 Issue

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Resomation—More than You Wanted to Know

By Deborah Meckler, President of FCA of SC/SM Counties

“Resomation” is a coined word that refers to the alkaline hydrolysis method of corpse/carcass disposal.

Touted as a greener alternative to cremation, it is sometimes referred to as “bio-cremation”, which is a total misnomer since the process is completely chemical rather than biological.



The Process in a Nutshell

Alkaline hydrolysis uses a very high pH (alkaline) chemical (usually potassium hydroxide) to lyse (rupture) cell membranes, causing them to spill their contents and die. The process is extremely effective at destroying pathogens and has been used for years to dispose of animal carcasses as well as waste from bio labs and medical facilities. In combination with water and elevated temperatures, it can dissolve the flesh and organs off a body and even soften the bones in a few hours.

What you will hear

“...an environmentally beneficial alternative to cremation ... dignified and respectful,”
www.resomation.com

“...an environmentally responsible, non-burn, water based process ... to rapidly breakdown the body leaving behind a pure white bio-ash”
www.uniquefuneralproducts.com

“The end result is a small quantity of green-brown tinted liquid (containing amino acids, peptides, sugars and salts) and soft, porous white bone remains (calcium phosphate) easily crushed in the hand...”
www.wikipedia.com

(Continued on page 3)



Published by Yale University Press of New Haven, CT, this excerpt of the book, *Immortality and the Law: The Rising Power of the Dead*, by Ray D. Madoff, is available at: <http://tiny.cc/puic9>.

The book itself is available in paperback or hardback form at www.amazon.com. Yale University Press, \$26

Do the Dead Have More Rights Than You?

In a new book, *“Immortality and the Law: The Rising Power of the Dead,”* author Ray D. Madoff explores America's own strange approach to the legal powers of the deceased:

“In this age in which more information is known and easily accessible by the masses than ever before in history, there is one subject about which we are as ignorant as our forebears, and that is death. For most of us, our ignorance about death is a fact of life. We either accept death’s mystery or ignore its inevitability. However, our legal system cannot afford these philosophical or psychological luxuries. The law

is constantly being asked to address real issues involving the dead: Is a person harmed when someone tells lies about her after death? To what extent does a person have an interest in what happens to his body after death? What about his property? For each of these questions, the law has been required to provide answers. . . .’

At one time, dead bodies were primarily something to be buried. Legal questions regarding dead bodies were generally limited to determining who among the living was responsible for interment. Today, we are presented with many more options than past

generations regarding the final use and disposition of our bodies. This range of possibilities raises many more legal questions. Can people make legally enforceable decisions about whether their bodies are buried or cremated, dissected for scientific study, harvested for organ transplants or plasticized for display in travelling exhibits?

More issues are raised by reproductive matter. . . Do people have a legal right to control whether their eggs or sperm are exhumed after death for posthumous child production?



VA Cemetery Policy



by Rodger Ericson
National FCA Board
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Q Can only a licensed funeral director bring a body to a VA cemetery for burial?

A Working up to the top layer of decision-making in exploring the VA policies for natural and family-led funerals, I was pleased to get the following information and hear of their decision to change a policy that I was initially told to be the rule, that a licensed funeral director had to be the person bringing a body to the cemetery.

I reached Glenn Powers of the National Cemetery Administration, Department of Veterans Affairs, in Indiana (202) 461- 5723 or cell (317)

409-1962). He said that after he consulted with their VA attorney they WILL now follow the state regulations - i.e. if the state allows for a family to bring the body for burial, that is acceptable for the VA, and if the state does not allow it, they they won't. So it is allowable in TX. (and California). 3 cheers!!! This means of course that not only can we care for our own veterans, but there would be absolutely no cost other than the chosen family/home funeral costs.

Also they do allow bodies to be buried which are not embalmed but they currently want to continue to use grave liners to reduce the grave maintenance. They are exploring having a section for natural burials, in a separate location, where they and the related families would not be concerned about the "uneven lay of the land" (due to continual settling) if a grave liner was not used. The VA

provides the cement or poly liners, so the use of a liner is not a cost issue for the veteran. They also provide the grave markers and are exploring new ways to anchor the markers so they do not settle over time.



Contact the Department of Veteran’s Affairs office:

On-Line: www.cem.va.gov/

By phone: 1-800-827-1000 (or the number provided by Rodger Ericson.)

In Touch is published semi-yearly by FEF/FCA. The subscription list includes FEF donors, members of FCA of San Mateo & Santa Clara counties, agencies, churches, and selected organizations.

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Hours: M,W,F 9am-Noon

Why did Egyptians put gold coins on the eyes of their dead pharaohs?

In Greek and Roman mythology there is a ferryman named Charon who guides the dead across the river of Styx to the underworld, but he requires a payment. If someone fails to pay they must wander between life and death for eternity. So when someone dies, coins are placed over the eyes or on the tongue so that they can pay the toll to the underworld.

Resomation—more than you wanted to know (continued from pg. 1)

Some Facts

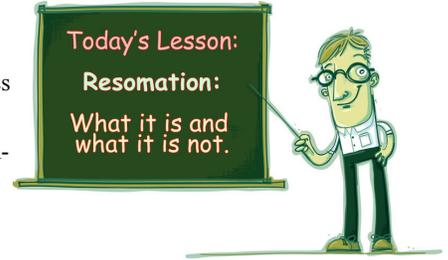
The resomation process is probably less environmentally damaging than cremation. Cremation uses fossil fuels to produce the very high temperatures necessary to burn a body, and it fouls the air with mercury particulates, dioxins and other pollutants. Resomation, by comparison, uses lower temperatures and therefore less fuel, and emits little into the atmosphere except some localized unpleasant odors. However, the manufacturing process for the chemicals involved require significant energy inputs, and so cannot be counted benign. To be sure, the process requires only a few gallons of chemical per body, and a few dozen gallons of water, so the inputs compare favorably to, say, embalming or burial in fancy coffins.

There is more left behind than “pure white bio-ash” however.

Cremation distributes the body into the air as gases and particulates, leaving behind only the unburnable parts, which are returned to the family as ashes. The law of conservation of matter tells us that when you dissolve a body with chemicals, you have a full body’s worth of mass left somewhere, plus all the water and chemicals. The softened, crumbly bone residue is simply the stuff that remains undissolved. The rest of it—the “small quantity” of liquid that Wikipedia says is left behind—is in fact about 100 gallons of effluent per 150-pound body. This effluent usually has a pH too high to be discharged directly into the sanitary sewer system, since it will kill the working bacteria at the sewage processing plant, so it must first be treated to lower the pH before it can enter the waste processing stream. Resomation

providers, wishing to stress the dignity and respectfulness of their process, will probably omit the bit about becoming sewage. But then, there is nothing particularly dignified about being embalmed or being eaten by worms either.

It is likely that resomation as a method of dealing with human remains will become legal and will gain in popularity, especially as it becomes priced competitively with cremation. Resomation will be seen as—and probably is-- less polluting than cremation and it will likely be less expensive than conventional burial. But it is not inherently a low-impact process. Green burial and perhaps full-body sea burials still stand out as the most environmentally benign ways of dealing with human re-



From: inrepose.typepad.com/in_repose_blog/cremation

Resomation is currently available in several states*. A bill was introduced in the California legislature to make it legal here, but is currently pending further study. The FCA of California Board of Directors has cautiously endorsed the inclusion of resomation as a death care option as long as it complies with environmental regulations.

*<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Resomation>

“It Pays to Shop,” Mortuary Survey Shows

By Marjorie Bridges
Mortuary Committee Chair

The 2010 Funeral Home Price Survey for San Mateo and Santa Clara County is now available. Mark your remit envelope if you would like a copy. It can also be viewed or printed from our website at www.fcapeninsula.org.

FINDINGS:

- Cremation prices remained steady in San Mateo County, but increased 5% in Santa Clara County
- Traditional funeral packages cost less now than two years ago, perhaps to compete with cremation prices, perhaps in recognition that families have less to spend in this recession.

- Big discrepancies exist among mortuaries for similar services, showing it pays to shop. The gap between cremation prices is \$2,695 down to \$725; direct burial without a graveside service or casket ranges from \$2,695 down to \$895; with a graveside service, direct burial costs from \$3,190 to \$1,095.
- The basic overhead fee for families who go without a package deal dropped a few percentage points, but there is a great range from \$3,345 down to \$260, part of which can be explained by the size of the establishment.
- The SAME cardboard container can be purchased for \$5 or \$250; a cloth-covered casket from \$150 to \$1,295, and a 20-ga. metal casket from

\$695 to \$1,995. Not many mortuaries offer a plain pine box anymore and the 37% avg price increase may indicate that they are no longer “plain.” You will have to pay \$395 to \$2,995 for the least expensive ones on funeral homes’ Casket Lists.

- We also wanted to include Costco casket prices in this survey, but they do not carry cardboard, pine, cloth-covered, or 20 gauge metal caskets—just 18 gauge and copper. Prices start at \$950.
- We looked at refrigeration prices, but they were priced so many ways that it was impossible to tell if prices had increased. They ranged from “we don’t charge for it” to a flat \$775 fee.

Volunteers from FCA/FEF visited each funeral home and picked up their General Price Lists and Casket Lists in July and August. The Mortuary Committee had the task of filling in the columns and rows of data and finding the highest, lowest, and averages.

We also found the percentages that prices increased or decreased and how the figures compare to the previous survey done in 2008.





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Mark Harris
Author of the bestselling book
GRAVE MATTERS
Presents



A Visual Tour of the Growing Green Burial Movement

See what it is like to "go green"
Learn about local efforts to create a green burial cemetery.

Friday, October 22nd
3:30-5:00 pm
Silicon Valley Community Foundation Conference Center
1300 S. El Camino Real, San Mateo

In Memory of . . .

Luella S. McFarland
July 8, 1920 - July 25, 2010



Only a couple of weeks after celebrating her 90th birthday, our dear Luella S. McFarland passed away on July 25. Although she preferred to have no memorials in her honor, she has left behind a wake of generosity and leadership which can not go without comment.

- As loyal and early members of FCA, Luella and husband Keith brought many of their friends into the organization over the years and she helped found the FEF in 2000.
- She hosted a bi-annual FCA newsletter assembling project at her home—where copies and labels coated nearly every surface and volunteers eagerly awaited her traditional soup for lunch—no matter what the base, her soups always had something to "jazz them up".
- Luella was at the forefront of the recycling movement in her home and with FCA .
- She attended the state FCA meetings, and held her share of leadership positions locally—spending hours on member files.
- Luella was the Los Altos & Los Altos Hills Joint Community Award Winner in 2003

Her family thanks the FCA for remembering Luella, "She had great energy and purpose, and she shared it with a great many people." Luella is greatly missed for multiple reasons by the old-timers at FCA as well as by her family and the community.

News Bits

Bay Area Consumers Checkbook Article on Funeral Buying
Lois Salo, our former board member, points out that the latest Bay Area Consumers Checkbook has a big article on funeral buying and rated mortuaries. It touts the FCA as having good consumer information.

* * *

Sea burial botched as man's body resurfaces—Foul play? Nope, just an ocean burial gone wrong, police say. For more details of this story, visit www.msnbc.msn.com. Be assured that sea burials are legal for both cremated and non-cremated human remains, but Environmental Protection Agency requirements must be followed. If you are interested, visit www.navy.mil/navydata/questions/burial.html or contact Tribute Enterprises LLC in Long Beach at (562) 715-4594.

* * *

Alarming Report from CA Cemetery and Funeral Bureau
The California Master Trust is the largest "preneed" financial holding vehicle used by fully 1/3 of California funeral homes. Unfortunately, a recent audit provided that \$70 million in money pre-

paid by funeral consumers was misused. Dollars that should have been kept in trust for the eventual funerals of California families were instead spent on funeral director lobbying, attendance at trade and merchandise shows, and more. \$1.6 million that should have been refunded to families, still remain in the Trust because 38 funeral homes "are not able" to perform the preneed contracts.

This report includes the names of 38 funeral homes that the state says "are not able" to perform the preneed contracts. All told, 27,000 California families may be affected by this scandal. No FCA cooperating mortuaries were on this list. For the complete story, along with the audit, visit: www.funerals.org or www.dca.ca.gov/publications/press_releases/2010/0706_cfb.shtml

* * *

Green Jewish Cemetery: A community-wide dedication of the country's first green Jewish cemetery, Gan Yarok, was held on May 30 in Mill Valley, California. For more info., call 415-383-7100.