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Cremating Anne

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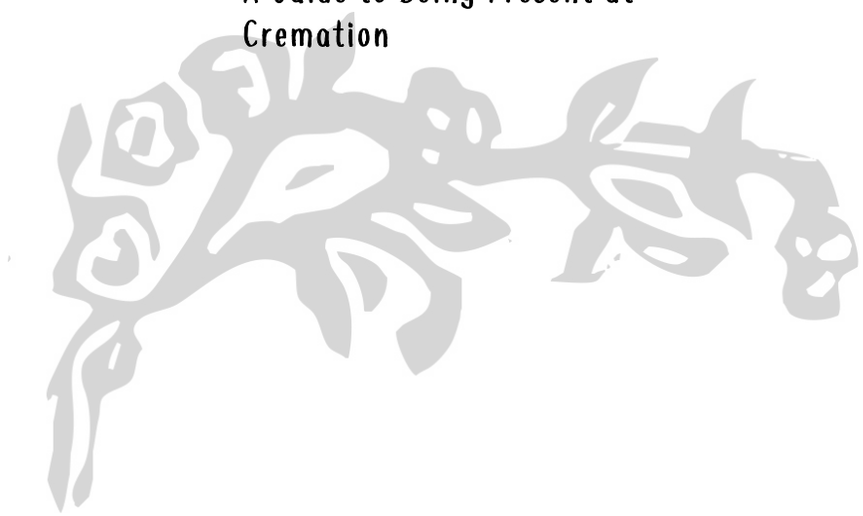
Cremating Anne

A Guide to Being Present at Cremation



Sally White King

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May our journey bless your journey

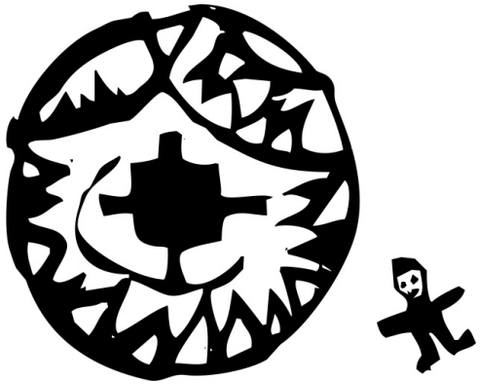
Anne White and Sally White King

CREMATING ANNE

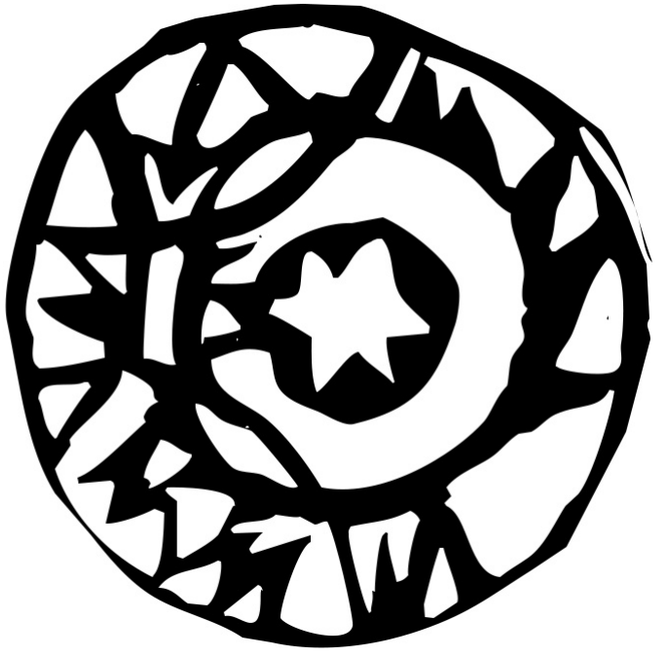
I'd heard somewhere that you could be present at a mortuary cremation. Being there with Anne made all the difference.

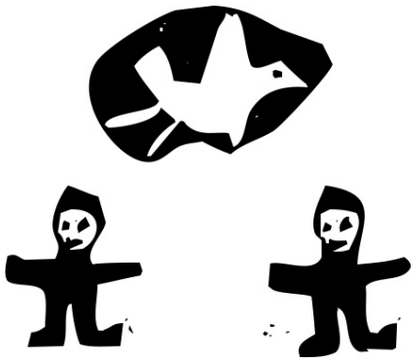
This book is about sending Anne on her way.

My sister Anne died. She'd been in hospice for a month when she broke her leg and that was it. She stopped eating and it was just eighteen days later that she died. Anne had been living with various serious physical and cognitive conditions for the last four years and now her sojourn was complete.



Anne was my older sister.
I became her primary care giver when she moved to Colorado. I was also her power of attorney and advocate with the nursing home where she lived.





So when it came time to make the arrangements for her remains, I was free to find the right fit for myself and Anne, which is what I did. I wanted to be present with her if I could.

Cremating Anne changed us both forever.

I picked out a funeral home when Anne entered Hospice. I made a visit to get the feel of the place and get an idea of the details that were coming. It was very helpful to have a plan in place.

When Anne died Hospice arrived to bundle her up for her journey to the funeral home.

I was pleased that I knew where she was headed.

It took a few days to get the death certificate signed and delivered to the funeral home. When the documentation was in place I met with Mike, the mortuary director and I asked him if I could be present at Anne's cremation.

He said that I could be present. I asked if I could see the space where the cremation would happen. I wanted to decide if I could handle being there.

Mike led me through the door to the back and relaxed once we left the formal setting out front. We moved through a couple of garages to an end garage where the cremation furnace took up most of the room. The small remaining space was lit by a window in the garage door. Everything was metal and clean.

Mike and I made a plan that I would come the next day at 8:30 to sit with Anne before the cremation at 9.

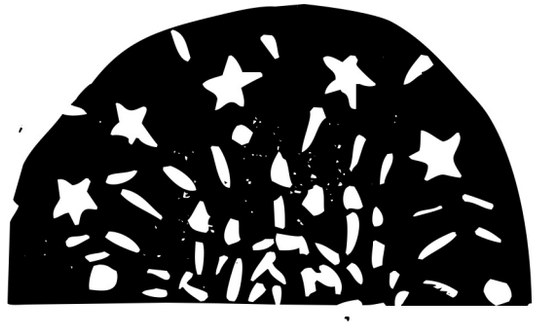
I asked my daughter, Willow, if she'd like to come with me. She was honest about not wanting to be there but she said she would come if I wanted her to. I decided that I was comfortable with going it alone. That evening before the cremation, my son in law, Jacques said he'd like to go with me.

We agreed that we would meet at the mortuary in the morning to see Anne on her way.

When we got to the funeral home, they were ready for us. Mike led us through the maze of garages to the kiln space. There was Anne. She was in an open cardboard coffin and they had tucked a sheet in around her. It was a sweet gesture on their part.

My darling sister, even now, I think of her as bathed in yellow light.

Jacques and I put sage sprigs and rose petals all around her body. I kissed Anne's forehead many times and spoke words only my heart will remember. I added the three notes from family members, a photo of Eddie, Anne's boyfriend, a photo of Anne with our dad and one of my sister's favorite mints.

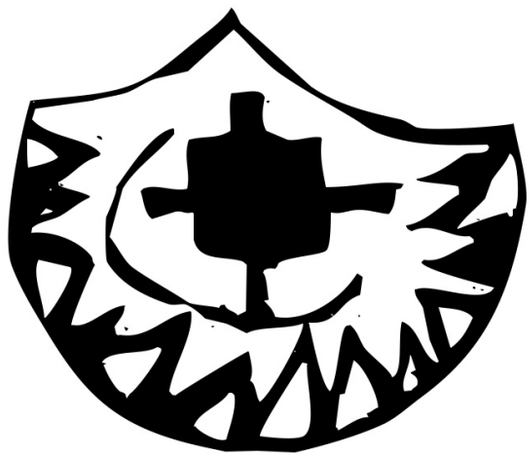


We were getting Anne's body ready for the sacred fire and we were healing ourselves with the placing of these items around her.

She looked well loved.

Mike asked us if we were ready. I was not ready but I said yes. He placed the lid on the box and rolled Anne into the cremation kiln with the turn of a lever. And then the door to the furnace shut.

This, of course, is too final for mere mortals.



Mike reminded me which button to push to turn on the fire.

He left us to say our final prayer or whatever kind of spirit language we chose.

I told Anne that her family was with her, that we loved her very much and other things that I don't remember.

I reached up and pushed the button. The fire made a roar. Anne who had been cold was getting warm. No one liked the cold less than my sister Anne.

As we saw my sister off, I think our hair was standing on end like it does right before you get struck by lightning. All the stardust and cosmic awareness zipped through us at a tremendous speed. Jacques looked wild-eyed. It was a big moment for all of us.

I picked up Anne's ashes that afternoon and they reside in a clay pot a small table in our dining room.

Come summer we will place them into the earth on the hill out behind our house, near the zen pine tree. Anne would like this spot.

I received a gift from being present with Anne while she was dying.

I am more than I was.

Knowing myself in new ways: as someone with staying power, perspective and life knowledge. I fulfilled a promise that I made to my soul long ago, a promise that will ease my own transition when it comes and hold me in good stead.

I am more than I was.

I Bequeath Myself to Dirt

From Song of Myself
Walt Whitman

I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow
from the grass I love.
If you want me again look for me
under your boot soles.

You will hardly know who I am
or what I mean,
But I shall be good health to you
nevertheless.

And filter and fibre, your blood.
Failing to fetch me at first Keep
encouraged,

Missing me one place search another.
I stop somewhere waiting for you.

Love's constancy

Hadewijch of Antwerp,
(13th c.)
(tr. By Oliver Davies)

Anyone who has waded
Through Love's turbulent waters,
Now feeling hunger and now satiety,
Is untouched by the season
Of withering or blooming,
For in the deepest
And most dangerous waters,
On the highest peaks,
Love is always the same.

About the Author

Sally is a painter and printmaker and all-around advocate for the human realm. She lives in Colorado on the banks of a river with her husband John.

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