

# Scholars Speak: End-of-Life Preferences Study

**I**t's extremely exciting to share with you news of the first phase of the Wiccan, Pagan, and Nature Spirituality Practitioners End-of-Life Survey. This survey was conducted by Dr. Marilyn Stoner, Priestess Nora Cedarwind Young, and Reverend Selena Fox. Response was unprecedented! Heartfelt thanks to Circle Sanctuary's online resources and *CIRCLE Magazine* for helping to get the word of this study out there. To all of you that forwarded the study to lists, friends, blogs, groups, newsletters, and websites, we are grateful. We received responses from all over the world, including the entire United States, Canada, Australia, Brazil, Denmark, East Angola, Germany, Greece, Israel, New Zealand, Philippines, Scotland, South Africa, Turkey, United Kingdom, and Wales. We really are everywhere!

Dr. Marilyn Stoner and I have both had opportunities to share our initial findings and we are amazed at how eager people have been to learn. Both the academic and institutional environments have welcomed information about choice and diversity of Wiccans and how to consciously meet the needs of Wiccans, Pagans, and Nature Spirituality Practitioners while preparing to cross over to the Summerland before, during, and after the time of death.

Dr. Stoner presented preliminary findings as a part of a larger presentation on spirituality at the Mayo Clinic Conference on Evidenced Based Spiritual Care. Priestess Nora Cedarwind Young has been asked to do several educational presentations for area Hospice Groups and Hospitals. On December 13, 2006, Marilyn and Nora presented a National Teleconference for Hospice and Palliative Nurses Association. Articles are pending publication in medical and trade journals, and inquiries for training have come in from other states and countries, also!

*We are pleased to say that due to the incredible insights and information we have received through this study, we will be writing a book about this experience and the information that has been identified.*

*It became obvious early into the study that many of us have specific concerns and desires for what we want to see happen at our time of crossing. We are diverse, unique,*



Sunset by Mari Jackson

*and outspoken. The largest age group that responded was 36-50 years and above. Cremation was the highest preference for after death. Specific summary data is as follows:*

## Data on Wiccan Survey

2,607 people completed the survey. The breakdown of where participants lived is: Southwest 12%, Northwest 11%, Central 26%, Northeast 22%, Southeast 16%, and 14% lived outside the United States.

Participants were asked to describe the term(s) they use for their religion. The responses show the diversity of descriptive labels used. 27% used the term "Wiccan," 31% used "Pagan," 11% used the term "Nature Spiritualist," 27% used a combination of terms, and the remainder of the respondents did not feel these terms accurately reflected their faith.

The study participants were a very experienced group of practitioners with full 80% having practiced some form of Pagan path for 5 years or more. One third of the sample has practiced for 15 or more years.

While 30% of the participants have completed an advance directive, over 80% have spoken with their family about their end-of-life wishes. This is consistent with general population. The results of the study demonstrated that Pagans have strong preferences for the following end-of-life care: Death at home - 66%, Cremation - 74%, Donation of organs - 67%, Want to have a memorial service after death - 81%. While the group was almost evenly divided between wanting a headstone or grave marker, 73% of the participants who wanted a marker wanted to have a Pagan symbol on the marker.

The study was designed to gather information about end of life preferences so that health care workers in palliative and hospice care could provide spiritually competent care. One question asked participants to describe the content of a class they would like offered to hospice nurses on death related care. Themes from this open ended question revealed a consistent desire for nursing and other health care workers to understand the basic tenets that are shared by all Pagan traditions, to maintain a connection to nature, appreciate that death is a normal part of life, and there is

little fear of death. One response summarized the group:

*Pagans vary widely on their personal beliefs, so I do not propose to speak for everyone. Basic tenets, however, include ultimate reverence for nature and respect for the natural world and all living things, a respect for balance... equality of males and females for their importance in the life cycle and respecting the equal value of the skills and properties unique to each gender (two halves of a whole), celebrating the Wheel of the Year -- natural cycles enjoyed during seasonal holidays, description of several modes of Pagan practice (Wicca, Druids, Shamanism, Asatru, Gaiaism, etc.) and a basic composite of the history of Pagan culture and religious practices.*

Another response also described the essence of the tradition this way:

*The importance of respect, Honoring of many traditions, the CELEBRATION of life vs. sorrow in death: This last one is important. While grieving is normal and important when one passes beyond, the celebration of her/his life is far more important. A bad habit of hospice care is to begin mourning days, weeks, even months before someone dies. These are the times when they should be reminded of living and making choices for their dying. Pitying a Pagan hospice client is unacceptable.*

The most alarming figure in the study was that over 70% of participants have not put their wishes in writing and do not have an Advance Directive completed. This creates specific and valid risks of wishes not being followed. Advance Directives can be as simple as a handwritten statement signed and dated by you in accordance to your state laws. It's always best to have either two witnesses or certification of your signature such as a notary. Leaving no room for discrepancy is the best plan. A copy of it should be given to your primary healthcare provider. Keep a personal copy in a SAFE PLACE like a safe deposit box or well-labeled file, or even in a zip-lock bag and put it in your freezer. It is critical that you let others know this document exists and especially where it is located! We also suggest you put a card in your wallet that states, "I have an Advance Directive." Include the name and contact information of your Priest and Priestess or those you would like contacted for spiritual support, as well.

You can write an Advance Directive in several ways. Write your wishes down yourself. Use a form provided by your doctor. Contact your local Health Department or State Department on Aging to get a form. Call a lawyer. Use a computer software package for legal documents. Advance Directives do not have to be complicated legal documents. They can be short, simple statements about what you want done or not done if you cannot speak for yourself. Always inquire into and follow state laws. It's also a good idea once you have completed your AD to review it with others, especially your healthcare provider, to assure they understand your intent. Advance Directives can be changed at anytime, also, as long as you are of sound mind, able to think rationally, and communicate your wishes in a clear manner.

The Internet offers excellent resources:

- [www.caringinfo.org](http://www.caringinfo.org) (offers specific laws to all 50 states)
- [www.agingwithdignity.org](http://www.agingwithdignity.org) (Five Wishes Workbook is excellent!)
- [www.uslivingwillregistry.com](http://www.uslivingwillregistry.com)
- [www.aarp.org](http://www.aarp.org)

It is also important to make contact *now* with hospice providers in your community. Let healthcare providers know what your needs are and help them prepare. Healthcare workers who provide end-of-life care are very interested in providing patient centered care. Educating providers about the diversity of Pagan beliefs, the view of death as a natural part of life, and the Wiccan Rede will help them meet your needs when death comes. You can locate hospices in your community through the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization: [www.nhpco.org](http://www.nhpco.org).

Phase Two of the study will begin when the data is completely compiled and we have the tool(s) to conduct continued research. All updates and announcements will be listed in *CIRCLE Magazine*, so keep your subscription current! You may also refer to our websites listed at the end of this article for current information.

We thank you all for your contributions! Helen Keller said: "Alone, we can do so little, together, we can do so much." We say Thank You and Blessed Be!

**Update:** In July, we were notified by Susan Shropshire, Senior Editorial Associate of the Journal of Hospice and Palliative Nursing that our article, *Spiritual Needs of Wiccans, Pagan and Nature Spirituality Practitioners* had successfully completed the peer review process and is scheduled for publication in the September/October edition of the magazine. Review copies will be available at Circle Sanctuary and at Pagan Spirit Gathering (PSG) next year.

*Nora Cedarwind Young and Dr. Marilyn Stoner*

*Nora Cedarwind Young is a Certified Death Midwife and Green Burial Educator as well as an Eco-Spiritual/Wiccan Hospice Chaplain in Washington State. She is a hospice volunteer, an ordained High Priestess and Minister and is currently doing advanced studies at Circle Sanctuary with Selena Fox in Barneveld, Wisconsin. Her website is [www.thresholdsoftlife.org](http://www.thresholdsoftlife.org)*

*Dr. Marilyn Smith-Stoner is a practicing Palliative Care Nurse since 1992. She teaches nursing at a California State University and is a Certified End-of-Life Nursing Education Consortium Trainer. She is online at [www.nursestoner.com](http://www.nursestoner.com)*

**Resources:**

- [www.funerals.org](http://www.funerals.org)
- [www.familydoctor.org](http://www.familydoctor.org)
- [www.caringinfo.org](http://www.caringinfo.org)
- Caring for the Dead, by Lisa Carlson

# Community Passages

## Weddings

**Alana and Amra (Cynthia Klessig & Stephen Colombo)** of Madison, Wisconsin exchanged wedding vows on September 9th, 2006, at Olbrich Gardens in Madison, Wisconsin. The ceremony was a blend of traditional Slavic and Roman customs that honored the ancestral lines of the couple. It was held in the stunning circular flower garden, with the Reverend Cat Donald, High Priestess of the Guardians of the Sacred Circle officiating. A reception was held for family and friends at the couple's home afterward.



**"Uncle Eddie" Mahonen and Robin Rios (Dancing Skygazer)** of Illinois were handfasted July 8, 2006. Handfasting was facilitated by KiriSue Renwick, with attendance by Pagan Spirit Gathering Thalia's Brats and other members of the immediate family, Luke and Miranda Rios, and Maxine Knepper, and ancestors of both families, and animal friends Ruby, Zeus, and Lucifer.



## Deaths

**Emergyn** crossed the veil on March 23, 2007. He was born in November, 1954 in Wales and as a child lived in Chicago. At the age of fifteen he began studying the Craft through various traditions. He spent much of his young adulthood traveling around the United States. He joined the military and eventually became a Navy Seal working at Bethesda Hospital, Maryland. He was member of Grove of the Unicorn, Bronze Griffin, and many other groups, eventually creating his own group, Celtica Draconis. In the early eighties, he settled in Atlanta, Georgia where he lived for several decades. He held a Third Degree in a Gardanarian tradition, and received his Second Degree Barding from Lady



Emergyn of SerpentStone at Mabon 2002. He has been a member of the SerpentStone Community since 1991 and served as Grand Bard to the family. He spent the later years of his life working for the greater good of the Pagan/Wiccan community and entertaining his friends and family with his heartfelt and often whimsical music. "Songs of Myst & Moon" by Emergyn and Friends is a collection of his music recorded with Kiva and released on CD. He leaves behind a son and a spiritual family who will always remember him with love.

**Wendy Phyllis Moher** died February 11, 2007 at the age of 46 at home in the comfort of her loving family. She was from Squire Street, New London and formerly of Coventry. She was born April 19, 1960 in Everett, Massachusetts. She is the daughter of June Tabb Moher of New London and the late William Moher, and beloved mother of Kyle Cormier of East Hartford. She graduated from New London High School in 1978 and later from Connecticut College with a Bachelors of Arts in History. She was currently employed at New Haven Juvenile Detention Center as Deputy Superintendent. Donations in her memory can be made to Hospice of Southeastern CT, PO Box 902, Uncasville, Connecticut 06382. More information at: <http://wendymoher.blogspot.com/>



## Ordination

**Reverend Nora Cedarwind Young** was ordained as a

Circle Minister on Friday, June 22, 2007 at this year's Pagan Spirit Gathering at Wisteria by Selena Fox, numerous Circle Ministers and the PSG Community. Many gathered in the sacred space of Hickory Grove and the sky spirits held off with liquid blessings until the very end. Nora was surrounded by, and received numerous blessings and gifts from, the people she holds dear in her heart and life. Cedarwind worked with Selena in the Ministers Training Program as a "Minister doing advanced study" as she was previously ordained as a High Priestess in the Circle of Stellamaris and The Fellowship of Isis. Nora has committed her service to the work of a Death Midwife, Green Burial Educator and End of Life Planner, as well as become her state's first Wiccan Hospice Chaplain. She is honored to serve the Circle Community.



Please send us notices of births, deaths, marriages, and other passages for possible inclusion in this section. Be sure to include location, full names, dates, group affiliation if any, and other details in descriptions.  
Email: [editor@circlesanctuary.org](mailto:editor@circlesanctuary.org)