

## **Healing Choices Available in Minnesota**

by Lucy Basler

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**Editor's Note:** Lucy Basler has been an interfaith Chaplain since 1995. She received intensive training in family-directed home funerals guidance and natural burials requirements from Jerrigrace Lyons in California. Since then, she has been teaching others the choices we have in making end-of-life and after-life decisions. Lucy is an experienced family-directed home funerals guide and travels throughout northwestern Wisconsin and northeastern Minnesota educating and helping families plan and carry out home funerals.

She has a wide knowledge of loss and grief experiences having been a hospice chaplain and bereavement coordinator for 11 years. She received a bachelor's degree in education and after completing a personalized theological seminary studies program at Bethany Theological Seminary Studies, was ordained in 1996. She included Clinical Pastoral Education for Chaplaincy in her studies in order to give herself a more extensive sensitivity to the needs of others. Besides officiating at weddings, funerals, and blessings, she is currently a volunteer chaplain for the local county sheriff's department.

Lucy co-founded the Loss and Grief Support Network which covered three counties and was the grief support facilitators' instructor. She also teaches and practices Therapeutic Touch. Lucy is the director of Sacred Ceremonies, Ltd, which was founded in 2008 in northwestern Wisconsin, where she lives with her husband whom she married in 1964. They have four children and six grandchildren.

I have a memory of being driven in a 1938 Buick to my great-grandfather's death vigil where he was laid out at home in a nice box. Mostly I remember playing with my cousins in the barn while the grownups were in the house. I'm sure the funeral must have been the next day. Sixty-five years later I flew in a modern jet to be at the side of my mother a couple of days before she died. My sister and I prepared her body for the three-and-a-half day vigil in her home. Yes, her



Mother's Vigil

great-grandchildren were pitching ball and playing out of doors after checking out great-grandma lying in honor in the living room where music, beautiful flowers, a photo of her and relatives and friends were enjoying conversation. She was buried in a casket a friend had made for her and, right next to my dad, she was lowered into her grave by ropes held by her six grandchildren. It was beautiful!

Most of this experience we had (in Pennsylvania) is available to everyone in all 50 states. In Minnesota this is all possible, and it is legal. Even though my mother took care to pre-plan her funeral through a local funeral home, we got back all her money plus interest, because the funeral home was not used. (Of course, it depends on what kind of plan you choose whether you can get all the money back plus interest.)

The day after our mother died, my sister and I went to a local county registrar and filled out the death certificate information. When a family decides to have a home funeral there is preparation and duties to fulfill. This is definitely not an inconvenience when

you stop to realize that all this effort for your loved one is helping you deal with the immediate grief. The more we can do for our deceased loved one, the longer we can stay with the body (touching, talking to them, sharing a couple of our days with them) the more our brain has time to understand that a death has occurred. Once the brain understands that your loved one has died, a catharsis follows and it feels right to bury or cremate this body that held the essence of the one we loved. You won't need to spend years looking for your loved one wherever you go, which is what may happen when the body is quickly taken away by the funeral home and the brain hasn't had time to register the death.

Often, in our culture, death is something that the general public tries to deny. I think that we have been set up (for disappointment). Death need not be a taboo subject; youth and beauty does not last forever; technology cannot keep us from dying; the services of a funeral home don't necessarily make the death any easier to accept. There surely is sadness, no doubt about it. I



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believe there can be intense, devastating sadness, but there is also “healthy, natural” sadness. So, what can we do for ourselves to experience “healthy grief” and still remain legal?

We are familiar with our ancestors who tended to their dying family members, who cared for the body at the time of death by washing, dressing and placing it in a homemade box in the parlor, and whose neighbors and family came with food and condolences during the day or so after the death and then proceeded out to the “back 40” for the burial: the grave having been dug by those who knew the deceased; very personal, very intimate. The next day, the cows had to be milked, the hay cut and the garden tended to. This was, and is, the cycle of life. And Minnesota law says you can have this same experience!

Needless to say, having a home funeral is not as easy as picking up the phone at the time of death and calling a funeral home. There needs to be preparation. Who can be called to help move the body? Is there dry ice available to buy or is there Techni Ice (also called chemical dry ice—Ebay has good prices) in the freezer? Who will help to wash and clothe the body? Is there a designated family funeral director who will take charge of filling out the Death Application and other legal documents? Will there be a burial (in which case you will need a shroud or a box of some sort, and where will that take place), or cremation (which crematory will take a body from a family rather than a Licensed Funeral Home)?

In Minnesota, there is still the issue of which institution will allow a family to remove their loved one from the premises. Each institution (nursing home, hospital, assisted living) has to set their own policy. From my experi-

ence, it appears that some institutions haven’t heard that families even would want to take their deceased loved one home, never mind that state law allows it.

Burying your loved one “in the back 40” is still legal, with some exceptions. It depends on the ordinances of the county and township in which you want to have the burial. Consult the local zoning officials to see if what you want to do is permitted. It will have to be surveyed, mapped and registered with the county. And, as regarding what can be done about scattering cremains in Minnesota, cremated remains may be buried or scattered on private property with no additional permits required (<http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/hpsc/mortsci/choices.pdf>). There are no written laws that forbid scattering the cremains on or in public waterways and there are no written laws stating that it is permitted.

Speaking as one who has experienced providing a home funeral for a loved one and who has guided many families as they lovingly provided after-death care for their loved one, there are many advantages to having this personal, hands-on, one-of-a-kind, last opportunity to show your love for the life that you intimately shared with another.

### **Suggested reading:**

- ◆ *Choices*—Information on the regulations and requirements of the final disposition of a dead human body in Minnesota (2011). Available at <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/hpsc/mortsci/choices.pdf>.
- ◆ *It’s OK to Die* (2011), Monica Williams-Monica Williams-Murphy, MD, and Kristian Murphy. Available at <http://oktodie.com>.
- ◆ *Final Rights, Reclaiming the American Way of Death* (2011), Joshua Slocum and Lisa Carlson. Available at <http://finalrights.org>.