

## **The One Washcloth Project**

### ***The One Washcloth Team***

*Lynn Holzman, RN, BSN, CHPN, PHN*

*Rochelle Martin, BScN, RN, CPMHN, MDiv*

*Susan Oppie, BSN, RN, CHPN*

National Home Funeral Alliance members Lynn Holzman, Rochelle Martin, and NHFA Board member Susan Oppie are excited to announce a new after-death care initiative called **One Washcloth**, a charitable program offering families an opportunity to reclaim the healing benefits of care for a loved one after death.

We live in a culture that has lost touch with the realities of death. Where traditionally families and communities around the world, and throughout time, have cared for their own dead, we now most often hand over the care of our deceased loved ones to paid funeral professionals. ***However, as nurses who have journeyed with dying people and their families, Lynn, Rochelle, and Susan know how precious and transformative this hands-on presence can be.***

In homes, hospices, and hospitals, families can be gently invited to offer care for their loved one after death, with the simple gift of a washcloth. With a warm cloth in hand, families are given the opportunity to provide care naturally and instinctively. Gently wiping the face and hands of a family member who has died can be a profoundly healing, final act of love and care.

**One Washcloth** is currently beginning a pilot project at host sites across the US and Canada. A hand-made, wet-proof cloth gift bag, containing a special washcloth made from organic fibers, will be offered by front-line caretakers to the family and friends of someone who has just died. An instructional gift tag attached to the bag reads:

*This cloth is a gift.  
Please use it to care for your loved one who has died, as a final act of love.  
You may use it to gently wash the face, hands, and body of your loved one,  
as you would have in life.  
Follow your instincts. There is no “right” way. There is no rush.  
You may keep this cloth as a reminder of the tender care you gave at the end.*

Families who have had the opportunity to be with, and provide hands-on care for a loved one after death—even if only briefly, and even in circumstances of unexpected or traumatic death—reflect afterward on how meaningful these moments were for them. Often difficult, often sad, but always profound, and never regretted.

*“We loved him to the end.”*

*“We did everything for her that we could, even after she died.”*

*“It was hard, but I’m so glad that we stayed with him.”*

*“It took a while to sink in. I’m not sure it would have, if I hadn’t been with her.”*

Families talk about how important these final acts of love and care were, in their understanding of the reality of the death, in their grieving, and in their eventual healing. The tool, the silent invitation, was a simple, comforting cloth.

The **One Washcloth** project hopes that this opportunity for caring engagement will be healing and transformative for grieving families, and perhaps inspire further interest in family-directed after-death care options. Ultimately, **One Washcloth** hopes to help our culture re-engage with death, as we become more comfortable with death’s place in the circle of life.

Please visit the **One Washcloth** website to learn more!

***onewashcloth.org***