February 2025

Informed Final Choices Crestone End of Life Project

Issue #6

VOLUNTEER NEWSLETTER

CEOLP's Natural Burial Ground

Although most Crestone End of Life Project (CEOLP) registrants choose open-air cremation for their final disposition, natural burial is another option that CEOLP has offered since 2022. Located on a five-acre parcel with expansive views of the mountains and valley, CEOLP volunteers facilitate both the burial itself, and a ceremony designed by the family and held within the pyre circle. Also, like cremations, natural burial is open to any Saguache County resident, whether they rent or own property in the county, if they are registered with CEOLP prior to death.

Burial at the Natural Burial Ground (NBG) means that only natural biodegradable materials go into the grave. CEOLP provides shrouds and lowering cloths, or the family may choose other natural burial options including burial baskets, caskets or coffins made of decomposable materials, although no casket is required. The shrouded body is carried to the gravesite on a wooden palette and lowered (without the palette) by pallbearers using lowering straps. Organic materials are added to the grave, and once the body is in place, juniper sprigs are added before the grave is refilled.

The intention with the NBG is that the land remain as undisturbed as possible. This means gravesites are located (in roughly a spiral pattern) in areas of least vegetation on the gently rolling grounds. Because it is so sandy, graves are hand-dug, eliminating the need for heavy equipment.

There are no headstones. Instead, graves can have simple sandstone markers with the deceased's name and birth/death dates sandblasted into the stone.

CEOLP volunteers facilitate the family's choice of ceremony, typically starting with a procession into the pyre circle. There, family and guests reminisce about their loved one, with whatever music, prayers, chanting, or other elements of ceremony the family chooses. Once the ceremony is complete, the pallbearers carry the body to the gravesite and lower it into the grave with only family members standing nearby, to minimize disturbing vegetation. The other guests witness the burial from just outside the pyre fence, a short distance away.

For more information about the NBG or open-air cremation, visit https://crestoneendoflifeproject.org/.

Malina

This month Malina, CEOLP volunteer and current board member, shares her thoughts on the roles she's involved with and what it means to her.

1. What volunteer role(s) do you take part in with CEOLP?

- Currently I am the team leader for Care of the Body, I have also assisted with parking, site prep, hosting and cremains. For Informed Final Choices I have often done educational outreach with HS and college students and site tours.

2. About how long have you been volunteering?`

- I started volunteering in 2001.

3. What first motivated you to become involved?

- In 2001 I found myself in a circle of 12 folks at the deathbed of a dear old friend. We toasted her with beer, sang songs and prayers, and told stories about her life. Then I joined four other women, and we attended to her body: we gently washed her, anointed her with oils, dressed her, and laid her out in a sacred peaceful space!

4. What's most important and meaningful to you about it?

- What I realized was that I had just participated in something that humanity had been doing for hundreds of thousands of years! I felt honored and called to assist other families in the death of a loved one.

5. What do you enjoy about it?

- Being of service, in whatever capacity, is so rewarding!

6. Is there anything that has challenged you about it, and if so, how that's helped you know yourself better or grow?

- Working with others and being in service to a family at such a difficult time is always a great practice in leaving my ego at the door.

News From the Board

- Long time Crestone resident and artist, Roy Gould, was laid to rest in CEOLP's natural burial ground following a well-attended ceremony inside the pyre circle on Sunday afternoon, January 26th. Much gratitude is owed to the handful of volunteers who had the difficult task of digging through the frozen ground the day before the ceremony.
- The next IFC/CEOLP quarterly meeting will take place Wednesday, April 9th at 7 p.m. on zoom. We hope you'll join us!