



glenda@
insightbooks.com

**ICCFA Magazine
subject spotlight**

► **Glenda Stansbury, CFSP**, is vice president of marketing for In-Sight Books, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

www.insightbooks.com

► She is a licensed funeral director and embalmer and trains funeral directors, cemeterians and others as Certified Celebrants who meet with families to talk about their loved ones and plan personalized funeral services.

► She and her father, Doug Manning, conduct celebrant training as professors in the College of 21st Century Services at ICCFA University and at other locations across the country through the Insight Institute.

- **ICCFAU 2013 will be July 19-24** at the Fogelman Conference Center, Memphis, Tennessee. Call 1.800.645.7700 or go to www.iccfa.com for more information.

- Contact Stansbury or go to the In-Sight Books website for information about celebrant training sessions scheduled around the country.

► Stansbury is adjunct faculty with the funeral service department at the University of Central Oklahoma, where she teaches courses in funeral service communication and the psychology of grief and oversees practicum students.

Editor's note

The ICCFA believes in celebrant training for funeral directors and cemeterians who wish to better help families and to be successful in the 21st century. In addition to articles by celebrant trainer Glenda Stansbury, ICCFA Magazine will be running, as a regular feature, stories by celebrants about specific services they put together for families.

Contact ICCFA Magazine Managing Editor Susan Loving, sloving@iccfa.com:

- if you are a celebrant with **a story about a service** that the family involved is willing to let you share in order to inspire others or
- if you have any **tips for celebrant services** such as the ones from Tanya Scotece on page ??.

CELEBRANTS

Do you believe in the value of what you offer families? Then why are so many of your families choosing 'cremation, no services'? Maybe it's because you're waiting until the arrangement conference to make your case, and by then it's probably too late.

The articulation factor: What we must learn to say to families

My favorite show on television for the past three years has been "The Big Bang Theory." The writing is wickedly funny and there is something endearing about incredibly intelligent scientists who understand and revel in concepts, equations and theories that we mortals have no chance of grasping trying to find love and acceptance in a world that doesn't embrace them and relegates them to nerd status.

One of the best parts of the show is the title. Each week the episode is titled in very scientific geek-speak to describe a mundane everyday experience. Some recent ones: "The Speckerman Recurrence" was about one of the characters dealing with a bully from his high school days; "The Good Guy Fluctuation" dealt with a cheating boyfriend; "The Isolation Permutation" showed one of the female leads becoming jealous because the two other girls went wedding shopping without her. It just makes you feel smarter to read the titles, even if the script is basic situation comedy fare with a physicist twist.

And so, in thinking about the topic I'm addressing in this article, I decided to title it, a la Big Bang, "The Articulation Factor."

I hope we can discuss an issue that presents possibly the biggest dilemma and source of frustration for funeral homes and cemeteries across the country and feel like extremely smart people while doing so.

We hear it constantly. How do we convince people who have decided to have an immediate cremation with no viewing, no service, no burial—nothing—to consider the alternative? Why do people not want what we have to offer? Why are

so many of our customers walking out the door with an alternative container in their hands, never to be seen again?

At conferences, conventions, meetings or wherever two or more funeral directors are gathered together, the conversation inevitably turns to this conundrum. The call load for cremation may be increasing, but the revenue and income per service is decreasing.

Families are convinced that cheaper and quicker is better, and we are left nodding our heads while they walk out saying to themselves, "I showed them. I didn't let them talk me into anything!" How do we combat that? Should we combat it? What will the future hold if we do not combat it?

Funeral directors have three very powerful tools: ears, knowledge and a voice. We sometime forget that we are the paid professionals the family has chosen to help them through this life experience and that we truly are the smartest people in the room when it comes to all aspects of the funeral process. We need to learn how to embrace that confidence, that passion and that belief.

First we need to learn how to listen, to hear the stories of the family, to hear the importance of a life lived and how the family would like to honor that life. And then we need to learn how to open our mouths and express it to the very people who need to hear it. We need to articulate the value of the funeral and how each element of a funeral can assist the family in their grief journey.

I'm going to make some suggestions in a chronological and experiential way to show you the opportunities we have for "the articulation factor."

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Go! Do not send your apprentice, your part-timer or your driver.

Even if you use a call service for removal, the funeral director needs to be there.

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The first call

We could write an entire article on first calls, about the importance and power of being there at that very first step in the journey. For the purposes of this article, there is only one thing to say about first call: Go! Do not send your apprentice, your part-timer or your driver.

Even if you use a call service for removal, the funeral director needs to be there. If our profession can't figure that out, all the rest of these thoughts will ultimately be moot.

Before the arrangement

You may have read this before, but it bears repeating. We are firm advocates of touching base with the family during the "gap" between removal and arrangement. It is when the family is left alone with their questions, concerns and fears that they make decisions with little information or surf the Web to find out what their options are.

Therefore, it greatly benefits the family as well as your company when the funeral director takes the time to answer many of the inevitable questions before the family even gets to the arrangement room. This is especially imperative if the funeral director is not present at first call (see first call discussion above).

A visit to the home or, at the minimum, a phone call to let the family know that the director is available for whatever they may need, is vital and a valuable use of time and staff. Those hours between when the removal car drives away and the family sits down in the arrangement room can either be the time when the family decides, on its own and to its own detriment, to forgo services, or when the family learns, thanks to an informed and caring funeral professional, about the many options available for honoring their loved one.

During "the gap," the funeral director has an opportunity to widen the family's thinking about options. The alternative is to leave the family to their own devices. That's when the computer comes on, Google appears and off the family goes on a search for information, pricing and alternatives to choices they do not want to

have to make in the first place.

Without some guidance, the family will come into the arrangement conference with decisions set in concrete based upon no information, horror stories from the Internet or reactions to bad funerals previously experienced, and the funeral director can do little to sway their thinking or offer alternatives.

The funeral director could stop by the home with some coffee and donuts, a few sub sandwiches or some paper goods, along with a funeral planner or packet of information. This tells the family that you are there to meet their needs, whatever they might be. What do you say when making this "gap" visit? You can start out with something like this:

"I just wanted to stop by to check in on you, see how you are doing and see if there is anything you need or any questions I could answer before we get together later today (or whenever the arrangement conference is scheduled).

"I'm sure you have a hundred thoughts flying around and it is difficult to concentrate on any of them. I want to assure you that we will work together to take care of all of those important decisions, details and arrangements and I'm more than happy to clear up any concerns you may have right now."

The discussion then might include, but does not need to be limited to, the value of having a viewing before cremation, a celebrant service or personalized tribute that fits their loved one and family, the importance of a funeral experience for family and friends, etc. The information you drop off certainly should let them know about their options.

Even if they look at you standing at their front door and say they have nothing to ask right now, never underestimate the power of just making that effort, the long-lasting effect of articulating your care and your expertise.

Please notice that I clearly said "the funeral director" should do this. This is not the place for a concierge or an apprentice or a part-timer who is sent on an errand to deliver coffee and cookies.

The first call and the "gap" meeting are the most important times you can spend

with the family. I cannot say this enough times or in enough different ways. Unless we touch the family from the beginning, we are playing catch up, and we never get a second chance to make that first impression.

After a recent shoulder surgery, I was lying on the couch trying to overcome the effects of the meds and the pain of the incision and wondering why I thought this was such a good idea.

The phone rang; it was my surgeon. It was not the nurse or the physician's assistant or the secretary. It was the professional I had chosen calling to see how I was, whether I had any questions or if I needed anything.

I was overwhelmed and thankful. I didn't have any questions, but I felt better that he had made the effort to touch base with me. A few weeks ago, a friend of mine asked me to recommend a surgeon. Who do you think I told her was the very best doctor in the city?

Do you see the connection?

The arrangement room

In a perfect world, funeral directors would return to the days of making arrangements in the home. People were comfortable in their own setting and it seemed less like a business arrangement and more like a meeting with an honored friend invited to help the family in a time of need.

I realize this probably is not going to happen anytime in the near future. Therefore, we need to give a great deal of thought to the location and setting of our arrangement rooms.

Ask yourself: Are you more comfortable sitting at a long wooden conference table or on an overstuffed couch with a coffee table you can put your feet on? The answer should be obvious.

It's time to make the arrangement room look more like a living room and less like an attorney's office or a furniture store. Most arrangement rooms today have way too much "stuff" lying around and are intimidating to people who are already overwhelmed by grief and probably operating with little sleep or food.

Every piece of furniture, brochure, book or sample in an arrangement room should

I am also a firm advocate of creating an atmosphere of “ceremony” every time you interact with the family, including the arrangement experience.

be reexamined, not from the standpoint of “Does this help us sell something?” but rather from the standpoint of “How does someone who has been up all night after losing a husband of 52 years feel when sitting here?”

The principles of simplicity, comfort and a welcoming atmosphere should guide you as you set up an arrangement room. The location of the coffee pot and the bottled water with the funeral home logo on it is of much less importance than the ability of the funeral director to sit next to the grieving widow and pat her hand if needed.

The “stuff” will get sold only after we have heard their hearts.

The arrangement ceremony

I am also a firm advocate of creating an atmosphere of “ceremony” every time you interact with the family, including the arrangement experience.

This could mean asking the family to bring some special items or pictures of the loved one and placing them on the table, lighting a candle and beginning by saying something like this:

“We are here to honor _____, and want to take a moment to acknowledge the importance of a life lived as we come together to plan a fitting tribute to honor _____’s life among you.”

That can go miles toward calming upset and angry minds and helping the family focus. It also says to the family that the funeral director is not just there to take their money but is very much attuned to the occasion and the loss and will be a guide for them.

Even if the family does not bring anything with them, the pausing, the acknowledging—the ceremony—is vital in setting a tone of remembrance for the family.

The arrangement bucket

For several years, Doug Manning and I have used the concept of buckets when talking to funeral directors in training settings. We try to help funeral directors visualize the family sitting in front of them as having walked in with a bucket full of feelings, fears, hurts and uncertainties.

Nothing that is said to that family will make a difference until they feel someone has heard what is in their bucket.

This is where funeral directors have failed miserably for years. The arranger is so intent on getting down to business and getting the GPL on the table that feelings and needs are ignored and families walk out of the arrangement room feeling they have been taken for an expensive ride and no one cared how they felt, what they needed to say or who their loved one was.

It is imperative that the first thing you do with every family is acknowledge their loss and let them talk about their loved one. It might be saying something as simple as:

“This must have been such a shock for you,” or

“What a long journey this has been for your family,” or

“I can’t imagine what it feels like to lose a young child,” or

“What a great long life your mother lived. I’ll bet you have some wonderful stories and memories of her,” or

“This must really hurt.”

The words are not the magic. The act of stopping to acknowledge their feelings and opening the door to hear their story is powerful and life changing. Almost everyone will have a “death story” about where they were when the death occurred: “She waited until I could get there”; “He waited until we all left the room”; “I whispered that it was OK for him to let go, and he died.”

Almost everyone wants to share their death story and, in our opinion, the first person who listens to that story is a hero in the family’s eyes.

You will encounter some families who don’t want to talk much or to share, but the majority will be extremely grateful that the professional they chose to accompany them on this unfamiliar journey is interested and compassionate and willing to be lend an ear, or a shoulder to cry on.

The arrangement consultant

For several years there has been much discussion about changing the “order taker” mentality, but not a lot has been done to encourage or provide training

in effective new behavior. The usual approach funeral directors take is to mildly offer options, then sit back and hope the family didn’t think they were too pushy or trying to up-sell. This has resulted in some pretty awful funerals, as well as loss of revenue for the funeral homes.

The family hires the funeral director to be their expert, to be the professional. A person who walks into the office of a neurosurgeon, an attorney or a wedding planner expects to be dealing with a confident professional who knows what he/she is doing, not one who apologizes for the cost or the procedures involved.

It is way past time for the funeral profession to truly believe in the value of what they have to offer, to explain with pride and conviction that the experience of a funeral is an important first step for families in grief. That means taking ownership in articulating:

- The value of viewing, regardless of the means of disposition
- The value of ceremony and gathering for some type of service
- The value of accepting expressions of sympathy and honor from friends and family
- The value of a well-planned and well-executed funeral service containing elements that make sense and are a meaningful part of the whole service.
- The value of having a final resting place as an important part of the grief experience.

If you as a professional cannot clearly define and verbalize to someone else why each of these elements is important—dare I say vital—for a healthy funeral and grieving experience, I suggest you stop reading this article right now and go spend some time working that out for yourself. Don’t worry, the article will be here when you get back.

All of these points should be made with each family to be sure that they have fully explored all the options as presented by their professional. Too often the family says “cremation” or “no service,” and the pen goes down and the folder closes.

Even if the family decides not to take advantage of any of the wide array of options presented, the funeral director will

Tips for celebrants and celebrant services

Using music

I have found that my celebrant services flow better when I select three pieces of music to use in a specific way. When I am talking (and listening) to the family, I find out what type of music the deceased liked—specific individuals or groups, eras or genres, specific songs.

I narrow down the possibilities to three that I incorporate into the service:

- I begin the service by playing one prelude song (fairly loud) right before I go up to the podium.
- The second song is played during the candle-lighting ceremony (from the In-Sight Institute) about half-way through the service.



by **Tanya Scotece, CFSP**
Scotece is a funeral director and certified celebrant

with Farley Funeral Homes & Crematory, Venice, Florida.
tanya@farleyfuneralhome.com

• I close with the third song as people come up to pay their final respects (at the casket or urn) and during the rose petal ceremony.

You always have the option to incorporate more music or clips of music. I served one family for whom I did a Jeopardy theme, and we incorporated the quiz show's distinctive music while I was talking about the deceased's love for the show.

The members of one family I worked with were all musicians and the wife wanted seven songs played, from beginning to end. I gave her my opinion and her response was, "If people are coming to pay respects to my husband,

then they can sit and listen to all seven songs. They were all classical musicians, too!" We played all seven songs, from beginning to end.

To begin with

The first tip below for starting services is applicable to all, while the second is for services for veterans:

• I have started asking everyone to "please **silence your cell phones** as we bid our final farewell to (name of decedent)." This really does seem to be necessary these days, whether you're in church, in a movie theater or even at a funeral!

• For celebrant **services for veterans**, I now am beginning by having everyone rise and recite the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag. I have had very favorable comments from families about doing this.

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have done his/her job as a professional, ensuring the family is making informed decisions rather than knee-jerk or avoidance decisions.

The funeral director must assume the role of an experienced guide with a strong conviction that these are important decisions to be made. A few examples:

The family says "no viewing":

"It is my responsibility as a funeral professional to not only be trained to care for the dead, but also to be a guardian of the living. Studies and writings by experts in the field of grief recovery tell us that having an opportunity for a final viewing is extremely important for a healthy grief journey, even if it is a private family gathering time.

"It will give each family member a chance to face their new reality while sharing the comfort that comes from being among others also searching for ways to cope with the loss. We would strongly encourage you to consider giving the gift of goodbye to your family and your loved one."

Or:

"While the law requires that we have at least one family view the body for identification, we believe this is an important, sacred moment of goodbye. We will have your loved one on our

beautiful reposing bed and give your family members a chance to say their final goodbyes. What time tomorrow would be good for your family?"

The family chooses to scatter:

"There are many wonderful ways to honor the life of your loved one and to carry on his memory and legacy. While there may be a very meaningful spot or location that your loved one chose for scattering, it has been our experience that at some point families need a place of remembrance.

"For some families, the ability to physically visit a grave or have a memorial marker where the urn is buried or even a tree planted in a special place can be most important in dealing with their grief.

"May I suggest that you take some time to consider all the options before you make a final decision and, if you scatter, think about saving some of the cremated remains for a memorial spot at a later time? And when you are ready to make those decisions, please know that we are ready and able to help you create a ceremony for that final tribute and farewell."

The family doesn't want any type of service:

"We believe that every life deserves to be honored in a wonderful and fitting way.

Our firm has trained professional life tribute specialists called celebrants who can work with you to put together a service that gives voice to your memories.

"The celebrant will take your stories and weave them into a gathering experience that will tell the story of your loved one's life and times and give each person attending special remembrances to take away with them.

"The service can be as religious or non-religious as is appropriate for you and your family and your loved one. In our experience, a well done personalized tribute that honors the life is the most important first step in the grief journey.

The family just wants family and friends to get up and speak at the service:

"In my experience, when you just open up the microphone for speakers from the floor, it can get too long and sometimes uncomfortable or even embarrassing.

"If you would like to have several family members and friends speak during the service, one of our professional celebrants or funeral directors will work with you as a master of ceremonies to help organize all the speakers, talking to each one ahead of time to make sure the stories do not overlap and to give a sense of continuity and framework to the service.

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The location of the coffee pot and the bottled water with the funeral home logo on it is of much less importance than the ability of the funeral director to sit next to the grieving widow and pat her hand if needed. The “stuff” will get sold only after we have heard their hearts.

“We want to do everything possible to ensure that every part of the funeral service is meaningful and comforting.”

The family wants to have a private ceremony away from the funeral home:

“We take our responsibility as your funeral professional very seriously and want to be available to help you with the ceremony so that you do not have to worry. This is your time to welcome the comfort and presence of your friends and family, not a time to be dealing with the details.

“We will provide one of our staff members to be present to make sure everything is set up and that everything runs smoothly. The cost will be minimal and it will take such a burden off you and the family.”

These are merely brief examples

illustrating many of the decisions made during arrangements in which a director needs to be a guiding voice, a professional who knows what grieving people need and a confident planner who knows how to help the family create the service they want.


Your goal should be to hear everyone who uses your funeral home say, “I couldn’t have done it without you.”

This approach does not come naturally or easily to many. The first step is to actually believe in the value of the funeral as outlined above. Then it requires a vision and commitment from the owner and the entire firm that no family will walk out of an arrangement room without being given options, guidance and assistance geared to help them plan a healthy and healing funeral experience.

It takes practice to get comfortable

listening, articulating and offering. It may take role-playing, videotaping or partnering with a mentor, but we all need to learn how to master the articulation factor.

We need to own the fact that we are the smartest people in the room when it comes to planning a meaningful, touching and lasting ceremony in honor of the deceased and for the family. We need to release our inner funeral geek, claim the power of knowledge and experience and be confident in how we approach each family.

Learning and putting into practice the approach is time-consuming, but it may be the only thing that will save funeral service in the coming years. People who find meaning and value in an experience will return and be willing to pay for that experience again. Just ask Disney. 



todd@
toddthecelebrant.com

**ICCFA Magazine
author spotlight**

► **Reinholt** is a certified celebrant based in Edmonton, Alberta, working with several funeral homes in Edmonton and the surrounding area.

He received his funeral director's and embalmer's diploma through Mount Royal University, Calgary, and is a licensed funeral director in the province of Alberta.

www.toddthecelebrant.com

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- if you are a celebrant with **a story about a service** that the family involved is willing to let you share in order to inspire others
- or
- if you have any **tips for conducting good celebrant services**.

How to become a celebrant

Becoming a celebrant involves more than learning how to conduct a personalized funeral or memorial service. Celebrants trained by the InSight Institute learn how to talk and listen to grieving families and how to work with funeral directors.

- The ICCFA University **College of 21st Century Services includes celebrant training** by funeral director and celebrant Glenda Stansbury and minister Doug Manning. Students successfully completing the course receive certification from the InSight Institute as celebrants. **ICCF AU 2013 will be July 19-24** at the Fogelman Conference Center, Memphis, Tennessee. Details will be available in the spring of 2013 at www.iccf.com or by calling 1.800.645.7700.
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CELEBRANTS

It's easy to say that everyone deserves to be honored and remembered with a funeral or memorial service, but sometimes difficult to put into practice. Celebrant Todd Reinholt took the time to find a meaningful way to celebrate the life of a homeless man.

He died homeless but not forgotten

As celebrants, we are called upon once in a while to officiate at services that are a bit out of the ordinary. In fact, this happens to me quite often.

I recall a service I was asked to perform for a man who died at the age of 58. He had no family, no home and no possessions, with the exception of the clothing he wore.

Clarence had many health problems, and his support system was a shelter in Calgary, Alberta, which in essence was his home. His family was the shelter support team and others who came to the shelter for help.

His service was small, as expected. The attendees were his support workers and a few others from the shelter, who were brought to the funeral home on a bus.

Clarence loved to play cards, so prior to the service, I placed a royal flush in his hands as he lay in the casket.

He had a sense of humor and would often joke with the staff at the shelter about needing a new pair of socks—despite the fact that both of his legs had been amputated years earlier.

Saying he needed a new pair of socks became a standing joke between him and the staff. Of course I placed a pair of socks in the casket with him as well.

The service was not long, but I focused on Clarence's personality and what other people had told me about him. He had a sense of humor; he was cranky at times; he was not one to mince words!

We opened the service up to anyone who wanted to come

forward and share a story or two. A couple of his friends stepped forward and spoke briefly.

At the conclusion of the service, I announced that everyone there would be receiving a pair of socks and a set of hand warmers in memory of Clarence.

It was the middle of winter and I had done some research at the shelter while preparing for the service, learning that donations of warm items of clothing were welcome and needed.

I felt that giving out socks and hand warmers would be a good way to memorialize Clarence as well as a way to provide for the care and comfort of the homeless people attending the service. Everyone seemed to appreciate the gifts.

On that day, I believe we made a difference not only for this man who had no family but also for many others whose day-to-day life is far from easy.



People who attended the funeral were given hand warmers as well as socks.



Clarence loved to play cards, so prior to the service, I placed a royal flush in his hands as he lay in the casket.



WE WANT A PARTY

She was dying. Her hospital bed was set up in the sunroom of her parent's home. Her husband sat on one side, her hospice nurse on the other, and her parents, who had invited her to move back home after her ovarian cancer diagnosis, hovered in the background, helpless and hurt as they watched their daughter suffer the agonies of this cruel disease. The day I was asked to come to the home, she had just days to live.

So why was a celebrant coming to meet with a family before the death? They had some very specific ideas about how to have a service for this wonderful woman and wanted to talk about them while she could still have input and offer her feelings. They'd been referred to me by one of their friends who had attended a service I had the privilege of doing a few months before. She told them, "She will honor her life and tell her story. You must call her."



Give families what they want in honoring their loved one's life but also what they need – a time to grieve before the celebration commences.

I sat down next to her bed with my celebrant notebook at the ready. Before I could get my pen out, the husband said, “We are going to have two parties. One just for close friends and family, with wine, lots of pictures and music and people telling stories. Then, the next day, we will have another party for anyone who wants to come, catered food and wine, lots of pictures and music and let everyone tell stories.” He went on, “And then we are going to do the exact same thing back in Maryland, where we live.”

They were in their mid-50s, well-educated professionals, she a high school history teacher working on her doctorate and he a real-life rocket scientist who worked for NASA. Religion or embalming or traditional funeral elements were not even topics of discussion.

My first thought was, “So why am I here?” If a family wishes to have a story-

telling party, then they probably do not want a celebrant. I was confused.

My second thought was, “So this is the new face of funerals?” – people so determined not to have what is considered the expected funeral experience that they will bend over backward to not use a firm, not have a service, not embrace anything that feels funereal. *We want a party.*

As we continued to talk, I tried very hard to listen to what was being said and also what was not being said. It was clear that the mother and father were really struggling with the idea of not having that one moment, that one experience that they could call a funeral service for their daughter. The son-in-law was adamant that he didn't want anything to do with funerals. The woman who lay there waiting for the inevitable had no real opinion. She was focused on her pain and her breathing from one minute to

the next and truly did not care what happened, as long as there were lots of candles and some of her favorite songs.

I finally offered, “Stories and sharing from family and friends are wonderful, and those stories will be cherished. But in my experience, on down the road in your grief journey, I think it will be important that you have some organized and cohesive collection of memories, a life tribute if you will, that you can look back on.” I went on to explain that I would meet with them and gather all of the stories and put them together in a service that would share her life and her personality and her spirit. If they wished to choose a few people to speak in the course of the service, they would be an integral and coordinated part of the entire tribute rather than random stories offered from around the room. (Anyone who has been to a celebrant training can attest to the fact that

I'm neither a fan nor an advocate of "open mic night at the karaoke bar.")

You could feel the tension subside. They had no idea what to do, and so the good old "celebration of life party" concept became the only frame of reference upon which to build. But now they were hearing that there *was* a way to have a service without having *a service*. Here was someone who was willing to work with them to have the type of gathering that was meaningful for them while still being a professional guide who would offer suggestions and experience that would be important as they began to grieve together.

While sitting in that sunroom watching this exhausted, brave woman live out her remaining days surrounded by people who adored her and who would miss her beyond comprehension, it struck me: These truly are our next customers, the growing number of families that wish to use the funeral home only as a removal and disposal service. Please take care of the body because we don't want to. Outside of that, we see no need for you. You are so yesterday, so black suits and somber faces, so impersonal and disinterested officiants, so limited options and burdensome traditions. *We want a party.*

There are two grave concerns about this next phase of funeral avoidance as we consider the changing face of our profession that I hope we can consider in this discussion.

The Wedding Planner Isn't Just a Bad Movie

Some of us are old enough to remember the 1950s and early '60s. It was a time of conformity, of acceptance by anonymity, of doing exactly what our neighbors did so people wouldn't talk about us. Weddings during those decades were all cut

from the same organza. The dresses were modest and always white, the music was *I Love You Truly* and *The Lord's Prayer*, the flower girl was a darling niece or the child of a friend, florists took care of all of the details, the reception was cake and punch and nuts, and everyone got married in a church. Those few daring ones who went to Vegas or eloped were certainly gossiped about in the grocery store.

Similarly, funerals were all very predictable. Everyone went to the funeral home, everyone was embalmed and buried, most had services in the church and then went to the house where the

The question must be asked: What do we have to offer those families that completely reject any and all forms of our business model? Are we allowing surmountable obstacles to be our excuse for not climbing out of the traditional chasm?

neighbor ladies had brought casseroles and cakes to last a month. A few brave souls opted for cremation, but it was so rare that most adults of this era had never seen an urn.

Then weddings began to change. The songs evolved from John Denver to Bare Naked Ladies; the flower girl is the daughter of the bride and groom; the dresses have become bold fashion statements; receptions are sit-down meals with champagne and plenty of alcohol, which means that very few are held in churches; elaborate gifts and cakes are the norm; and ev-

everyone wants a destination wedding with a theme. And out of this metamorphosis, a new profession was born.

In the 1990s, event planners realized that there was a void in the wedding business. Florists had given up the role as coordinator, and the ceremonies – and budgets – were ballooning. Someone needed to step in and help these poor brides spend their money and realize their vision. There are now wedding planners in every city, the Wedding Channel on cable TV, a national Association of Bridal Consultants and multiple training schools for becoming a wedding planner.

Just as weddings have evolved, so have funerals. The implication for the funeral business is that people are turning away in droves from our beautiful buildings, our chapels with pews and stained glass, our impressive cars, our quiet halls, the same-service-different-day ministers and our dignified staff. They want a place to feel comfortable, to have the type of service that fits them, which includes an officiant who tells the story of their loved one, food, alcohol, multimedia pictures, good music and lots of time to visit.

I've heard so many funeral directors snort in derision at the idea of becoming an event planner. "I'll never do that. I'm a funeral director." Well, the fact of the matter is that we can quickly become as obsolete as the florist who refused to adapt to the changing consumer.

Sure, florists still sell flowers for weddings, but they are not an integral part of the experience and are not realizing the financial gains from the new reality.

Sure, funeral directors can still do removals and embalm or cremate bodies, but if we are not willing to embrace the new expectations of the families we serve, we can sit at home while the service is taking place someplace else with someone else running the event.

The question must be asked: What do we have to offer those families that completely reject any and all forms of our business model? How do we answer those families that ask if you can arrange for catering, for wine, for a place to have a gathering? What do we say to those families who say, "We want a party"?

Some readers can shake their heads because they are limited *at their location* by state statutes and regulations. But even in those states that allow food and drink in the funeral home, how many of us are

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truly taking advantage of accepting the role of funeral *director*? Have firms in states that prohibit food and drink been proactive in seeking out other ways to serve families or do they simply shrug and say, "Sorry, the law won't let us." Once we get beyond selling boxes, books and DVDs, how equipped are we to walk with a family that needs and wants something completely different than what we are comfortable offering? Are we allowing surmountable obstacles to be our excuse for not climbing out of the traditional chasm?

Reality Show Candidates

The second concern/danger in this type of change is that grieving people really don't need a "party." Just like the family with which I met, they believe that the opposite of a boring, meaningless, impersonal funeral experience is a party. What we need to be ready to help them understand is that grief ignored is grief compounded and that it is vital to their mental health that they stop and acknowledge the death while honoring the life. *These families need a service.* They need a service that fits them and allows them to grieve in the way that is right for them.

I'm an avid fan of the *Hoarders* reality TV shows. There is an incredible level of interest and intrigue with this sad segment of the population that struggles with a debilitating disorder. But, contrary to what my husband says as he smirks while I watch, I do not watch these episodes out of train wreck fascination. I'm doing grief research.

You can't watch a single episode without hearing, "Everything was fine until..." until a baby died, until a parent died, until a divorce happened, until a trauma occurred. Each of these people suffered a loss of some type and none of them were given the chance to grieve that loss in a healthy and appropriate way. And so, to protect themselves from losing something again, they began to keep everything.

It has been well documented by a host of grief and bereavement experts that an ignored death becomes a problem death. When people are not given the opportunity – or they avoid the opportunity – to grasp the reality of the death and to say goodbyes in a safe and structured setting, there are huge boulders waiting for them on the road back to health.

By failing to help people understand the

power and importance of a personalized, unique and special service to commemorate the death, we are creating more people who might show up on reality shows. TLC and A&E are very grateful.

And Now... What?

Our future holds a twofold challenge and responsibility: to be expert and vocal consultants on grief and how the funeral experience plays a vital role in that experience and to be expert and vocal consultants on planning events that incorporate all of the elements our new client is looking for.

How do we do that? Of course, given my particular interest, I'm going to say that the first step is to have funeral celebrants available to offer at all times. Whether you have a celebrant on staff or utilize independent contractors, using celebrants as your first option rather than your last-gasp effort will keep many families from walking out the door after deciding that you have nothing to offer. When they hear that you have a trained professional who will work with them to capture the story and the essence of their

loved one, they will know they have come to the right professional to guide them through their planning.

Second is location, location, location. If your firm isn't conducive to having events because of space or regulatory or staffing limitations, then become the expert on what *is* available in your city. Where are the event centers, the hotel ballrooms, the wedding chapels, the open-air spots where a tribute service could be held? What equipment do we need to have in portable setups for these sites? A projector and screen for DVD tributes? A self-contained sound system and podium? Do we need to provide seating?

What are the expenses for time, coordination and use of the hall or center? Who are the caterers we can work with or do we need to hire and train our own staff? What are the requirements for serving wine, beer or other alcohol?

Are we willing to change our vision of who we are in order to stay relevant and in business? Are we willing to change our pricing structure and how we charge for our professional services to meet the needs of the next generation? If we are

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not, then a whole new profession of event planners will be more than happy to step in and fill that void. Just ask your florists.

One Week Later

Exactly a week after I met with the family, the woman died. I went back to the house and they shared the endearing and special stories of this adventurous and amazing daughter, wife and mother. We discussed what they wanted included in the tribute and they selected three people to speak at the service that I would incorporate into the eulogy.

They spoke highly of their time at the funeral home and the staff there but saw the funeral home's role only as the cremator of the body and dispenser of death certificates. They did not expect – nor did they receive – any other help from the funeral professionals they had chosen.

Then they spent three days frantically searching for a place to have a service. It was December 19 and many of the venues were already booked or were charging outrageous fees for the use of their facility. Since the family knew the funeral home did not have the ability to do what they wanted, they were on their own to

navigate the waters of putting together the event. Finally, they decided to hold it at a friend's home on a Sunday evening.

The family and friends put together a DVD that was played. They glued together

Are we willing to change our vision of who we are in order to meet the needs of the next generation, to stay relevant and in business?

er a picture board and borrowed an easel from a friend. They went to Kinko's and printed service folders on purple paper, her favorite color. They brought snowmen to hand out to all of the attendees. They hired caterers and purchased cases of wine. They took care of every detail, believing this was their only option.

That night, about 60 people arrived and crowded together in the various rooms so they could hear and try to see the service. It was not ideal – it was a little uncomfortable – but I stood up in front of the fire-

place in the den, with family and friends sitting on couches and chairs around the house, and we had a service that told the story of Liz. We lit candles, honored her life and acknowledged the pain of the loss; two of her friends briefly spoke about her touch on their lives; and I closed by giving everyone a word-find game with important words from Liz's life experiences.

After our time together, which took about 40 minutes, the caterers served dinner, the wine flowed and they all shared stories over the rest of the evening. Before I left, the husband and mother both hugged me and said that it was exactly what they had hoped for.

A few days later, the mother of the deceased called. She said, "I just have to tell you how perfect that service was. It was elegant and so much more than I expected." I was a bit impressed – I'd never been called elegant before! But what she was trying to say was the service flowed together, made sense, told the story and captured memories in a way that will be meaningful for her in the hard days and weeks to come in a way a random smattering of stories over dinner could not.

They *thought they wanted a party*, but what they *needed* was a sacred space of remembrance *before* the party. That's the missing element and the one piece we as funeral professionals can offer.

Just as the wedding of today is not how your mother or grandmother got married, this is no longer your grandfather's funeral business. We must find out what our customers need and want and then find a way to fulfill it or we will be alone in our beautiful buildings, with empty pews and unemployed staff and driving around without purpose in our impressive cars while families are having services without us and paying someone else to plan the event. It's up to us to decide how this party ends. ★

Glenda Stansbury, MAL, CFSP, a practicing funeral celebrant, has worked as marketing and development director for In-Sight Books for 16 years and as dean of In-Sight Institute Certified Funeral Celebrant Training for 12 years. She is a licensed funeral director and embalmer and an adjunct professor in the University of Central Oklahoma's funeral service department. She can be contacted at glenda@insightbooks.com or 405-810-9501.



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celebrantpam@gmail.com

ICCFA Magazine author spotlight

► **Vetter** is a freelance journalist and certified funeral celebrant.

818.313.9009;
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ICCF AU 2013 will be July 19-24 at the Fogelman Conference Center, Memphis, Tennessee. Details will be available in the spring of 2013 at www.iccfa.com or by calling 1.800.645.7700.

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CELEBRANTS

Sometimes a celebrant needs to suggest various ways the family can personalize their loved one's service. Other times, the family has plenty of ideas but needs someone with the willingness and know-how to put it all together.



Brian L. Tan and his mother, Serene Lee, about to take a surprise charter helicopter ride he set up for her birthday to celebrate their shared love of flying.

A flyover for Serene at graveside

Since Southern California funeral homes have embraced the celebrant movement, I have attended some incredible funeral services and memorials that have taken my breath away because they truly captured a loved one's spirit in life. That was true for the funeral planned by Brian L. Tan for his mother.

Serene Lee had passed away unexpectedly. Brian was still a young man, yet he immediately went to work to organize an honorable, personal tribute for his mother. Most family members are overwhelmed when someone passes away and they don't know where to begin. But Brian had a vision he needed to fulfill for his mom.

I met with Brian and his father at their home, listening to Serene's life stories. The definition of "Serene" is tranquil, peaceful and calm. Those words set the stage for what would be an extraordinary, loving

service for an amazing wife, mother and friend.

While I oftentimes suggest creative ideas to families, this service was different. Brian came well prepared, and my job as a celebrant was to act as a guide to encourage the options he had planned on his own.

Brian knew the memorial had to be unique and special for his mom, and he made sure it focused on her life stories, highlighting her love of family and friends and her strong Christian beliefs. As Brian works in the film industry, he was extremely organized in creating lists so no detail would be forgotten.

Serene's life story

Serene Lee was born in Singapore and raised in Malaysia. She was a happy child, and also ambitious. She attended high school in England and was only 17 when she entered



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WE LOVE YOU SERENE/MUMEE. RIP WITH GOD!

The flyover at graveside. The plane is pulling a banner that says, “We love you Serene/Mumee. RIP with God.”

the University of London, earning her degree in economics. At the university, she met the man who became her husband, Kim Tan. The couple moved to the United States, and a few years later their only son, Brian, was born.

An avid reader, Serene read to Brian and also took him to the zoo, museums, beaches, car shows, aquariums, fairs, exhibits, parks and large aerospace shows. She and Brian shared a love of airplanes.

Serene’s goal in life was to see her son graduate from college and find professional success. After his graduation, Brian worked at DreamWorks and on several high-profile films. His mother told him, “Whatever you love to do, we support you.”

In return for her love and support, Brian enjoyed surprising his mother with limo rides, private screenings and elegant dinners. Brian noted that their shared love of flying gave him an idea to surprise her one year with a helicopter ride as a birthday present.

“One of the last things I ever did with my Mum was a helicopter charter to Catalina Island, a last memory that I cherish dearly,” Brian said. “Since she was somewhat of an artistic free spirit who lived and breathed the outdoors, I figured an airplane flyover at the graveside service for my Mum would be an apt, special tribute not only to our last activity together, but to her life, love and legacy, as well.

“Our celebrant worked on the ceremony, getting everything organized, and helped make the day go as smoothly as possible. Even though my Mum is no longer with us, I like to think that she was with that airplane, smiling down on us as we conducted a truly unforgettable, poignant ceremony that I and many others present will remember vividly till our dying day.”

Brian is absolutely right; it was an incredible service. The church service was personal and loving. We shared Serene’s

life story; friends spoke; Brian shared his personal sentiments and an amazing slide show of his mother’s life.

Brian had also employed a professional string quartet to play at the church and graveside services at Forest Lawn in Hollywood Hills, California. As the string quartet was playing the song “My Heart Will Go On” from the film “Titanic” at the graveside service and the casket was being quietly lowered, an airplane appeared overhead carrying the message, “We Love You Serene/Mumee. RIP With God.”

This surprise ending to the services seemed like something out of a movie. It was so emotionally moving, there wasn’t a dry eye, as everyone smiled through their tears.

Serene always felt God was watching over her. On the day of Serene’s service, it seemed that God was watching over all of us, bringing everyone together to remember her. □



jhandlh@aol.com

ICCFA Magazine author spotlight

►Haddon has been in funeral service for more than 30 years and has been a Certified Celebrant since 2001. As a celebrant, she has performed nearly 1,000 services, for as few as five and as many as 1,500 attendees, and recently began performing weddings. She lives and works in the Pacific Northwest on Puget Sound.

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CELEBRANTS

Every service should “wow” the audience, whether it’s for an Olympic medal winner, a successful Native American entrepreneur or a grandmother who baked the best chocolate chip cookies.

A celebrant’s goal: Wow! Every family, every service

Many years ago, I worked as a sales rep for Batesville Casket Co. At the time, our focus was on convincing funeral directors that a service should provide an “experience.” We had studies and articles, even provided speakers for conventions that backed up our promotion. Some funeral homes accepted the idea, but it wasn’t until celebrants became popular that “experience-based” services really took off.

It has been my goal, as well as the goal of the funeral homes I work with, to “knock it out of the park” and provide “wow” experiences for families and attendees. A couple of recent services I have conducted provide great examples of the “wow” factor.

Special ceremonies

The first service was for a 1948 Olympian, a famous down-hill ski racer from Austria. He had been captured by the Russians and held as a prisoner of war for four years, escaping in early 1945, walking 1,000 kilometers home to Austria. Three years later, after recovering from injuries suffered in the war, he competed in the Olympics, winning a silver medal—his country’s first medal in down-hill racing.

After immigrating to the United States, he had become a successful businessman in Washington state, and was quite the legend on the mountain. His service drew people from his childhood, his racing days and local businessmen who admired how far he had come in his 92 years on earth. The timing was eerie, as his service was held during the buildup to the Winter Olympics in Sochi, which would take place two weeks later.

After welcoming the crowd and recognizing the family, I began the service with a short recap of the race that won him the silver medal. Due to WWII, the games had not convened for 12 years. In 1948, 28 nations gathered in St. Moritz for the festivities. As I vividly described that day, the

race and his number finally being called, the emotions could be felt in the room.

I built on the excitement, speaking louder and louder as the description of the end of the race peaked. The “wow” happened as the description of his run heightened and the Olympic theme song began in the background; it was truly awesome! The smiles on the faces of his family and friends were gratifying—a home run for sure.

During the sharing time, a slightly built, heavily accented, older gentlemen dressed in his lederhosen stood, took the microphone from me and said, “I’ve been to a lot of funerals and I have never been to one so good. Thank you for giving my friend such a wonderful send-off.” The entire crowd provided a rousing ovation of applause. All I could do was blush. I was thrilled; this was a “wow” moment for me.

The second service was for a Native American. His tribe was Sioux, originally from the Dakotas. He was an extremely successful entrepreneur and inventor, holding 25 patents.

His family had not celebrated their Native American heritage until recent years. As with many Native American families, his parents’ generation had dealt with and overcome much discrimination. They didn’t want their children to be treated in the same manner, so they ignored their heritage for a long time.

This service began with a purification ceremony. The three remaining brothers of the deceased carried smoking sweet grass bundles all the way around the room (we were in a yacht club on the water) as we played the Cherokee rendition of “Amazing Grace.”

The purification ceremony cleanses the mind both physically and spiritually of any bad feelings, negative thoughts or negative energy. It is believed that one must be healed of such things before one can help heal another.

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CELEBRANTS

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The religious element that day was provided by a Catholic priest who had served the local tribe's Catholic church for 30 years and currently works with the homeless on the streets of Seattle. A very gentle soul, he provided the invocation.

I chose the bald eagle as the theme of the service because there were many stories of the bird's relationship to the family. The deceased was the patriarch for some 60 family members, and the growth of subsequent generations was an important fact. I made use of the eagle's strength, majestic beauty, long life and the fact it is native to North America. Eagles mate for life; the deceased and his lovely bride were married 54 years. The growth of the family related well to the size of an eagle's nest. At every turn and opportunity, I wove the eagle's powerful imagery into the service.

At the end of our service, all five of the deceased's remaining siblings brought in a Pendleton blanket designed by Native Americans. They asked the deceased's wife and three adult children to join them up front, wrapped them in the blanket and held them tight as the priest performed a Cedar Blessing and chant around the group.

There were many tears. The priest then gave the benediction. The final element of the service was the showing of a video of the deceased's 12-year-old granddaughter singing "Castle on a Cloud." Again, awesome, another home run.

These examples describe services that were not elaborate or difficult to manage; they were simply creative. Celebrants naturally do what funeral and cemetery professionals have been advised to do for years: Think outside the box.

They do not insert a name in an otherwise standard service. They take the time to create and provide a real experience of celebration. It is my goal to "wow" every audience. Not every service celebrates a life as varied and accomplished as the ones I just described, but a grandmother whose claim to fame was the perfect chocolate chip cookie can just as easily provide a service that "wows" if you look for the chance to truly celebrate her life.


Can you imagine the response of people arriving in your chapel to the smell of chocolate chip cookies right out of the oven, coming from plates of cookies set out for them to enjoy? How about printing granny's recipe on the back of the memorial folder or on little cards inserted in the folder as a gift

for them to take home?

When people leave services held in your chapel, do they say to each other, "Don't ever do anything like that for me," to their loved ones? Or do they say, "Wow! Wasn't that just like Granny?"

Celebrant services provide the best advertising you can have—word of mouth raves about what people can expect from your services. These services do involve more

time and effort, from the family interview to the composing of the service, the staging, coordination of music and other elements such as memorial folders.

But these days, *not* offering celebrant services isn't really a choice, unless you choose to slowly but surely go out of business. I guarantee, if you don't offer families the choice of unique, personalized services, someone else will. 



glenda@
insightbooks.com

ICCFA Magazine author spotlight

► Stansbury is vice president of marketing for In-Sight Books, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

www.insightbooks.com

► She is a licensed funeral director and embalmer and trains funeral directors, cemetery workers and others as Certified Celebrants who meet with families to talk about their loved ones and plan personalized funeral services.

► She is adjunct faculty with the funeral service department at the University of Central Oklahoma, where she teaches courses in funeral service communication and the psychology of grief and oversees practicum students.

► She and her father, Doug Manning, a former Baptist minister who became a noted author of books about grief, developed the Certified Celebrant program and have recently added a new component, to train celebrant trainers.

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NEW

How to become a celebrant trainer

• Contact Stansbury (glenda@insightbooks.com) for information on the new training program for Certified Celebrants who would like to learn how to train new celebrants.

CELEBRANTS

Do funeral directors just need to learn how to handle cremation arrangements better, or do they need to learn how to handle *all* arrangements better?

Teach your children well

Making sure the funeral directors of tomorrow start out knowing how to handle arrangements

She was a beautiful young funeral director sitting across the table from me in the arrangement room. She fidgeted, coughed and sighed, and was clearly not comfortable.

She graduated from a well-known mortuary college, fulfilled all of her requirements, passed the National Boards and served a year as an apprentice in a large city at a very busy firm. Yet when I asked her how to begin an arrangement conference, she looked at me in open fear and said, "I have no idea. I don't even know how to introduce myself."

I swallowed hard and tried not to look completely shocked. I asked how many arrangements she had observed or participated in during her apprenticeship. "None." "None?" "None."

What did she do during her apprenticeship? Spent most of her time in the prep room or handling the minutia at the funeral home—cleaning, handing out service folders, hauling flowers, washing cars. She had never sat with a family in grief, had never watched an experienced funeral director guide a family through those difficult waters of emotion and decisions, had never spoken to a family. Never.

The firm where she currently worked had brought me in as a consultant to do a training all morning for their staff on how to improve arrangement conferences. Then they asked me to do some private coaching with this young funeral director because they wisely knew that she needed a lot of help. Starting from point zero.

What all students should learn—but aren't required to

I've had the honor of teaching in a mortuary program for seven years. My favorite class is titled Communication in Funeral Service. It has several different topics

that are supposed to be covered—theories of grief, family systems, complicated grief, arrangements and a whole host of vocabulary words that will be included on the National Board Exam.

I get these poor students for three hours every week. Pray for them. I tell them at the first class session that this will be the most important class they have. They give me that "give me a break" look as only college students can; all professors say that about their curriculum.

I tell them that we will cover all the required material they need in order to pass their boards in the first hour of each class. Then, for the remaining two hours, we are going to learn how to be good funeral directors. We are going to learn how to talk to families.

We discuss first call and how to be comfortable just sitting and listening at those most difficult and sacred moment of handing over a loved one to the professional they chose. We drill on arrangements and how to put the pencil down and be present and attentive while the family tells their story. They have to give speeches articulating the value of the funeral.

I tell them this is the most important class that they will have because if we don't respond to families at arrangement, we have lost them, and no amount of excellent body preparation or creative video tributes or immaculate cars will win them back.

The American Board of Funeral Service Education, the governing and licensing board of mortuary programs, requires each student to go through a practicum experience where her or she serves in a funeral home under the supervision of a preceptor. Sort of like "student teaching," if you will.

Our program at the University of Central Oklahoma requires that the students

Even if the ABFSE doesn't require it, we should be ensuring that every student in every program has plenty of experience with arrangements, in dealing with grieving families, in being comfortable introducing himself or herself and starting the conversation.

complete 10 embalming cases, five arrangements and five funeral services and write case reports on their experiences. As practicum supervisor, I get to visit with the preceptors and encourage them to involve these students in every facet of funeral service so they will graduate with a more complete knowledge of being a funeral professional.

I assumed that every program had the same requirements. Imagine my surprise when I found out that the ABFSE only requires that the practicum include 10 embalmings. There is no requirement for practicum to include arrangements. Let me say that again: There is no requirement for practicum to include arrangements.

As my dear friend Stephanie Kann, president of Worsham College, observed, "In this day and time, we may get to embalm 50 percent of the bodies. But we will do arrangements with 100 percent of the families." And yet there is no mandate or emphasis put on the one area so vital to creating a trusting and healing relationship. We just send newly licensed funeral directors out into the world and hope they pick it up. Some will be starting from point zero.

Are cremation arrangements different?

I've been privileged to be a part of the ICCFA Cremation Arranger Training this year. This is a great one-day training designed by Poul Lemasters to provide a different conversation about how we handle the growing number of cremation families.

Everyone agrees that the funeral profession reacted badly when cremation first walked into our doors and we've been playing catch-up ever since. Cremation arranger trainings have been proliferating for the past decade as more and more funeral directors realize that the horse is out of the barn; we are desperately trying to bring those immediate cremation families back to us.



Doug Manning, Teresa Dutko, Wanda Mullins Lee, Glenda Stansbury and Kathy Burns at the first training of Certified Celebrant trainers, held in Cincinnati. Manning, a former Baptist minister, and Stansbury developed the training, done through the In-Sight Institute. Dutko and Lee are on the faculty of the Cincinnati College of Mortuary Science. Burns is the In-Sight Institute's mortuary college celebrant program coordinator.

But, as anyone who has read any of my past musings can attest, I'm always asking "why?" Never quite content with accepting the current situation, I want to peek behind the curtain and get to the root of why we do what we do.

In this case, it occurs to me that what we are presenting in Cremation Arranger Training is nothing more than Arranger Training 101. How to talk to families. How to engage the stories. How to be a present professional as they decide how to honor their loved one in a healing and healthy way.

We throw the word "cremation" in every once in a while, but all I'm presenting in my little segment of the training is simply: This is how to do a funeral arrangement.

I've gotten good feedback from each of the ones I've been a part of. Why? (There's that word again!) Simply because I'm touching a place of need for almost every funeral professional.

We are not comfortable in the arrangement room. We were not taught how to engage and relate to grieving people. We were given no models or guidance in all of our training to become a funeral professional. We learned from that guy who would brag that he could do arrangements in 15 minutes. We are all starting from point zero.

Part of my time these past couple of

years has been spent as a private consultant for firms providing training for staff. Some want me to talk about Certified Celebrants. Some want me to talk about ceremony. Almost all of them want me to talk about arrangements. Why? Because as one owner put it when inviting me to come train his staff, "We suck at it."

So, is this an article about arrangements? No, not really. It's an observation that we can no longer leave these vital pieces of learning to chance. We must

take an active part in whatever mortuary program is part of our area and be involved in training new licensees.

Even if the ABFSE doesn't require it, we should be ensuring that every student in every program has plenty of experience with arrangements, in dealing with grieving families, in being comfortable introducing himself or herself and starting the conversation.

Whether they are practicum students or apprentices, we are doing our profession no good if we are relegating these new members to vacuuming, mowing and washing cars.

This is a plea to any person who serves on a mortuary board or as a preceptor to start asking questions about your program. How are we equipping our future? How are we preparing the next generation to adapt and acquire the necessary skills to be effective? How can we leave a legacy of service that can be picked up by the ones who will follow us?

Training celebrant trainers

As part of that collective effort to provide a more complete preparatory program for new directors, we do have some exciting news. The InSight Institute has trained its first mortuary program Certified Celebrant

Our first step was to develop a training and franchise license that can be incorporated into the mortuary programs as part of the curriculum.

trainers. This is a big deal.

For 15 years, as long as my father Doug Manning and I have been doing celebrant training, after every training session someone would come up and say, "I'd like to be a trainer." We'd pat them on the back, tell them to go get some experience and then, "We'll see." Every year some people would ask, "When are you going to train trainers?" We'd smile and say "We'll see."

As my father has gotten on up there in years (don't tell him I said that, please!), every year he says to me, "What are you going to do when I can't do this anymore?" I'd smile and say, "I'll think about that tomorrow, Scarlet."

We created this baby we call Certified Celebrants. We took an idea and combined training, resources, processes, code of practice and years of experience into a pretty comprehensive training.

People think we can't train someone to conduct funeral services in just three days. But you ask our trained celebrants, and most of them will say that they left our training feeling prepared to take on this unique, special and important job.

We've been very protective of the training. We established it on the basis that funerals are important to the grieving experience, and we have grounded everything we do on that foundation. Each element in a celebrant service is focused on being the voice for families and giving them a healthy start on their grieving path.

The pretty words and inventive take-aways are nice, but what's really important is whether you have touched that family and honored their loved one's life. That's the proving ground. And 2,400 Certified Celebrants have left our training room understanding that this was their calling and their mission. We didn't know if anyone else could convey that deeply important message.

But we understand that in order for Certified Celebrants to grow and to become part of the normal fabric of funeral service, we are going to need to invite some other trainers to join us. This has, quite honestly, been a difficult and agonizing process.

Here's the big secret: I'm kind of a control freak and I want this training to be

presented in a certain way. I'm working through my anxieties and have reached a place where I accept that there are many people out there who have the same passion, the same vision and the same capabilities for training. Sigh.

Our first step was to develop a training and franchise license that can be incorporated into the mortuary programs as part of the curriculum. We invited schools that already had instructors who had undergone our celebrant training to participate in a "training of trainers" experience. People from several mortuary programs have indicated their interest and hope to join us soon.

Wanda Mullins and Teresa Dutko from Cincinnati College of Mortuary Science were the first ones to say "yes." We were scheduled to have one of our Certified Celebrant trainings in Cincinnati, sponsored by the Ohio Cemetery Association in August of this year, so we invited them to be a part of the training and to have coaching sessions with Kathy Burns, the mortuary college celebrant program coordinator.

Both both attended celebrant training several years ago and have some experience in providing services for families. They also have used some of the concepts in their curriculum through the years. Now they will be able to present the complete training to their students, to "graduate" each of them with a Certified Celebrant certificate and pin and to have an entire graduating class going out into the workforce with this skill under their belts.

As anyone who has been through our celebrant training can tell you, not only do you learn how to provide services, our training makes you a better arranger, a better listener and a better professional.

I hope that as this grows among the programs, we'll eventually have a generation of funeral practitioners who understand how to use celebrants, how to embrace the concepts of ceremony, how to articulate the value of service to those cremation or non-traditional families, and who are prepared to face the challenges that the next decade will bring. They won't be starting from point zero. That's kind of exciting. □



Happy Anniversary!

NFDA Training in Brookfield

By Glenda Stansbury, CFSP

For three years we had been dreaming about creating the concept of Funeral Celebrants and agonizing over how it would work, what would be necessary, who would want to come.

1999. We saw dead people in the movie *The Sixth Sense*, our hearts broke over the Columbine shootings, my city, Oklahoma City, had a massive F5 tornado that killed 38 people, My Space was a brand new way to interact online, Putin became the leader of Russia for the first time, and everyone was waiting for the world to end with Y2K when the computers melted down on New Year's Eve. It was the cusp of a new millennium, and no one quite knew what that would look like or what to expect.

October 1999. Doug and I arrived at the Mt. Ida College New England Institute for Death Education in Newton, Massachusetts for the inaugural premiere of Celebrant Training. We walked into the Dodge Auditorium overwhelmed, excited, and fearful. This was either going to go well or it would be over before it started.

For three years we had been dreaming about creating the concept of Funeral Celebrants and agonizing over how it would work, what would be necessary, who would want to come. Following Doug's trips to Australia and New Zealand where he encountered a whole set of professionals called Civil Celebrants who were licensed by the government to perform weddings and funerals, this had been the main topic of conversation in the offices of InSight Books. Why you might ask?

For those of you who were in the funeral profession in the mid-90's, you are familiar with the sea changes that were occurring. Cremation was beginning to be a significant factor. Nationally the cremation rate was hovering around 25% but showed no signs of slowing down or reversing. The Catholic Church began allowing cremated remains to be present at funeral Masses in 1997, which significantly changed the attitude of many who were hesitant about the process.

We were ten years into the FTC regulations and still trying to figure out how to live within the stringent language and inflexible options.

After a steady growth of religious adherence and fervor from revivals or televangelists or the enthusiastic participation after Vatican II, in 1997, the term "spiritual but not religious" was being used for the first time in public discourse. This was

the beginning of the pattern of the "nones" which would grow bigger each year. The times they were a-changin'.

From our vantage point at InSight Books, we constantly heard from funeral directors and leaders in the profession that client families were making different choices. That the same casket, the service folder with the gold cross, Rev. Billy Bob reading the same verses and preaching everyone into heaven for the 45th time, with a nice arrangement of How Great Thou Art thrown in, were not cutting it. Cremation allowed families to have options, to delay, to be mobile, even to decide to not have any type of service. And, as more people stopped identifying with a church or denomination, the traditional funeral home offering was often not very appealing.

Since our goal at InSight Books has always been focused on facilitating a healthy grieving experience, and since we believed that a funeral was an important first step in the healing process, we could see that these steps to avoid an experience that did not fit them could be disastrous for individuals and families and for the funeral profession.

What Doug had seen in his Australasia (isn't that a great word?) travels was a transformation of service. The funeral professionals in both countries had recognized that their families had little or no interest in traditional, religious funeral experiences. A poll by Win-Gallup International found that 48% of Australians claimed no religion, 37% were religious, and 10% declared themselves "convinced atheists." 42% of New Zealanders stated they had no religion in the most recent census and 4% made no declaration.

So why would they continue to insist on a minister or priest to officiate services for people who had no connection or belief in the words or the rituals? Enter Civil Celebrants. While they were originally licensed by the government to perform civil weddings, they quickly moved into the funeral realm. If you can do a wonderful, personalized wedding for me, then can you do a funeral that is unique and customized? This began in 1975. There was a lot of pain and growth and even blacklisting of funeral celebrants by the Attorney General for a time (resistance to change is not limited to the borders of our great nation), but

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NEI First Celebrant Training



Doug, Glenda, and Arnold at First Celebrant Training

by the 1990's when Doug visited, they were well established and effectively providing services for those who did not wish to have a religious service.

Doug was amazed when he saw this concept and decided on the spot that we needed this choice—a trained, professional group of people who were prepared to listen to the stories, to craft a one-of-a-kind service, and to be the trusted voice of the family—in North America. Let's do that!

Thus came the days, weeks, months, and years of discussing, brainstorming, and agonizing over how to make this a reality. We offered the concept to national funeral organizations and national funeral corporations. Everyone patted us on the head and said, "Everyone wants a religious funeral," and sent us on our way. Celebrants? We don't need Celebrants! Silly kids.

When NEI contacted Doug about coming to conduct a grief seminar on campus, we talked them into giving us a weekend. We have an idea. Let us run it up a flag pole and see if anyone salutes. Thankfully, they agreed. And the first Celebrant training was born. We had no computer or projector or notebooks. We had a flip chart and a bunch of ideas about how funerals could heal people. OK, here we go!

On that weekend, fifty intrepid people came to Newton. They had no idea what they had signed up for. We had no idea what we were going to do. But together we determined that this was something important and special and the Celebrant movement was born in the Dodge Auditorium. Twenty years ago. Wow.

Arnold Dodge sat at the back of the auditorium with Doug and I as we watched the first presentations of services and we were blown away. Arnold leaned over to us and said, "If all funerals were like this, all of our problems would be solved." We agreed. We still agree.

So, what has happened in twenty years? We've conducted 190 trainings and almost 4,000 people have come through training. That doesn't mean that we have 4,000 practicing Celebrants around the world, but it does mean that 4,000 people understand the value of the funeral, and what storytelling and ceremony and customization of the

service can mean to a family. The training is now part of the curriculum at two mortuary schools. We are hoping that will grow as well.

We've held private trainings for some of the largest funeral corporations. We are now sponsored by all three of the national funeral organizations and many state associations. We are scheduled for 12-16 trainings each year in the U.S. and Canada. Attendees from all over the world have joined us—from the Philippines, Brazil, Guatemala, Singapore, the Netherlands Antilles, South Africa, Bolivia, just to name a few. This year I will be conducting a training for ALPAR, the Latin American Funeral and Cemetery organization, in Bogota, Colombia. I haven't told my husband that I'm flying to Columbia yet, so I'd appreciate it if you keep that a secret.

The road was not easy. There were times when Doug and I looked at each other and sighed and asked why we were doing this? The age-old problem of resistance to change in funeral service has pushed back and pushed back and pushed back. "We are fine here with our rent-a-ministers. Everyone's happy. All of my families go to church. Don't bother me with new ideas." There were some dark and discouraging days when we questioned why we were spending time, effort, and money to sustain an effort that was not embraced by the profession as a whole.

But, because of progressive and creative funeral professionals and leaders, the resistance has gradually lessened. Funeral homes in all corners of the world have proven that people respond to a well-done, personalized service that fits them. And none of them are turning back the clock.

We have seen the future and it includes a wide buffet of options for serving families. And the cornerstone of that change has been incorporating Celebrants as part of the norm, rather than for the occasional or weird client or for that atheist family who walks in the door. Celebrants are good for families. Celebrants are good for business. Celebrants can be a part of the renaissance that brings people back to the funeral home.

So, allow us a moment to pop a cork and have some pride in how far we have come. A little four person publishing company in the heartland decided to make a difference and start something important. We are so grateful for everyone who has come along side in support, encouragement, and partnership. We are especially thankful for the Dodge Company and Arnold and Mike, who believed in us from the beginning.

What does the next twenty years look like? I don't know and I'm pretty sure I won't be around to write about that anniversary. Our goal, our hope, our vision from day one has always been that everyone who walks into a funeral home knows that they have the ability to have exactly the right funeral with exactly the right officiant and that they understand that the only place to find that service and that guidance is from the creative and responsive funeral professional that they have chosen. That will be a good day.

Happy Anniversary Celebrants!

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Glenda Stansbury, CFSP, MALS is the Dean of the InSight Institute of Funeral Celebrants, VP of InSight Books, adjunct professor for UCO Funeral Service Department and a practicing Certified Funeral Celebrant. You can contact her at celebrantgs@gmail.com