

# FCA REPORT

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FCA-GKC



## Second option found for local natural burial

By Steve Nicely, FCA-GKC Secretary

A second public cemetery that allows natural, or “green,” burials in the metropolitan area has been discovered.

The Lee’s Summit Historical Cemetery, like the Highland Cemetery of Prairie Village, was established in the 1860s, when all burials were natural—before the use of steel caskets, concrete grave liners, and embalming. The practice of natural burial remains an option at both places.

“Natural,” in terms of body disposal, means burying in a biodegradable container (wood, cardboard, wicker, or cloth), allowing the body’s decomposition into rich, life-supporting soil. Vaults, metal caskets, and embalming inhibit that natural process. The FCA-GKC is aware of no others that allow natural burial among the approximately 50 metro-area cemeteries. The apparent reasons for cemetery reluctance are reduced sales revenues and added cemetery maintenance costs.

Although Lee’s Summit and Highland of Prairie Village cemeteries have been active for 150 years, they are relatively small and have limited grave sites left. The 20-acre Lee’s Summit Historical Cemetery, located at Third Street and Missouri 291 Highway, only has about 30 sellable grave sites remaining among its 10,200 individual spaces, said Robert Sanchez, Lee’s Summit superintendent of park operations. The one-acre Highland has about 80 sellable spaces remaining among its 830 total grave sites.

### Rich in history

Both cemeteries contain the graves of pioneers in their areas, but Lee’s Summit’s history reflects Missouri’s pro-slavery Civil War heritage. It contains the remains of many of Quantrill’s Raiders—pro-Confederate guerrillas also known as “bushwhackers.” The brothers Jesse and Frank James rode with them, as did another set of brothers, Cole, Jim, John, and Robert (Bob) Younger. After the war, the James-Younger Gang formed and continued plundering, according to the online encyclopedia Wikipedia. This time the plunder was for personal profit rather than in support of the Confederacy. The gang was suspected of robbing banks, trains, and stagecoaches in at least 10 states.

According to the cemetery’s website, its most famous graves are those of Cole Younger and his brothers, Jim and Bob, who were arrested in a botched bank robbery in Northfield, Minn. Cole served 25 years in a Minnesota jail, then spent the rest of his life as a model citizen of Lee’s

Summit. Bob died in jail and Jim committed suicide.

If anyone of similar notoriety is buried in the Highland Cemetery of

Prairie Village, its board is not aware of it.

Highland contains the graves of Thomas and John Nall, early pioneers of Johnson County, and 27 members of the Nall family. (Nall

Avenue is named for them.) There is also a section originally set aside for Native Americans, reflecting the area’s one-time designation as a reservation for Kansa, Osage, and Shawnee Indians. It’s located in the 5000 block of West 65<sup>th</sup> Street, between Nall and Roe avenues. □



### Contacts for local natural burial

#### Lee’s Summit Historical Cemetery

- The price of grave sites in Lee’s Summit Historical Cemetery is \$1,000, a reasonable amount by today’s public cemetery standards.
- The cost of opening and closing each grave is \$800 on weekdays, \$950 on weekends.
- City taxes pay for maintenance of Lee’s Summit Historical Cemetery.
- [cityofls.net/Parks/facilities/Historical-Cemeteries](http://cityofls.net/Parks/facilities/Historical-Cemeteries)
- 816-969-1590

#### Highland Cemetery of Prairie Village

- Highland’s grave sites cost \$800, with opening and closing at about \$500.
- Highland is run by a nonprofit corporation and has a maintenance fund in which all sales money is deposited.
- [www.highlandcemeteryprairievillage.com](http://www.highlandcemeteryprairievillage.com)
- 913-262-1650

## Gratitude for our supporters

With great gratitude we recognize the individuals who have donated during the past six months. We could not function without them. Combined, their support totaled \$3,690. After paying our bills, we have a current balance of \$4,482.

FCA-GKC Treasurer David Johnson cautioned that last year we were supported by a generous grant and this year we have not received one. That increases our reliance on personal contributions to carry on our work.

Because we are an all-volunteer, not-for-profit organization, your contributions are tax deductible. We call your attention to the self-addressed envelope in this newsletter and ask you please to use it. We pledge to make good use of the funds.

Thank you!

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## This workbook can help you plan

"Before I Go, You Should Know" is a workbook that guides you through the process of recording the important information your survivors need in order to handle your estate.

For a minimum \$60 donation to FCA-GKC, a copy of the workbook is yours. Just send a check, with the notation that it's for the "B.I.G. offer," to P.O. Box 7021, Kansas City, MO 64113.

Your survivors and FCA-GKC will appreciate it.

## The big picture

By Frank Cockrell  
FCA-GKC President



## New price survey coming!

If it's an even-numbered year, the odds are great that FCA-GKC board members and volunteers are spending a lot of time and miles tracking down price lists for another survey of funeral costs throughout our area. This year is no exception.

Why do we make such an effort? Our motives haven't changed in our 56 years of existence: It seems to be a quirk of American culture that many of us don't anticipate deaths and our need for funerals. We are forced into awareness by circumstances at an emotionally vulnerable time. A hospital or hospice administrator asks, "Where do you want the body taken?"

"Oh, take it to [fill in the blank]" is our reflex response. That blank is likely the same provider the family used in the past. We don't check on the prices and services available elsewhere. But a funeral is the only large-ticket (\$8,000 to \$16,000 or more) purchase we make without shopping the market. That's fine if we can afford it and if that's what we want to do. But what if we *can't* afford it?

I don't mean to imply that all funeral providers take advantage of people; they don't. Funeral directing is a legitimate business and most funeral professionals are honest and caring. We receive good cooperation from many of them who recognize the value of our work.

Kathleen Foster, FCA-GKC's newest board member, is in charge of this year's funeral price survey. She has settled here from the Baltimore area with her husband, who is in medical school. She is talented, enthusiastic, and smart, and she lifts us with her infectious smile. We are lucky to have her and we know you will feel the same about the information in this year's survey. She is eager to share the results. Look for them in our fall newsletter. □



Kathleen Foster, newly elected to the FCA-GKC board, is spearheading the 2018 Funeral Price Survey.

# The vital work an SCL grant made possible

By Steve Nicely, FCA-GKC Secretary

In January 2017, the Funeral Consumers Alliance of Greater Kansas City received a generous \$10,000 grant from the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth. The sisters' goal was that we affect sustainable change on behalf of low-income and marginalized local people.

The method of FCA-GKC is the same one the sisters used when they taught me from the second grade through high school: *education*. As an organization, we teach people how to be wise consumers of funeral products and services at an emotionally vulnerable time of life. This includes how to compare prices and make decisions based on financial realities and family wishes, how to avoid excessive debt, how to shop for a funeral, the value of planning, and the hazards of prepaying for services.

Active for more than half a century, the FCA-GKC is now the area's sole provider of a comprehensive listing of prices charged by the metro area's 95 funeral providers; a twice-yearly informational newsletter; in-person presentations to organizations; educational materials for social service agencies; and at-a-glance cards showcasing the 10 lowest-cost providers of direct cremation and immediate burial, in both English and Spanish.

This education is important for everyone, but it's *crucial* for people struggling financially or lacking easy access to information resources. That's where the grant comes into play. Our challenge from the sisters was to get that knowledge into the hands of those who need it the most.

## Honing our efforts

To meet the challenge, we spent a lot of time exploring our weak points in terms of outreach and crafting an outreach strategy. As a result, the grant has hoisted our volunteer organization of less than a dozen board members to an intensified level of outreach that we haven't attained in the past.

First, we printed abundant supplies of our existing materials, revising and updating them. Then we began to make personal contact with health clinics, hospitals, clergy, social workers, hospices, community organizations, food pantries and kitchens, nursing homes, low-income housing facilities, and home health agencies—the very professionals and institutions that support and nurture the area's low-income and marginalized residents. We knew that if *they* had the right information, the consumers would get it as well.

We are proud of our efforts last year in directly contacting 93 such organizations; distributing more than 4,500 price lists, price summary cards, and newsletters; and making more than 25 direct presentations.

In addition, we took a close look at the FCA-GKC website. It was working in a bare-bones way but it needed to become much easier to use and offer more extensive information in a better-organized way. We hired an experienced Web designer who, we're happy to say, believes deeply in our mission. As a result of her work, this



An ethics presentation highlighted the FCA-GKC annual meeting last fall. The SCL grant helped make such presentations possible.

spring we inaugurated a sparkling new website, available at [funeralskc.org](http://funeralskc.org).

An elderly woman at the Keeler Women's Center, an empowerment ministry of the Benedictine sisters in Kansas City, Kan., is a good example of those the grant was intended to reach. During our presentation, she explained that she had taken in a homeless man and cared for him during the last six months of his life but was caught unprepared when he died. In coordinating his funeral and burial, the woman wiped out her savings of \$7,000. Through our presentation she learned that she could have accomplished the same thing for less than half that amount or provided a cremation for less than \$1,000. She and the others present were glad to have the information for future needs.

## Your support for this year

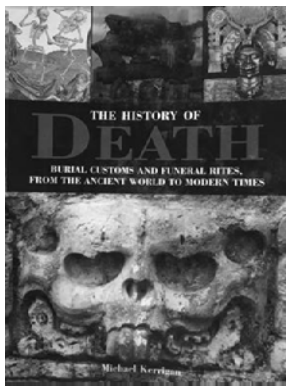
We spent all of the sisters' grant last year, but we are continuing our enhanced outreach efforts this year. That means we must depend on the contributions of our members and supporters to carry us through the year. If you can manage a donation, however small, please know that we will put it to enormous good use.

If you would like to help—by becoming a volunteer or a board member, helping on a committee, or hosting us to speak to your group—we'd love to have you. □

*This article follows on a report Steve Nicely made Nov. 3 to 80 attendees of our annual meeting at the Kauffman Foundation Conference Center. Most were social workers and other professionals.*



SISTERS OF CHARITY  
OF LEAVENWORTH



## Book review

*The History of Death: Burial customs and funeral rites, from the ancient world to modern times.*

By Michael Kerrigan. The Lyons Press. 2007

By Lynn Anderson, FCA-GKC Volunteer

If you read our article about the National Home Funeral Alliance in the Fall 2017 edition, your mind may have been stretched a bit. Here's an organization that advocates for and assists with the age-old practices of after-death care at home.

This is a new idea for most of us in 21<sup>st</sup>-century America. But Michael Kerrigan's book, loaded with photographs and illustrations, will open your mind even more—and will make a home funeral seem downright ordinary.

"Something that proverbially comes to us all, death is universal and yet universally strange," Kerrigan writes, "an object of fascination and of fear. Elaborate rituals have become associated with death ... as if we hope, by stage-managing it, to moderate its force."

So Kerrigan delves into many dramatic, creepy, comforting, earthy, and spirit-ridden rituals with zest.

"That so many different societies, in so many centuries, should have had their own ways and rituals of death is not perhaps surprising," he writes. "After all, they have had their own ways and rituals of life."

In *The History of Death*, we learn that:

- In Toraja, Sulawesi, an Indonesian island, the dead are not buried at all but sit for months in temporary houses while they slowly rot. In some cases they are given a seat in a corner of the family home.
- The Eskimos of Eastern Asia ritually dismembered their deceased, then covered them with cairns of stone to keep away scavengers.
- Peruvians went to the tomb in layers of rich fabric, a way of 'wearing wealth' and buying status in the world to come.

The book explores ideas of afterlife throughout the world in various eras and unveils the many ancient (and often modern) customs that bind the living to their ancestral dead, including concerns about judgment and damnation; rituals of cremation and water; Tibetan "sky burial"; the Mexican/Latin celebrations of the Day of the Dead; and the chevra kadisha, or local burial societies, of Jews.

*The History of Death* is educational and enthralling, a wonderful way to put modern American death practices into perspective. And the most potent reality the reader is left with is this: We are estranged from death in ways that impinge on our ability to truly live full lives. Let's think about that. □

## A humorous but grounded take on 'eco-death'

By Lynn Anderson, FCA-GKC Volunteer

Some readers will be familiar with Caitlin Doughty, a mortician and writer who made a name for herself, and earned a great deal of respect, through her book *Smoke Gets in Your Eyes and Other Lessons from the Crematory*, and her "Ask a Mortician" series available on YouTube. Doughty takes a funny, irreverent, challenging approach to important facts about the very issues FCA-GKC also tackles: dying, death, and funeral choices.

One of her newest Ask a Mortician videos is titled "Eco-Death Takeover: Changing the Funeral Industry." In it Doughty, decked out as the Grim Reaper, educates viewers about several methods of body disposal—some gaining traction and growing in availability and acceptance, others just surfacing in public awareness.

She begins by laying out the ecological and common-sense ramifications of the most common funeral choices: embalming and cremation. Did you know, for instance, that formaldehyde, the most common embalming fluid, is among the top 10 percent of the EPA's most hazardous and damaging chemicals? Did you know that every year, four million acres of forest go into creating caskets; 800,000 gallons of formaldehyde are pumped into bodies; and 115 tons of steel and 2 billion tons of concrete are formed into caskets and vaults that slow, but cannot stop, the process of decay? That cremation sends carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, hydrochloric acid, sulphur dioxide, and even mercury vapors into the atmosphere—from which they eventually rain back onto our planet?

Given these troubling facts, asks Doughty, "What's a corpse to do?"

One answer lies in the emerging technology of **alkaline hydrolysis**, also known as "aquamation" or "water cremation," in which a corpse is placed into a pressurized steel container to which chemicals are added. The result mimics the natural chemical decomposition process but dramatically speeds it. The body becomes liquified and is sent into the ground, then the bones are powdered and given to the family, just as in cremation. Yet the process uses only one-eighth of the energy and one-quarter of the carbon footprint of cremation and creates no emissions.

Alkaline hydrolysis is legal for humans in 14 states, including Kansas and Missouri, and is used widely for pets and disposal of donated cadavers in medical schools. The main thing hindering popular embrace of the technology is what Doughty calls "the ick factor."

See *Eco-death*, page 6



Caitlin Doughty, mortician and author, educates consumers about burial options.

# Three witnesses offer physical and spiritual views of dying

Note from Steve Nicely, FCA-GKC Secretary and Newsletter Editor:



Steve Nicely

Marge Corbett, of Gladstone, and Ginny Farney, of Prairie Village, are veteran hospice nurses, each having witnessed hundreds of deaths. The late Kathleen Dowling Singh, a psychotherapist and hospice worker, also witnessed hundreds of passings. I had read and taken notes on her book *The Grace in Dying*. They are three hospice workers who've been present at perhaps 1,000 deaths. What do they have to tell us about dying?

It turns out that all three of them see it in terms of its physical and psychic aspects, but ultimately as a spiritual experience involving union with the ineffable essence and source of life. Some of us at FCA-GKC wanted to share this information, but that posed a dilemma for us. Our organization is about funerals and death's practicalities, usually not its spirituality. Should we include these views in our newsletter? Whom might we offend, I wondered? For instance, our three sources endorse no religion or religious doctrine but might implicitly cast doubt on someone's religious belief.

I decided to risk it and the board, though with varying viewpoints, went along with me. We invite your comments on our phone recorder, 816-561-6322, or by email, fca.gkc@gmail.com. We'll address your views in our fall newsletter.

## Editor's notes from *The Grace in Dying*



Kathleen Dowling Singh

In Singh's experience as a witness, the dying process is difficult, painful, and chaotic at its various stages. The body is under siege. So is the psyche, as the mental ego is pried from our precious self-identity. Even those who don't fear death can expect these experiences as they move through the process.

Ultimately, they are transformed into a place of light, beauty, love, and altruism. The characteristics are the same as those experienced by mystics. They are spiritual, not religious, although those dying may meet saints or beings from their various religious traditions. They experience unity with "The Ground of Being," another term for God.

## One special death experience recalled

By Marge Corbett, Retired Hospice Nurse

As a hospice nurse for eight years, I was present at many deaths as people continued their journey to God. But the one that stays with me is the death of my dad, Jim Corbett. He retired at age 65 from a life as a bridge builder and power plant yard superintendent. Three months later he was diagnosed with cancer.



Jim Corbett and his daughter, Marge Corbett



He went through several operations as the cancer spread. He endured radiation therapy that caused shingles. Finally, the day came when the doctors told him there was nothing more they could do for him. I was devastated.

We, as a family, encouraged him to travel to Maui, a trip he had always wanted to take. He went with his brother and stayed for three weeks. He loved it! Then he came home and entered hospice care.

He was 69 years old. He became weaker and bed ridden. I lived in Kansas City; he was in New Jersey. Needless to say, it was stressful for me to be so far away. We talked every day by phone. Then came the day I dreaded. His hospice nurse called me to say that his blood pressure was alarmingly low and she did not think he would live through the night. By a series of minor miracles, I got a flight.

I arrived to find him sitting up in bed, talking with friends. He introduced me to them and I hugged him. I looked at the nurse quizzically.

"I told him you were on your way and he rallied," she said.

For the next four days he told me stories of his life, with me lying on the bed beside him. Family was with us. We comforted him and each other.

I was exhausted from lack of sleep. I told my brother, "Watch him for a while so I can take a nap. If his breathing changes, call me."

It wasn't 15 minutes until he called me. Dad had lapsed into a silent, dreamy state and his breathing slowed. I had my arms around him, telling him I loved him and it was OK to go.

He got a beautiful smile on his face, lifted his arms up high, and took his last breath. It was a holy, sacred moment for me. I continued to hold him till his valiant heart stopped beating.

"I love you, Daddy," I said, and let him go.

See *Dying*, page 6

## Eco-death, from page 4

People don't want to contemplate their loved ones being liquified and "drained away."

Doughty urges viewers to learn more about alkaline hydrolysis and to support legislation that would permit it in more states.

A more common new funeral choice is "natural," or "green," burial, in which an unembalmed corpse is wrapped in a shroud or placed in a biodegradable casket such as a willow casket or cardboard box, placed in a three- to four-foot-deep hole, and covered. Natural burial is perfectly safe, as access to oxygen flow creates heat and kills pathogens. Decay occurs quickly and the body is beneficial to the environment.

This is how people were buried throughout human history until, starting in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the death industry convinced people that this was somehow grotesque or undignified. It's the most traditional form of burial that we have and it's legal in all 50 states.

Doughty also mentions "conservation burial," in which landowners create a legal agreement through a land trust, prohibiting development by public or private agencies. The ground is set aside for natural burial and only native species are allowed to grow there. She also mentions the notion of "body composting."

The video wraps up with Doughty urging viewers to talk to their local funeral homes, telling them what kind of funeral they want for their loved ones or themselves. Only with pressure from consumers, she notes, will change occur. □

*Find the video by going to YouTube, then entering "Eco-death takeover" in the search field.*

### Let us help educate your members

Are you part of an organization that would benefit from an unbiased presentation about important practical aspects of funeral planning and myths/facts about funeral and burial practices?

The Funeral Consumers Alliance of Greater Kansas City has speakers who are eager to share and educate. Call us at 816-561-6322 or email us at [fca.gkc@gmail.com](mailto:fca.gkc@gmail.com). We'll line you up with one of our members for a visit—at no charge, of course.

We look forward to meeting and interacting with you!

## Dying, from page 5

### Many paths to death, one destination

By Ginny Farney, FCA-GKC Board Member



Ginny Farney

The experience of dying is as unique as the individual experiencing it. You live until your final breath; you will likely continue to face life's challenges as you always have. Dying is a time of loss and sadness, but it also can be the source of healing and inner growth. Acceptance of death is the act of total surrender to Divine Will.

Death has many faces. Those who die of old age or chronic illness experience a gentler unraveling of their lives. The slow, progressive physical decline allows time to adapt to these losses. These individuals often reach a state of acceptance, even a hope for death to come.

I think back to my first experience with death, when an elderly patient told me that he was dying. As tears came to my eyes, he said "From where you are, this may not look so good." Weakly placing his hand on his heart, he added, "But in here, it is so beautiful..." He radiated peace and acceptance.

Other illnesses tend to dismantle a life more aggressively, often giving little time to shift from hoping for a cure to surrender. Much of the suffering in death, as in life, lies in wanting the experience to be different. It is our Ego's resistance to life *as it is* that causes suffering. As alertness fades, death becomes an inner process, a mystery. This active dying begins with a transition phase much like the transition phase of labor before childbirth. As the body begins to shut down, the Soul begins to disconnect and the Ego disintegrates. Thoughts and beliefs dissolve. High fevers can be present as well as anger, agitation, and panic for some.

This short stage, called Terminal Restlessness, transitions into a time of calm acceptance and surrender. In this final stage, one is generally unresponsive and breathing becomes irregular. The Soul is traveling between the body and the Threshold; there is a sense that one is no longer feeling what is happening to the body. There is Divine guidance in this liminal space; no one dies alone. At the time of death, there is a palpable energy change in the room. I perceive the hand of the Divine reaching in to carry the Soul home. □

**This newsletter, past newsletter archives, and a treasure trove of information about funeral options are all available on our new website:**

**[www.funeralskc.org](http://www.funeralskc.org)**

## **Transport, from back page**

open a box of worms that delays your plan or, worse yet, tries to force you to do and pay for what you and your loved ones do not want. Not because it's illegal, but because it's 'weird.'"

When officials or professionals communicate misleading or fear-based information regarding care for loved ones after death, one of the best defenses is to "know the rules." Fortunately, the National Home Funeral Alliance (NHFA) and FCA collaborated on Quick Guide to Legal Requirements for Home Funerals in Your State, a convenient aggregate of state statutes or regulations relevant to caring for loved ones after death. For more comprehensive legal explanations, another excellent source for laws governing the handling of bodies after death in each state is the website for Nolo, a publisher that produces easy-to-understand legal guides for the public.

In Helene's case, we must look to the requirements for Kansas and Illinois. According to Kansas statutes, a body cannot travel outside state lines without a "transit permit" issued by a funeral director or the state registrar. Under the rather strict Illinois Compiled Statutes, a licensed funeral director must file the death certificate and only a licensed funeral director may be issued a "permit for disposition," to move the body for final disposition (burial, cremation, etc.). While knowing local laws is useful when advocating for the plans of ourselves and our loved ones, Nancy Petersen's guidance is also relevant. Sometimes we better serve our loved ones by breaking the rules and asking for forgiveness rather than permission.

### **Logistics**

Helene was thankful to find a Kansas City funeral home, Signature Funerals, to embalm Virginia's body and provide the necessary burial transit permit. She also located a funeral director in Sycamore, Ill. (15 minutes from DeKalb), to receive her mother's body and obtain the permit for disposition.

With the arrangements taken care of for the beginning and end of Virginia's after-death journey, all that remained were the logistics of the trip itself. Helene settled on a one-way, one-day vehicle rental from Enterprise; car rental and gas totaled about \$350. It was a Dodge Grand Caravan (known to some as a "soccer-mom van") with fold-down seats and just enough room for the cardboard transit box and wooden platform that Signature Funerals provided to hold Virginia's body. With transit permit in hand, Helene and her sister, Linda, set off for one last road trip with their mom.

During the nine-hour trip, the sisters were able to process their mother's death while she was still with them, in a sense. They laughed, they reminisced, they cried. The

sisters reveled in their new-found appreciation for the Jewish tradition of sitting shiva, where mourners take a week out of their schedules to gather, discuss their loss, and accept the comfort of others. They also lamented the prevailing attitudes about funerals and deaths in our country today, where mourners merely show up to a funeral and spend little or no time with the body after death.

Helene said the trip itself was mostly a breeze. Although Linda had some anxiety about getting pulled over by a patrol officer, there were many moments of levity. When Linda once slammed on the breaks, causing the box to slide forward a bit, Helene gave the box a reassuring pat and a cheery, "Sorry I let her drive, Mom!"

### **Lessons learned**

Overall, Helene is happy with the path she chose for her mother's last journey. The trip was rewarding and much easier than her initial interactions with funeral directors led her to believe. She wants people to know that they have options that deviate from the norm when caring for their loved ones after death, and that choosing to drive a body to its final resting place isn't "weird" or even all that rare. In fact, upon reaching their destination in Illinois, Helene and Linda learned that, the previous day, another family had departed with their loved one's body on a cross-state journey. Their destination? South Dakota.

There are many positive take-aways from the travels of Virginia Carlson and her daughters after her death. Virginia is buried in her hometown, surrounded by her brothers, sisters, grandparents, and husband in the Fairview Park Cemetery of DeKalb. Helene and Linda were able to make new memories and remember old ones with their mom. Finally, their story shows that accessible information and guidance empower us to make funeral and burial decisions that honor our loved ones and nourish our souls. □

### **Resources**

- **Quick Guide to Legal Requirements for Home Funerals in Your State:**  
<http://homefuneralalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Quick-Guide-to-Home-Funerals-By-State.pdf>
- **Nolo:** [www.nolo.com](http://www.nolo.com)



Virginia Carlson with daughter Linda Batsch. Both Linda and Helene helped transport their mother's body, by car, to another state after her death.



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# Transporting Mom

## Resources + determination = a meaningful final road trip

By Jenna McGill, FCA-GKC Volunteer

Helene Carlson and her mother, Virginia Carlson, were lifelong travel partners. For 18 years, Virginia and Helene lived together in several places around the United States. The pair even spent six years together in Africa. When Virginia died last fall after a 94-year journey on this earth, it was time for Helene to take one final cross-country trip with her mother.

Near the end of Virginia's life, she required constant professional care. Helene lives in North Carolina. In part because Helene's sister, Linda Batsch, lived in Kansas, Virginia spent her last days at the Evergreen Community of Johnson County, a nonprofit hospice and elderly care community in Olathe. Virginia's final resting place, however, would be a cemetery plot next to her husband in the small Illinois town of DeKalb.

Ever the planner, Helene began researching her options. She found that funeral homes typically charge \$2,000 to \$3,000 to fly a body from Kansas to O'Hare Airport in Chicago. Based on these excessive prices, a desire to spend some more time with her mom, and respecting the strong dislike for flying that Virginia held in life, Helene decided she would drive the nearly 500 miles to DeKalb—with Virginia's body as a passenger. Yet, when she called around for help, *five* funeral homes or hospices told Helene, outright, that she was not allowed to transport her mother's body over state lines herself.

These unfortunate misconceptions are as common as they are untrue. The roadblocks Helene faced when making



Virginia Carlson, left, with daughter Helene Carlson.

arrangements for her mother's transportation and burial are best summed up by Nancy Petersen, a licensed social worker and board member of both the Funeral Consumer's Alliance of Greater Kansas City and the national FCA. In an email responding to Helene's request for advice, Nancy responded:

"We, as a country, are very bad at dealing with death. Answers from officials/clerks/funeral directors/hospital workers/even hospice personnel are often given based on their personal fear, revulsion or just lack of education about hands-on/family involvement in death events. In many cases, I certainly think it's better to ask forgiveness than permission. Asking could

*See Transport, page 7*