

# AKEOLA Newsletter

January 2023

## Death Cafes 2023

Starting January 30, Kris Green and Linda Johnson, Death Café Moderators, will be holding death cafés in Anchorage. To learn more about death cafes, AKEOLA chatted with death café moderator, Linda Johnson.

**AKEOLA:** What is a death café?

**L:** *A death café is where we talk about death and dying with no agenda.*

**AKEOLA:** What's the purpose of a death cafe?

**L:** *To normalize talking about death and dying.*

**AKEOLA:** If I join you, do I need to talk or share?

**L:** *Not at all. You can just listen.*

**AKEOLA:** What's your role?

**L:** *I am a moderator – I make sure that everyone is heard.*

**AKEOLA:** Is there counseling provided? Like for grief?

**L:** *No, this is just an open conversation. Join us for the first one on January 30, 2023! See AKEOLA's website under "EVENTS"!*

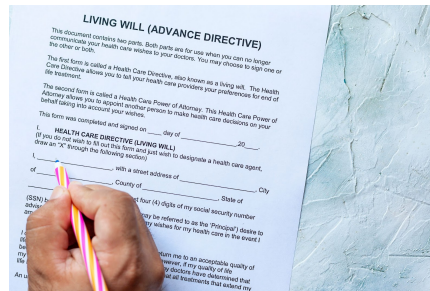
# Alaska End-of-Life Alliance

## Happy New Year!

**AKEOLA is planning for the year ahead - join us!**

**It's the beginning of the year and there's no better time to start talking about plans. From our kick-off event in October, you told us that you'd like to learn more about Advanced Planning; this is important to us, too. So, here's our plan!**

**At the end of each quarter or every three months, we will hold a discussion or workshop with the goal of each participant to have their own End of Life (EOL) Plan Package together by the end of 2023!**



Photos: Shutterstock

**End of March** – One of Anchorage's local Palliative Care doctors will discuss the importance of planning – specifically, advanced directives.

**End of June** – AKEOLA and EOL advocates will explain the different documents in EOL care and what they mean: For example, Advanced Directives, Power of Attorneys, Living Will, and Estate Plans.

**End of September** – Planning Workshop! Bring a partner to discuss your plans with. Ask deeper questions about your plans/EOL documents.

**End of December** – Complete your plans! Get your documents notarized by volunteer notaries. Leave with your EOL Plan Package!

**Would you like to join us for these sessions? If so, let us know! We will make sure you get an invite, supply you with a list of resources, and keep you motivated to complete your End-of-Life Plan Package!**

**FACT:** As of 2017, nearly 37% of Americans had Advanced Care Directives. (\*Reuters, 2017) **WE ENCOURAGE YOU TO:** Download these advanced planning documents if you don't have them yet - [Power of Attorney \(alaska.gov\)](#) or [five-wishes-sample.pdf \(fivewishes.org\)](#) - they're free!

## Contact Us

Alaska End-of-Life Alliance

Email

[info@alaskaendoflifealliance.org](mailto:info@alaskaendoflifealliance.org)

Website

[www.alaskaendoflifealliance.org](http://www.alaskaendoflifealliance.org)

### Board Members

Rachel Bernhardt, Secretary

Brehan Corveau

Denise Hendrickson, President

Linda Johnson

Julie Raymond-Yakoubian, Vice  
President, Treasurer



Alaska End-of-Life Alliance  
Education · Advocacy · Support

We educate, advocate, and support Alaskans in end-of-life care so that they are informed and empowered when living out the final stages of their lives.

## NODA – No One Dies Alone

The No One Dies Alone or NODA Program is a hospital-based program started in 2001 by a nurse named Sandra Clarke. During her shift, Sandra checked in with one of her patients who was dying. “Will you stay with me?” the dying patient asked. Sandra says, “Of course, as soon as I check on my other patients.” Sandra came back 90 minutes later to sit with the patient and, sadly, the patient had died. Sandra says, “I was overcome with guilt and frustration. I didn’t know what to do. I just knew something had to be done.” **Thus, NODA was born. Sandra created a program where volunteers sit with dying patients so that no one will die alone.** (Supportive Care Coalition, 2020)

We don’t know how many hospitals in the United States have NODA programs, but we do know that hospitals have started their NODA programs again after being paused due to the pandemic. To note, in Alaska, there are two hospitals that have NODA programs that we are aware of - Providence Medical Center in Anchorage and PeaceHealth in Ketchikan. The Alaska End-of-Life Alliance supports and looks forward to the launch of NODA programs in all of Alaska’s hospitals!

Interested in becoming a NODA volunteer or in spreading the word about NODA? Contact AKEOLA at [info@alaskaendoflifealliance.org](mailto:info@alaskaendoflifealliance.org)

*Photos below: Shutterstock and Ioan-Dan Plesa, respectively.*



*Animal Companion Corner....* Pro-tip: a great way to make a lasting keepsake of your animal companion is to make paw prints. There are many different types of kits available online - from plaster to touch-less ink. Your veterinarian's office may have some on hand, too. The Ritual Bough keeps paw print packets in stock. *Questions? Ask Julie at [TheRitualBough@gmail.com](mailto:TheRitualBough@gmail.com)*

Photo: Jessica Arraes

## Book Review

By Julie Raymond-Yakoubian  
[TheRitualBough@gmail.com](mailto:TheRitualBough@gmail.com)

*Final Gifts: Understanding the Special Awareness, Needs, and Communications of the Dying.* By Maggie Callanan and Patricia Kelley. Simon and Schuster Paperback edition, 2012.

*Final Gifts* is a wonderful book for anyone who is interested in end-of-life issues, who is or may be accompanying a loved one in their final days, and for end-of-life professionals. The authors, nurses Maggie Callanan and Patricia Kelley, expertly weave together their vast experiences with clients, detailed explanations of “Nearing Death Awareness”, helpful information about topics such as the different ways the dying (and those not dying) respond to diagnoses and dying, and suggestions for responding to the needs and desires of a dying person.

Nearing Death Awareness is described by the authors as, “a special knowledge about – and sometimes control over – the process of dying. Nearing Death Awareness reveals what dying is like, and what is needed in order to die peacefully; it develops in those who are dying slowly. The attempts of dying people to describe what they are experiencing may be missed, or misunderstood, or ignored because the communication is obscure, unexpected, or expressed in symbolic language” (p:21). This theory of Nearing Death Awareness calls us to be open and attentive to what a dying person may be trying to communicate to us and, in return, how we may be able to be responsive and provide peace and comfort to them.

The authors share their discovery of two main themes of the special type of communication that the dying may share with us – the dying person’s attempt to describe what they are experiencing, and requests for something that the dying person needs to have a peaceful death. These requests often relate to relationships, such as waiting for a loved one to be present (or to leave), in order for the dying person to feel ready to let go.

One example from *Final Gifts* of such a ‘request’ is from the story of Andrea who kept insisting that “We must go to the park”. Her husband was able to decipher this symbolic language from Andrea to mean that she wanted to see her father. Andrea and her father used to go to the park all the time before she was ill, and he had been unable to visit often because of his sadness over her dying. When the family called for him and they reunited there was a great sense of peace for Andrea, her father, and her family, and she died that evening.

As the authors sagely note, if we are not expecting these messages from the dying, which often come in symbolic language, we may miss them. Recognizing these messages can provide gifts of comfort for both the dying person, and their loved ones.

## Podcast Review

By Brehan Corveau

Death Doula Trainee/University of Vermont

Photo: Anna Uralpova



We Shake with Joy

-By Mary Oliver

We shake with joy,  
we shake with grief.

What a time they have, these two  
housed as they are in the same  
body.

To witness this sort of intimate storytelling where I could listen and honor the experiences of another's grief journey is what I was recently searching for. While I could have made the assumption, I really did not know there were so many grief and loss-centric [podcasts](#) until I started looking.

During this search I came across the podcast [Breathing Wind](#)-a podcast all about grief, parent loss, change and healing. Each season features different hosts, interviewing feature guests, with the mission to destigmatize grief through story-sharing and authentic conversation. In season 3 episode 70 of *The Possibility of Pleasure Miniseries*, Host and End of Life Doula, Oceana Sawyer, speaks with Karine Bell, founder of the online community *The Rooted Global Village*. Their [conversation](#) explores the duality of grief and joy through the senses and considers how utilizing any one of our six senses can enhance the metabolization of grief, opening us up to a greater appreciation of living.

Oceana substitutes the word "toy" for "tools" saying, "we aren't fixing anything. To underscore that there can be delight in a grief process with the use of specific elements that both support and nurture like meditation, dancing, writing, talking to a friend, or sitting in the sun." Her word choice allowed me to think and feel more creatively about the systems of support we can tap into during our journey with grief.

For Karine, the toy was her consistent mindfulness practice she developed prior to her mother's passing that became her anchor to the present moment. She allowed the feelings of joy and grief to be held simultaneously within her body; determined to surrender to these emotions when they were felt. Fully tuned in to her body, Karine had this feeling and knowingness that if she did not allow herself to feel the entirety of the experience of her mother's death, that it could damage her. She knew she had to be present for these moments and dimensions of grief that she allowed to roll through her like waves. Giving herself over to the waves of grief each time.

Karine shares memories of other significant transforming life events such as the birth of a daughter and the death of her father, grieving the complexities of her relationship with her mother, and experiencing "the portal and timeless potent space" that one can feel when accompanying someone leaving this life.

This episode was a beautiful little session reminding me of our ability to hold two seemingly conflicting feelings together so that we may yield to the moment that we are in.