



## **Die Well Death Education**

### **Death Education Series Syllabus**

#### **Reiche Community Room**

Offered in collaboration with WENA - Enter through Door 11 on the Clark Street side of the building and proceed upstairs via elevator or stairs.

*Presented by: Leona Oceania*

#### **Session One: You're going to die. Why not die well? Preparation is key. –**

Thursday, September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2025 (6:30 – 8:00 pm)

In this session, we will explore the importance of discussing death and the benefits it offers. We will also review the creation of an End-of-Life Plan, the importance of legacy work, hospice & palliative care, funeral and body disposition options (there are more than you think!), and much more!

\*Individually wrapped, homemade skull cakelets will be provided.

#### **Session Two: Film: Barbara Karnes's 'This is How People Die - Part One: Natural Process of Dying from Disease & Old Age' – Thursday, September 25<sup>th</sup>, 2025 (6:30 – 8:00 pm)**

*This is How People Die* addresses the normal dying process, from months before death through the actual moment of death. This film provides the knowledge and tools for working with the end of life, presented with non-medical terminology. It is a practical guide for working with anyone facing end-of-life issues. Part One will cover: role models for dying, dying being a normal and natural part of life, ways to

die, dying development compared to infant development, dying dynamics, and 3-4 months before death on a continuum, etc. (2017 - 66 minutes) Open discussion to follow as time allows.

*Barbara Karnes, RN, is an internationally respected speaker, educator, author, and thought leader on matters of end of life. She is a renowned authority on the dying process and a leading educator for families, healthcare professionals, and the community at large.*

*world. In her work, Barbara compassionately explains stages of the dying process, living with a life-threatening illness, pain management, and how people grieve. She explains how important it is to take care of yourself as a caregiver and offers guidelines for professionals.*

*Barbara has dedicated the last 40 years of her life to the education, care, and support of*

**Session Three: Film: Barbara Karnes's 'This is How People Die - Part Two: Labor of Dying' – Thursday, October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2025 (6:30 – 8:00 pm)**

*This is How People Die* addresses the normal dying process, from months before death through the actual moment of death. This film provides the knowledge and tools for working with the end of life, presented with non-medical terminology. It is a practical guide for working with anyone facing end-of-life issues. Part Two will cover: labor of dying: pain, fear, unfinished business, religion, family dynamics, social masks, one to three weeks before death, days to hours before death, hours to minutes before death, what to say, near death experiences, etc. (2017 - 56 minutes) Open discussion to follow as time allows.

**Session Four: The Importance of Legacy Work: What to Do, and Where to Start - Writing Your Own (or Someone Else's) Obituary – Thursday, October 9<sup>th</sup>, 2025 (6:30 – 8:00 pm)**

Legacy work is not about dying and death; it is about life, living, and creating your own legacy for your family, friends, and loved ones. Only **YOU** can truly tell your story, expound upon your personal wisdom, and express your feelings to and about others. It makes sense to start this sooner rather than later; preferably before you are actively dying. We will discuss various methods for documenting your legacy, including several prompt questions.

Relying heavily on James R. Hagerty's book, *Yours Truly: An Obituary Writer's Guide to Telling Your Story*, we will discuss tips for telling your own story and preserving your personal history in a meaningful and engaging way in your obituary.

*“Whatever your age or health, an inventory of your life so far can help you decide if you’re on the path you intended, and if you aren’t, lead you to another.” – James R. Hagerty*

**Session Five: MAID (Medical Aid in Dying)** – Thursday, October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2025 (6:30 – 8:00 pm)

We will discuss MAID: Medical Aid in Dying, focusing primarily on Maine’s Death with Dignity Act. MAID is the process by which qualifying competent and terminally ill state residents with a prognosis of 6 months or less life expectancy may legally obtain MAID prescription medication, which they may take voluntarily and without assistance, to end their life peacefully and on their terms.

**Session Six: Docuseries: Take Me Out Feet First – Season One Episode One: “Mom and Dad”** – Thursday, November 6<sup>th</sup>, 2025 (6:30 – 8:00 pm)

*Take Me Out Feet First*, created and directed by filmmaker Serene Meshel-Dillman, is a poignant documentary series delving into the deeply personal journeys of 25 terminally ill individuals as they navigate their end-of-life decisions and explore their options. Through intimate interviews and candid moments, viewers witness the diverse range of emotions, challenges, and reflections experienced by each individual as they confront their mortality. From exploring palliative care to considering hospice or medical aid in dying, the series sheds light on the complexities surrounding end-of-life choices and the importance of dignity, autonomy, and compassion in these deeply personal moments. Through these narratives, *Take Me Out Feet First* invites viewers to contemplate the meaning of life, death, and the human experience itself.

*Episode 1: “Mom and Dad”* features Serene’s parents. Her mother, Miriam Reiner Meshel, used California’s [End of Life Option Act](#) in 2017 to peacefully end her suffering from a very rare, aggressive cancer. Her father, Robert Meshel, opposed his wife using the option, but years later, changed his mind. “I’m sharing their story because it shows the courage, determination, and love both my mom and dad embodied in their final days. They taught us that there’s grace in being in charge of your own destiny,” said Serene. “This law, legal in only 10 U.S. states and D.C., deserves national endorsement. ‘Take Me Out Feet First’ is their legacy.” (2024 - 95 minutes)

**Session Seven: VSED (Voluntary Stopping of Eating and Drinking)** – Thursday, November 20<sup>th</sup>, 2025 (6:30 – 8:00 pm)

We will discuss VSED: Voluntary Stopping of Eating and Drinking, which is a legal option for any mentally capable, determined, well-informed person as a means to

advance the time of their death. VSED requires significant caregiving and support, which we will discuss further.

Short Film: *Rosemary Bowen's Fast*

At age 94, Rosemary Bowen hastened her death by voluntarily stopping eating and drinking (VSED) in 2018. For twenty years, Rosemary Bowen had told her family that she would hasten her death when she was no longer able to live independently. Several months after suffering a back injury, she decided that she was ready to die. Rosemary asked her daughter to make this video to show others that VSED could be a sensible end-of-life option. (2018 – 17 minutes)

**Session Eight: Funeral & Body Disposition Options – There Are More Than You Think!** – Thursday, December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2025 (6:30 – 8:00 pm)

Everyone has the right to care for their own dead. In this session, we will go over the basics of a home funeral/after-death care; from getting your loved one home if they have died elsewhere, to how to wash, care for, and maintain the body, as well as ideas for a meaningful home vigil for your person. You do not need to involve a funeral home on any level if you don't choose to do so. Alternatively, you may consider implementing a "hybrid funeral" approach, where a funeral home provides some level of service or support.

Many people think there are two basic body disposition options – burial and cremation. Not true! There are many more than that, several of which are far more affordable than the “standard offerings” from a funeral home. We will discuss the body disposition options available in Maine and review “The Funeral Rule,” a law implemented and enforced by the Federal Trade Commission in 1984 (amended in 1994) to protect consumers when purchasing funeral goods and services. In short, protecting consumers from unscrupulous selling practices in the funeral industry.

**Session Nine: Film: ‘In the Parlor: The Final Goodbye’** – Thursday, December 18<sup>th</sup>, 2025 (6:30 – 8:00 pm)

Rejecting the mainstream tradition of hiring funeral professionals to care for the deceased, families in search of a more personal and fulfilling way to say goodbye are taking an active role in caring for relatives who have died. *In the Parlor* shares an intimate story of three individuals who, with the support and guidance of their families and communities, were cared for after their deaths, at home. Julie, Ron, and Jarrad, all unique individuals with very different circumstances, are portrayed in a thoughtful, quiet manner to give the viewer an idea of what “family-directed death

care” might look like. Both a critical look at the American relationship with death and an inquiry into the home death care movement, *In the Parlor* takes viewers on a journey where very few have gone, and challenges us to reflect on this uncomfortable subject, which so often is hidden away and ignored. (2015 - 80 minutes)

*Die Well Death Education is the passion project of Leona Oceania. Always fascinated with death and baffled by the fact that we don't talk about the one thing that will happen to all of us, she decided to do what she could to encourage that conversation. She is a trained End-of-Life Doula, Home Funeral Guide, Life Legacy Facilitator, and Death Educator. She also serves on the board of the Funeral Consumers Alliance of Maine and volunteers with Maine Death with Dignity. She is the facilitator of several Death Cafés and offers community Death Education programming in Southern Maine. She has built a bookcase coffin with the prodigious Chuck Lakin, which is currently in use as a bookcase in her living room until it is needed as a coffin.*

Die Well Death Education [www.diewelldeatheducation.com](http://www.diewelldeatheducation.com) –  
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