

# FCA REPORT

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FCA-GKC



## Reflections on 18 years of advocacy

By Steve Nicely, FCA-GKC Board  
Member and Newsletter Editor



Yes, I have notified the FCA-GKC board that I will be resigning after our annual program Nov. 3. At age 86, I need to focus on other things while I still can. What should I write about 18 years of involvement with this organization? A review of the contents of 30 past newsletters reveals these common themes:

### NATURAL BURIAL



Natural burial, also called “green” burial, was the subject of 15 articles. This is burial in a shroud or a cardboard or wooden container, with no embalming or concrete grave liner. The practice returns the body to the earth, to become rich compost for future life. The environmentally friendly practice was standard throughout human history until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and the American Civil War.

We campaigned in the newsletter for widespread return of the practice, but found the funeral industry distinctly unenthusiastic. It meant no profits from embalming, steel caskets, or grave liners, and a little more trouble for cemeteries. The Lawrence, Kan., city-owned Oak Hill Cemetery became the first in our area to open a natural burial section in 2009 with 250 gravesites. Only 16 remained unsold.

It took a decade for us to find a public cemetery in the Kansas City area that would allow natural burial: the

*See Reflections, page 4*

## **FCA-GKC 2023 Annual Program a rich offering:**

## **Celebrating & caring for our dead in a changing, diverse landscape**

This is the important and fascinating topic of the FCA-GKC 2023 Annual Program, to be held from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. Friday, Nov. 3, at All Souls Unitarian Universalist Church, 4501 Walnut St., Kansas City, Mo. The program is free and open to the public. In a nutshell, the program’s focus:

Humanity is in a period of rapid change in its culture, its science, its technology, its spirituality, its environment. These changing conditions are reflected in how we celebrate and care for our dead. Speakers will share current trends in funeral practices, celebrations of life, reasons behind the changes, and insights from contemporary spirituality.

### OUR SPEAKERS & SCHEDULE

Two funeral professionals, two ministers, and three FCA-GKC board members will present during the program, which begins at 1:00 p.m. with an introduction. Following is the rich array of presenters, topics, and times:

### TRENDS IN FUNERALS & CEMETERIES 1:15–2:15 P.M.



From left: Wiley Wright, Bridget Anaya

*See Annual, page 6*

# Newsletter editor needed!

By Diane Etzel-Wise, President, FCA-GKC

Do you have a knack for writing and editing, and enjoy that creative process? Would you like to join the board of FCA-GKC for our monthly meetings and volunteer your services for this worthwhile organization? Would you like to edit this



newsletter once in the spring and once in the fall, replacing retiring board member Steve Nicely?

You would not be alone in the process. You would have Lynn Anderson, a retired professional journalist who lives in Moab, Utah, to back you up. She does the final editing and lays out the newsletter. Your responsibility would be to assign stories to board members, do the initial edit, write some articles, and send all the copy to Lynn. And you would still have Steve, who will continue as a volunteer, for guidance.

Contact Lynn (Lbanew1@gmail.com) or Steve (smnicely@gmail.com). We would love to hear from you! □



## Willed-body programs

Two area medical schools accept bodies for anatomy classes and research when the process is arranged in advance. The University of Kansas Medical Center, Department of Anatomy and Cell Biology, does not pay for transporting the body, but the Kansas City University of Medicine and Biosciences does. The bodies are cremated after use and the ashes returned to families. See the fall 2014 newsletter on our website for details.

## Speakers available

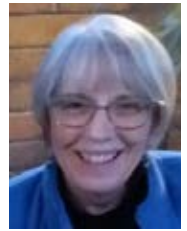
Contact us if your group would like an unbiased presentation from a board member, either virtually or in person. We are an independent, all-volunteer, nonprofit organization with no products to promote. We don't charge for our services but we do depend on contributions.

## Our mission

To educate and support individuals and families in making informed decisions about death-related services consistent with their values and lifestyles. □

## The big picture

By Diane Etzel-Wise  
FCA-GKC President



## Acceptance

Popular culture has seemingly embraced death and dying this year. In the film "Barbie," the heroine asks whether anyone else ever has thoughts of death or dying. And Jimmy Buffet's recent passing drew a plethora of Parrotheads reflecting about his influence on their lives. Perhaps "embraced" is my overzealous term for "accepted." As a baby boomer, I fully expect that we will continue to affect societal views just due to our sheer numbers!

As a boomer, I feel the ever-increasing physical and cognitive losses among friends and family members more sharply every year. I recently had the honor of sitting with a friend and former mental health colleague as she passed from this world to the next. While the experience didn't appear to be an honor at first, it became a sacred space for four of us gathered there to console each other and reflect on her life in her quiet presence. She was *not* usually a quiet person; we believe she was taking care of us, consoling us in her last hours. She was a regular attendee at the FCA-GKC Annual Program and often recommended our educational material to those she served in the community as a crisis specialist and social worker. I've *almost* accepted her death.

As a boomer, I attended my 50-year high school reunion, Hayden High, Class of 1972, last year. While it was primarily a rollicking celebration, there were a few moments of reflection and remembering our 37 classmates already passed. I've been trying to accept those deaths over the past 50 years.



As a boomer, I've used personal computers and cell-phone technology for less than half of my life. I've limited my social media presence to Facebook and LinkedIn for 12 years or so, but haven't been able to control what appears on a Google search for my name. Because I profess to be a lifelong learner, I'm trying to absorb and accept some of these challenges by reading *Digital Remains: Death, Dying and Remembrance in the Tech Generation*, penned by J.H. Harrington and published by New Degree Press in 2020.

As a boomer, I find that what Harrington is sharing with us is the way to discern our path to acceptance of death and ways to leave our legacy. This is *not* a one-size-fits-all book; as boomers, we are individuals first and foremost! He asks great questions, such as:

*See President, page 8*

# An update is coming at last to the FTC Funeral Rule

By Amy Simmons, FCA-GKC Board Member



As is the case with most things governmental, the wheels of change regarding the funeral industry move slowly. For more than 100 years, the Federal Trade Commission has worked to protect consumers from unfair, fraudulent, and deceptive business practices in that industry. The FTC has strived, through its Funeral Rule, to ensure full transparency *before* funeral providers engage in service delivery.

Now, after almost 30 years of operating under the most recent Funeral Rule, the FTC is moving toward updating it to provide far greater access, primarily regarding new technologies. Here is some history:



In 1982 the FTC issued its first Funeral Rule (16 CFR Part 453) to enhance consumers' ability to make informed choices regarding funeral goods and services. In 1984 the rule went into effect, requiring funeral providers to disclose accurate prices for their goods and services; it also forbade them from levying "conditional costs," embalming without consent, or misrepresenting legal or cemetery requirements.

The rule requires funeral providers to maintain an itemized general price list, casket price list, and outer burial container price list. The rule requires all providers to have their general price lists available on site and to provide accurate information to all phone inquiries. **(These price lists are presented every two years in this newsletter and online through FCA-GKC's meticulous compilation of Kansas City area funeral provider information.)** Providers must share an itemized list of selected goods and services, and their associated and total costs. The FTC regularly reviews the rule and allows for public comment but it was last revised in 1994.

In 2020, the FTC announced that the Funeral Rule was to be reviewed. Public comment focused on technological changes in the industry, including online and electronic availability of general price lists. The review and public comment supported revising the rule to include online general price lists.

In 2021, the FTC completed a formal review of funeral provider websites. The review found that most providers displayed a range of information about their goods and services, but little to no information about their *prices*. The review report concluded, "...consumers planning funerals would, in almost all instances, need to contact the businesses directly or visit the providers in person to get

enough information to make informed price decisions or to compare prices."

The FTC announced in 2022 that several amendments to the Funeral Rule were under consideration; public comments were requested regarding seven topics. As a result, an in-person workshop was held in Washington, D.C., to provide information about the potential revisions, which included:

- Online or electronic disclosures of price information;
- New forms of disposition of human remains;
- Standards for the readability of general price lists;
- Embalming disclosure requirements and other mandatory disclosures;
- Whether third-party crematory fees and other third-party fees should be disclosed in the general price lists; and
- Whether funeral providers should be required or permitted to maintain general price lists in languages other than English.



During a recent webinar for the funeral industry about the potential amendments, hosted by Tribute Technologies, we learned that the FTC is expected to amend the Funeral Rule by mid-2024. The webinar included discussions about the requirement of online and electronic general price lists. Some participants expressed concerns about the types of online resources (website, social media) they may be held accountable for, copyright issues, and formatting of the lists. Presenters clarified Americans with Disabilities Act compliance, the necessity of screen readers, and accessible electronic general price list formatting. The clarification seemed to relieve some concerns. From the webinar discussion, it seemed that industry resistance to providing general price lists online was less about transparency and access, and more about technological practicalities. Overall, there seemed to be a consensus among providers that posting prices online would benefit both the industry and consumers.

**This newsletter will carry updates as the rule revision comes closer to being finalized.** □

## Preplan, but don't prepay!

Funeral homes like to see families arriving ahead of time to plan funerals, and FCA does, too. But the funeral home will try to sell a prepaid plan, and we advise against it. Preplan, we say, but don't prepay.

Prepaid contracts can be restrictive and can make you vulnerable. We suggest opening a bank or credit union savings account jointly with a trusted friend or relative who knows your wishes. □

## **Reflections, from page 1**

historic Highland Cemetery of Prairie Village, open since the Civil War. Three FCA-GKC board members and two area residents formed a nonprofit corporation in 2015 and assumed cemetery management. By 2020, all of its remaining 150 gravesites were sold, mostly to those seeking natural burial.

Today natural-burial graves may be purchased at Elmwood and Longview cemeteries in Kansas City. Other regional cemeteries that offer it are Mount Muncie in Lansing, Kan., Sugar Creek and Green Acres near Columbia, Mo., and Heart Land Prairie near Salina, Kan., the first cemetery in modern Kansas history reserved *exclusively* for natural burial.

We have made real progress, but still, it's pitiful that only two public cemeteries out of 69 here will offer the service today.

### **CREMATION**



The national cremation rate was 57.5 percent in 2021 and projected to be 64.1 percent by 2025, according to the Cremation Association of North America. That will be double what it was in 2005. The funeral industry resisted cremation like it has resisted natural burial, but it was an economic force that could not be denied. Now numerous funeral homes operate their own crematories. Compare the \$1,889 average price of a direct cremation in our 2023 survey of area funeral prices with the average of a standard funeral and burial (at least five times more). Several local funeral homes offer direct cremations for less than \$1,000.

Besides its lower cost, the beauty of cremation is that the ashes are compact, portable, and durable. You don't have to bury them within a few days, or bury them at all. You may scatter them at a favorite site, keep them, or ship them through the U.S. mail. You have plenty of time to plan a memorial service weeks or months later.

The downside of cremation is that it contaminates the environment. All of the hydrocarbons from the body and the massive amount of fuel burned in the process are piped into the atmosphere. Many environmentally conscious consumers choose natural burial as the most eco-friendly alternative.

### **HOME FUNERALS**



At an FCA-GKC workshop on home funerals, participants discussed care for a body (portrayed by a board member).

Another favorite subject in our newsletters has been home funerals. It's possible to skip the services of funeral homes entirely by caring for our own dead the way our ancestors did—and it's legal. You may wash the body; dress it; wrap it in a shroud or place it in a box; cool it with dry ice; and hold a wake and service at home. If zoning laws permit, you may dig a grave on your property.

We have written a few stories about rare home funerals, but all involved the services of cooperative funeral homes to handle the legalities of death certificates and help with refrigeration and transportation of the body. It seems that we are not ready to revert entirely to the practices of our ancestors. We still feel we need the assistance of our funeral directors to one degree or another.

One thing I have heard repeatedly is how *meaningful* it is for those who care for or spend time with the body of a loved one after death. This tells me we should not be in such a rush to have the body removed after death, often while it is still warm. Some say the spirit remains with its body for a period of hours. This is an opportunity for spiritual communication that somehow helps in the grieving process.

Our most touching account of a home funeral was the one carried out by 27-year-old Rachel Fracassa for her husband, Tyler, who was killed in an automobile accident a decade ago. See excerpts on page 5 from our story originally published in the spring 2013 newsletter.

### **HOME FUNERAL GUIDES & DEATH DOULAS**

Occasionally we have written about persons qualified to serve as home funeral guides (persons families can hire to help plan and carry out home funerals) and death doulas (who support the dying and their families in a variety of ways, depending on their circumstances). The term doula (DOO-lah) is Greek, meaning "woman caregiver." Death doulas and birth doulas are similar in that both provide non-medical support. I have yet to hear of a home funeral guide or death doula who has been very successful at it, because few engage their services.

### **PRICES**

It's awesome to consider that our nonprofit organization, FCA-GKC, has operated continuously for 62 years, functioning through volunteers, for the sole purpose of informing consumers about their funeral options. We were founded by members of All Souls Unitarian Universalist Church who were concerned that some funeral homes were taking advantage of people at a vulnerable time of their lives. That first funeral consumer organization was the Kansas City Memorial Society. It arranged for discounted prices with a few trusted funeral homes on behalf of its members. In time, the Memorial

*See Reflections, page 6*

# Husband's home funeral & burial helped family deal with his loss

By Marci Michnick, FCA-GKC Volunteer

*Editor's note: These are excerpts from a 2013 article in our newsletter. They reflect FCA-GKC's longtime focus on natural burial and home funerals.*

Rachel Fracassa doesn't necessarily look more special than other 27-year-olds, but once you hear her story, you realize she is. Rachel, a mother of three (and pregnant with a fourth), lost her 26-year-old husband, Tyler Fracassa, in 2013 to a fatal car accident that occurred as he drove home from work.

Despite the devastation that follows such a loss, Rachel managed to carry out a home funeral for Tyler at their residence in Urich, Mo., where he was buried on the couple's property.

"It was comforting to have him at home," says Rachel, "because that's where he was happiest."

FCA-GKC, along with organizations like the National Home Funeral Alliance, supports and empowers families who want to care for their own dead, at whatever level of involvement with which the family is comfortable.

Rachel, who once considered a career in mortuary science, said she was fortunate that Tyler's uncle was a funeral director at Louis Memorial, a Jewish funeral home familiar with caring for unembalmed bodies and conducting natural burials. Louis Memorial refrigerated Tyler's body for four days before delivering it to the Fracassas' home the day before the funeral. The funeral home also made some aesthetic repairs to Tyler's battered body. Rachel and Tyler's sister then dressed him and braided his long hair at the funeral home. In staying with the natural theme, Tyler's body was not embalmed.

Looking back, Rachel is grateful for the help of her husband's uncle and the funeral home. Trying to do it all herself would have been too overwhelming, she said.



The death of Tyler Fracassa a decade ago was honored through a home funeral and natural burial by his family and friends.

The Fracassa children were not apprehensive about having the body in the home, Rachel said. They also provided some comic relief as they ran around and played with their friends as usual. When her 7-year-old son, Elliott, and his friend approached the casket, Elliott asked, "You wanna touch him?" Elliott's friend reached over and touched Tyler's hand.



The gravesite of Tyler Fracassa, whose family chose a home funeral and natural burial. Sitting on the grave are three Fracassa children, a cousin, and a neighbor child.

Dry ice was used to keep the body cool while family and friends began digging Tyler's grave—a process Rachel believes was cathartic for them. When a stubborn layer of clay was reached, machinery was brought in to finish digging.

On the following day, 120 people attended Tyler's funeral. Friends and family carried Tyler's casket a quarter-mile from the Fracassa home to the burial site. A family minister conducted the unscripted ceremony, during which memories of Tyler were shared. Everyone had the opportunity to write on Tyler's casket, and the children released balloons at the end of the service.

The only thing Rachel wishes she had done differently was to have written a statement that could have been read at the ceremony. Otherwise, she believes that the intimate, hands-on experience helped her and her children work through their emotions to better deal with the loss.

"In the beginning I was very attached to his body," she said. "But by the time of the service, I was ready to put him in the ground."

Of course it was a tragic experience for the family, she said. "But I'm a realist. I'm not going to let my life fall apart." □

## **Annual, from page 1**

Speakers are *Wiley Wright*, *Bridget Anaya*, and *Steve Nicely*. Wright is professor and coordinator of the Mortuary Science Program at Kansas City Kansas Community College. Anaya is general manager of Longview Funeral Home and Cemetery, Johnson County Funeral Chapel and Memorial Gardens, and the Overland Park Funeral Chapel. The Longview Cemetery is one of two cemeteries in the metropolitan area that offer natural/green burials. Nicely is an 18-year FCA-GKC board member who has written about natural burial as newsletter editor. He also is a past board member of the Highland Cemetery of Prairie Village, which allows natural burial.

### **THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE, 2:30–3:00 P.M.**



Speakers are FCA-GKC board members *Amy Simmons* (pictured at left) and *Diane Etzel-Wise*. Simmons, director of the Master of Social Work Program at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, will address the effect of declining church attendance and membership. Etzel-Wise, FCA-GKC board president, is a retired University of Kansas social work instructor. She will speak on the book *Our Digital Remains* and the death-related messages of Jimmy Buffett and the film “Barbie.”

### **Reflections, from page 4**

Society became FCA-GKC, one of about 40 local affiliates of the national FCA.

We no longer negotiate discounts with funeral homes. Instead, we provide education about the funeral industry, including the prices charged by all 114 funeral homes in our area. Those prices are printed in our newsletters and posted on our website, [www.funeralskc.org](http://www.funeralskc.org), free of charge. We have the Federal Trade Commission’s Funeral Rule of 1984 to thank for our ability to compile all those prices. (See page 3.)

Most area funeral providers cooperate with us when we update our list every two or three years, but some do not. They believe that what they charge is none of our business. That’s when our volunteers go out to collect those prices by asking for them in person. The morticians cannot decline without breaking federal law. We just updated the price survey again this year.

Recently we got some good news that should eliminate

### **SPIRITUALITY AROUND DEATH RITUALS, 3:00–3:50**



Speakers are the reverends *George Gordon* (pictured at left) and *Joe Walker*. Gordon is the retired minister of pastoral care at Country Club Christian Church, where he has presided at more than 700 funerals. He is also a member of the local Mystic Misfits group and a certified Enneagram teacher. Walker is the current minister of pastoral care at the church. Gordon says Walker is “undoubtedly the most widely read person and minister that I know in the area of devotional literature, from almost every tradition known to humankind.” They will address contemporary spirituality, the changes they have witnessed, and the lessons they have learned in their roles.

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### **REGISTRATION INFORMATION**

Participants may attend in person at the church or online via Zoom. Registration in advance at [www.funeralskc.org](http://www.funeralskc.org) is required for Zoom attendance. A link will be shared via email after registration.

Three hours of free continuing education credits will be offered to social workers and health-care professionals.

Those not seeking continuing education credits are free to drop in and out of the three-hour program as they wish, while professionals seeking credit must attend or monitor the entire program. □

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the need for in-person requests. The four Federal Trade Commissioners voted unanimously “to signal their intention” to amend the Funeral Rule. (See page 3.)

### **PUBLIC RESISTANCE TO DEATH**

There is no doubt that we live in a death-denying society. As a funeral director once told me, “We are the only nation that acts as if death is optional.” This phenomenon can be frustrating to us as members of an organization focused on death planning and the practicalities of funerals. Here I have to admit a degree of personal guilt. My wife and I have a “freezer packet” (the freezer will protect it in case of fire) containing our wills, funeral preferences, powers of attorney, and living wills. We decided six months ago that we needed to review it. The darned thing is still sitting on a shelf in the family room awaiting our attention. Hope a fire doesn’t get it. □

# She was dead but she changed my life

By Steve Nicely, FCA-GKC Board Member

I don't remember her name or the cause of her death, but I do remember this: She was about my age and she was beautiful.

I encountered her at George F. Porter & Sons Funeral Home in Kansas City, Kan., where I worked as a maintenance man, greeter, and chauffeur while attending Donnelly Community College. The opportunity to drive the company's sleek new Cadillac limousine first attracted me to the job, but working there was an education in itself. I learned not to fear the presence of death, and I learned how to assist with funerals. I was strong and could help move heavy bodies in addition to mowing, painting, and washing the cars. My cleaning supplies were located in the body preparation room, where I witnessed embalmings and even autopsies.

Then one day I went into the preparation room and there she was, on the white porcelain table, looking like she was just taking a nap before going out on a date or something. It stopped me in my tracks.

"Oh, my God," I thought. "I would have been *interested* in her."

I worked during her funeral and chauffeured her family. And I wrote a story about the experience for Benedictine Sister Mary Faith's English class at Donnelly. Sister read my story aloud in class and afterward told me she thought I could be a writer. That's when I decided to pursue journalism as a career. I attended Marquette University's journalism school, returning home with the degree and Marcia Donovan, my wife now of 62 years. I worked for 36 years with *The Kansas City Star*.

So I owe that beautiful young woman a lot. I have prayed for her and thanked her. I look forward one day to meeting her spirit, and believe it will happen. □

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## Moving but want to stay in touch?

If you receive our printed FCA-GKC newsletter and have moved from the mailing address we have on file, let us know and we'll make sure you remain on the list—no matter where you live.

Just email [fca.gkc@gmail.com](mailto:fca.gkc@gmail.com) or leave a phone message at 816-561-6322. □



# Exposure to death can begin early

By Steve Nicely, FCA-GKC Board Member



The author's son, Ben, many decades ago with his dog, Sugar.

When we talk to elders planning their funerals, I often wonder about the desire of some to shield their grandchildren from the experience of seeing their dead bodies.

This reminds me of a mistake I made years ago, when our youngest son, Ben, was 5 years old and we finally ended the suffering of his beloved dog, Sugar. She was hit by a car, losing her tail and control of her bowels. I was going to end her life then, until Ben bought her more time when he crawled onto my lap and asked me, "Are you going to kill me, too, if I get hurt like Sugar?"

Sugar became an outside dog with a heated doghouse in the winter and a bed of straw. But when it finally was time for the end, I made the mistake of burying the dog without the participation of Ben and his brothers. Ben was devastated, and angry because I had excluded him from the process.

I never forgot it, especially some 15 years later when we lost another of his dogs to a similar accident and a kind police officer brought the pet home in a plastic bag late one night. I wrapped Barney in a blanket, placed him in a cardboard box, and waited up for Ben to return home at about 1:30 in the morning. Then Ben got the painful but deeply meaningful experience he was denied as child, and I got to be present with him—a redemption of sorts. Ben dug Barney's grave that night in the back yard and we buried him at the foot of our blue spruce, the burial site of Sugar and other pets.

Exposing children of all ages to death can begin to instill in them a sense of its inevitability, and a sense of comfort in its presence. That will pay off in important ways as they grow. □



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### FCA-GKC Board of Directors

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## FCA-GKC 2023 Annual Program

### CELEBRATING & CARING FOR OUR DEAD IN A CHANGING, DIVERSE LANDSCAPE

Friday, Nov. 3 • 1:00–4:00 p.m.  
All Souls Unitarian Universalist Church  
4501 Walnut St., Kansas City, Mo.



Free and open to the public

**3 free continuing education credits!**

### Contributors to FCA-GKC April–August 2023

FCA-GKC is a nonprofit, all-volunteer organization with no memberships or dues. We just have supporters. We depend entirely on donations to cover our expenses and carry out our mission. Thank you, thank you, summer donors:

Deborah Altus  
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#### Our Mission

To educate and support individuals and families in making informed decisions about death-related services consistent with their values and lifestyles.

### President, from page 2

- What can one do to prepare for death regarding one's own or a loved one's social media accounts?
- What social movements enable conversations about the end of life and beyond?
- How do we learn of a person's death these days?
- Are cremains beneficial for trees?
- What are some alternatives to burial?

If you're interested in hearing more about these topics, I recommend reading his book or coming to our annual program on Friday, Nov. 3, at All Souls Unitarian Universalist Church. Maybe I can finally accept the permanent influence of digitization in my life!



Lastly, but most importantly, I must begrudgingly accept the recently announced resignation of our dear friend Steve Nicely from the FCA-GKC board of directors. He has served tirelessly for 18 years in a variety of roles as newsletter editor, program chair, president, and other informal jobs. Most influentially, he has recruited and mentored many other board members, past and present. He has helped shore up the board and the organization when needed. He has excelled at delivering the message of our mission in person and in print. Maybe I'm still in denial, because I think we can persuade him to help from time to time. Come chat with Steve at the annual program.

Peace to all you Parrotheads out there. □

"Grief is like the wake behind a boat. It starts out as a huge wave that follows close behind you and is big enough to swamp and drown you if you suddenly stop moving forward. But if you do keep moving, the big wake will eventually dissipate. And after a long time, the waters of your life get calm again, and that is when the memories of those who have left begin to shine as bright and as enduring as the stars above."

— Jimmy Buffet