



Heard It Through the Grapevine

By Glenda Stansbury, CFSP

And now something is happening at InSight Books. Something that we never quite envisioned or expected. And, we know that while the word gets out, there are questions, suppositions, and rumors. So, here we are to give you the tea.

There are 22,327 funeral professionals in the United States. There are 21,000 funeral establishments in the United States. There are 1,200 funeral establishments in Canada. We are spread out from sea to shining sea, from tiny hamlets to sprawling metropolises. And, yet the funeral profession is a small community. When something happens to one of our colleagues in California, it takes but a short period of time before people in Rhode Island have heard about it. We like to talk, we like to hear the latest, we like to know what everyone is doing. Face it, we like to gossip.

These past few years have been a time of turmoil, moments of mergers, access to acquisitions. The funeral news is full of so many changes that it has become hard to keep up without a scorecard.

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Not to bury the lead - InSight Books, Incorporated has entered into an acquisition and partnership with Osiris Software. Now that doesn't sound like a fit, does it? It is actually an interesting story about how all of this came to be. So, let's take a little stroll into history about two visionary men who had no idea that their worlds would reconnect over four decades later.

Most of you are familiar with Doug Manning and the resources he has produced over the years that have provided such valuable guidance and wisdom for grieving people. However, most of you probably do not know the origin story. Doug grew up in Frederick, Oklahoma and had been a Baptist preacher for thirty years when he became interested in the grief process and how to support those on that journey. By this time, he and his family were living in Hereford, Texas when he wrote his book, *Don't Take My Grief Away From Me*, in 1979. He knew that this was the direction that his life was supposed to take - writing and speaking about life transitions - so he began the first forays into finding places where he could have an audience.

Gary and Judy Gray purchased their funeral home in their hometown of Grandfield, Oklahoma in 1960. Grandfield is 29 miles from Frederick so both Gary and Doug grew up in the southwest

corner of Oklahoma, less than 30 minutes away from each other. The Gray family purchased the funeral home in Lawton, Oklahoma in 1982 which became Lawton Ritter Gray.

Somehow the details have been lost to hazy memories, but Gary heard about Doug and invited him to speak about grief at his funeral home. He was the very first funeral director who gave Doug a platform and a place to sell his books. The Gray family began giving *Don't Take My Grief Away* to their families and were great supporters of Doug and his new company, InSight Books. When Doug published the *Continuing Care Series* and began the partnership with The Dodge Company, the Grays adopted those for their aftercare. Their son, Kris, remembers as a teenager that his first job at the funeral home was to address and send out the *Continuing Care* books to the families they had served.

Through the years, the Gray family purchased two more funeral homes, one in Doug's hometown, and served the area of Southwest Oklahoma for over fifty years. Son, Kris became licensed. Daughter, Kara, became a CPA and a licensed funeral director. Both were preparing to carry on the family tradition.

As the second generation became more involved with the daily work of the business, it was clear that they needed more modernization and computerization of the workflow, especially keeping up with four locations. Kris' husband, Ben Adams, was a computer development specialist, and they put him to work to create something that they could use for their firms. As they implemented the solutions, they discovered that this was an answer for many firms to provide a platform for tracking all the details and information required for each service. Kara also saw a need to provide accounting services that understood the unique and specific needs of the funeral professionals and their businesses and her husband, Marty Ludlum, came on as the education director.

So, in 2009, Osiris Software and Ludlum & Mannen CPA's launched under Funeral Director's Resource. Kris and Kara were still active in the funeral home and beginning to explore what serving other firms would look like. Then, as things changed, the funeral homes were sold to Carriage Services in 2012, and

Kara and Kris continued to expand and market their offerings.

Meanwhile, Doug had moved InSight Books from Texas to Oklahoma City in 1995 and we, his daughters, Kathy and Cindy and I, took over running the publishing company. In 1999, we began InSight Institute Celebrant Training. There are many articles about Celebrants, we won't spend a lot of time on that story here. Really, there are a bunch. Go read some of them.

Over the years, we would see Kris and Kara at state and national funeral conventions. We knew they had a software company but didn't really know much more than that. They were just friends who used to live in Lawton and now lived in Edmond, and we always enjoyed seeing them. Kris and Ben and their children even attend the same church where I attend.

Osiris Software continued to grow in the increasingly crowded market of funeral home business software platforms. What set them apart was the experience and understanding of funeral professionals who had been in that chair in the office trying to make things work, and the commitment of customer service from a family-owned business. The accounting practice provides input in the development of features and continues to support the integration between the accounting needs and the software needs.

Last December, Kris and Kara came to the Celebrant Training in Oklahoma City. They said they had always wanted to come and thought it would be valuable so they could advise their clients about the importance of utilizing Celebrants. And, yes, they had to do the same work as any participant and presented their funeral services on the last day. And then, as we were packing up, Kara said to me, "We think we would like to buy InSight." What?? Where did that come from?? What do we do now??

Of course, we at InSight had begun those conversations about what was next. After watching so many firms sell or go into acquisitions, after observing so many vendors becoming folded under one umbrella, it was a topic of consideration. We are three women of Medicare age with a 91-year-old owner. This is not going to last forever. InSight Books has supported all of us all these years, but we knew that, in order for Doug's books and Celebrant training to continue, something was going to have to happen. And, out of the blue, something did.

It took some moments of reflection and certainly some moments of concern. How exactly will that work? What does this mean for our customers? How will Doug feel about someone else owning his copyrights? And why does a software and accounting firm want a grief publishing company? That seems to be the prevailing question. So, it took us some months to figure it all out and come to agreements and to close the deal in May.

Kara and Kris have been very clear that their goal is continuing to spread the availability of Doug's bereavement resources and Celebrant Training through their platforms. They appreciate and honor all the wisdom that Doug has provided around the world for fifty years and they are committed to continuing that legacy. They know from their years of working with their father how important bereavement and aftercare can be for families, they are completely committed to the growth of Celebrants, and they understand the complexity and complications of family businesses.

We all must stop and honor such an amazing circle of life moment for these two visionary men, Gary and Doug, who grew up within 30 miles of each other, and now they have lived to see their family businesses come together. You can't make this stuff up.

So, what will change? Nothing for the time being. We have moved to the Osiris' office building and are going through the pain and agony of combining computer and process programs and downsizing from a 4,000 square foot office. But that's temporary and will soon be conquered by people much smarter than I.

We will continue to sell our books and resources to you through your Dodge Representatives. We will continue to offer Celebrant Training all around the country and beyond. We will continue to have a presence at national conventions. I will continue to offer seminars and webinars.

The rumor that I am retiring is wildly wrong. I'm on the road for the rest of my life, and beyond. It says so in my contract. How things will unfold and how we will blend our companies will be a long-game process that we are just beginning to figure out.

And when people have asked the obvious question, "Why?" Kara has just smiled and said, "Wait and see." And so, we will. Change is hard. Change is required. Change is exciting. Change is exhausting. Change is inevitable. And now you can say you heard it through the grapevine from one of the head grapes.

PS While writing this, we received the news about Todd Van Beck. By the time you receive this, many words and tributes and special memories will be shared. But we just wanted to add our thoughts about this unique guy who offered so much to the funeral profession through his devotion to its history and his challenge for all of us to be better. Todd, we will all miss you. Thanks for your humor, your dedication and your example. InSight Books

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