



Final Passages

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Definitions of Terms

What is a home funeral? The following definition was created by the National Home Funeral Alliance:

A home funeral is a family or community-centered response to death and after-death care. Families and communities may play a key role in:

- Planning and carrying out after-death rituals or ceremonies (such as laying out the deceased and home visitation of the body)
- Preparing the body for burial or cremation
- Filing of death-related paperwork such as the death certificate
- Transporting the deceased to the place of burial or cremation
- Facilitating the final disposition such as digging the grave in natural burial

Home funerals may occur within the family home or not. Some nursing homes, for example, may allow the family to care for the deceased after death, and more church committees are housing and caring for the dead. Also families may bring a loved one home from a hospital, a convalescent home, skilled nursing home or other end-of-life care facilities following death.

"The mission of the NHFA is to educate and empower families to care for their own dead." Final Passages would add that we wish to preserve the innate rights of families and communities to care for their own dead in a personal, respectful and an environmentally sound manner.

What is a home funeral guide?

A home funeral guide is someone who offers education, support and guidance to a family wishing to carry out their own after-death care and funeral arrangements. Their goal is to facilitate the maximal involvement of the family and its social network in accordance to their own state laws. Most people calling themselves guides in this reclaimed field today have attended trainings to learn how to become a home funeral guide or consultant.

What is a death midwife, spiritual death midwife or death doula?

A (spiritual) death midwife or doula is a person who offers spiritual or compassionate support at end-of-life rather than being in a medical or caregiving role, although they might do both. This person can also act as a home funeral guide when someone dies.

What is Natural Death Care?

Natural death care is loving and compassionate hands-on care that family and friends administer to their beloved at the time of death. It is care without invasive and toxic processes like embalming. It uses simple, natural and "green" products such as warm water, natural anti-bacterial soap and therapeutic essential oils rather than spraying the body with chemically created antiseptic solutions. Families choose biodegradable caskets or shrouds for final disposition rather than steel or rare and precious hard woods. They often choose affordable options with the lowest carbon footprint available.

What is Green Burial?

Green burial is earth friendly and ecologically sound. Green burial, or natural burial, ensures that the burial site remain as natural as possible in all respects. Interment of the bodies is done in a biodegradable casket, shroud (material covering or wrapping the body), or a blanket at 3 to 4 feet deep. There is no embalming fluid and no concrete vaults used. Ideally it is on a nature preserve or is created as part of a land conservation project.