



P.O.V.

Discussion Guide

Season

17

A Family Undertaking

A Film by Elizabeth Westrate



www.pbs.org/pov



Letter from the Filmmaker

NEW YORK, 2004

Dear Colleague,

In 1999, while researching a different project, I stumbled upon a website that described how people could care for their own dead at home. At the time I was seeking subject matter for a film which was meant to be an irreverent look at bizarre modern death rituals: ashes shot into outer space on rocket ships, modern mummification, cryogenics – that type of thing.

Initially, reading about home funerals made me very uneasy. It called to mind images of Faulkner and the Old West, and it certainly was not the kind of story I had been looking for. But, I was intrigued. Why would anyone want to do this? I called Jerri Lyons, the “death midwife” from *Final Passages*, to find out more about her work.

I admit that I expected Jerri to be eccentric and not very convincing about this strange mission of hers. But after speaking for over an hour, and much to my surprise, I found a lot of what she said to be persuasive. Having recently lost my own grandfather, I couldn’t help imagining how the experience might have been different if my family and I had been aware of this option just a few months earlier. By the time I hung up the phone, my original idea for the documentary seemed superficial and glib, and I knew I had to make *A Family Undertaking* instead. I spent the next four years producing the film.

At one point during filming, a funeral salesman explained to me that a family’s motivation to spend thousands of dollars on a casket is the same as a bride’s who spends thousands on a dress that she knows she’ll wear only once. He presented this argument as justification for the great expense of a funeral. However, I thought it was a perfect illustration of how we may be losing sight of what is important.

When a death in the family occurs, most of us hand things over to strangers so that we can put the experience behind us as quickly and efficiently as possible. By doing so, I have come to understand, we miss an essential opportunity for intimacy and healing. While the financial benefit of home death care is significant, it quickly became clear to me that it is not the most compelling reason that a family might consider this option.



Filmmaker Elizabeth Westrate



Letter from the Filmmaker



Producer / Director Elizabeth Westrate talks with Bernard Carr at his home.

In most of the world, home funerals have always been the norm, but most Americans have had no direct experience with caring for the dead. I feel that it is our culture's lack of familiarity with death that has resulted in our fear of it. So, it seemed crucial to film these events unfolding, rather than simply feature family members describing their experiences after the fact. As I learned more, I decided that showing the bodies of the deceased was also very important, if only to keep the viewer's imagination from filling in the blanks with grotesque and unrealistic images.

I did not know when I started this project if any families would be willing to share these experiences with me. I learned, though, that many people who have been through a home funeral are eager to tell their stories. Still, it was difficult to gain access during this private and emotional time. In order to reach out to families, I worked closely with the handful of home funeral organizations that exist across the United States, and also with the Vermont-based Funeral Consumers Alliance.

As word spread about the film, several people mailed in home movies that they had filmed in the past. Others were willing to record their ceremonies for us, but were not comfortable having our crew involved. In these cases, I shipped them a small digital camera so that they could create their own videos for the documentary. Finally, we were incredibly fortunate to meet two special people, Ann Stuart in California and Bernard Carr in South Dakota, who invited us to film with them during the last months of their lives and through their home funerals.

As Nancy Poer says in the film, "home funerals aren't for everyone." My goal for this film is not necessarily that after viewing it, everyone should choose to have a home funeral,

but simply that people might better understand that choices exist. I also hope that *A Family Undertaking* will spark a dialogue within families that might lead to better communication about the issues surrounding the end of life.

As a first-time filmmaker, the experience of making *A Family Undertaking* was challenging and incredibly rewarding. I will be forever grateful to all of the families that shared their stories.

Elizabeth Westrate

Producer/Director



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Introduction

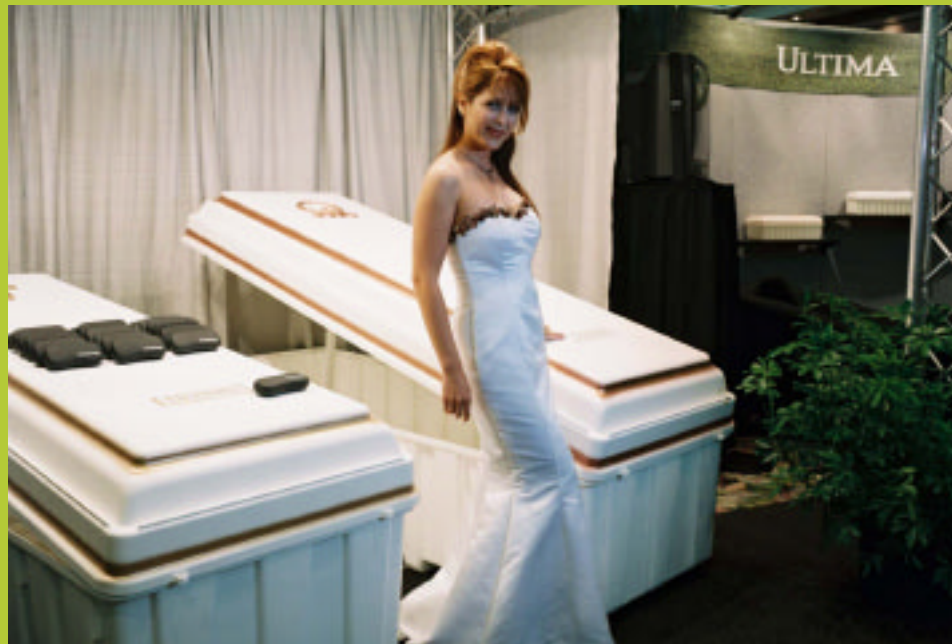
Prior to the 20th century, especially in rural areas, most Americans prepared their dead for burial with the help of family and friends. Today death care has been transformed into a multi-million-dollar industry run by professional caretakers. People who believe that the reliance on morticians and funeral directors has alienated Americans from a critical life cycle passage have pioneered a small but growing new trend: home death care. *A Family Undertaking*, an hour-long film by Elizabeth Westrate, documents their efforts.

The families featured in *A Family Undertaking* reject funeral industry practice for a variety of reasons. Opposition to embalming, dissatisfaction with a sanitized feel that forcibly separates loved ones from the deceased, resentment of the marketing of services that aren't needed, environmentally unsound practice, and the high cost are a few of the critiques that viewers hear. But the film is not primarily an expose of the funeral industry. Rather, it is a poignant portrayal of the transformative and powerfully healing personal experience of caring for the dead at home.

Viewers meet several families, each in different situations, who have chosen to perform a home funeral. Audiences will be watching things most of us rarely see – dead bodies, not in the context of shooter video games or slasher films, but in the respectful care of those who loved them. For some people this simple visual will be jarring. For some it will provide an opportunity for introspection. For others, the deep sense

of caring demonstrated by the families featured in *A Family Undertaking* will be an inspiration to deepen their own capacity for caring.

As an outreach tool, *A Family Undertaking* provides an uncommon opportunity to open conversations about



A model promotes caskets at the International Cemetery and Funeral Association Convention in Orlando, FL.

death and all its implications. From an individual's deepest personal fears to the Federal Trade Commission rules governing funeral industry practice, from spiritual beliefs to expressions of love, this rich and moving set of stories gives you a unique resource to explore a topic that will inevitably affect every single person in your community.



Potential Partners

A Family Undertaking is well suited for use in a variety of settings and is especially recommended for use with:

- **Your local PBS station**
- **Groups focused on any of the issues listed above**
- **Faith-based organizations, groups, and clergy**
- **Hospice**
- **Academic departments and student groups at colleges, universities, community colleges, and high schools**
- **Community organizations with a mission to promote education and learning such as P.O.V.'s national partners Elderhostel Learning in Retirement Centers, members of the Listen Up! Youth Network, or your local library**

Key Issues

A Family Undertaking is an excellent tool for dialogue and reflection because it presents a direct, and sometimes graphic, depiction of difficult circumstances, but in a gentle and respectful way. It will be of special interest to people involved in:

anthropology

death and dying

family counseling

family law

funeral industry

geriatric services /

anyone serving the needs of the elderly

“green” funerals / environmental protection

home care

hospice care

medicine / health care

public health

religion, both mainstream and alternative

ritual

social work

spirituality



Background Information

People We Meet in *A Family Undertaking*

Home Funeral Guides



Jerri Lyons, *Final Passages*



Beth Knox, *Crossings: Caring for Our Own at Death*



Nancy Poer, Author of *Living Into Dying*

Consumer Advocate



Lisa Carlson, formerly of the Funeral Consumers Alliance, now Executive Director of the Funeral Ethics Organization

Families



Carr Family – a family of ranchers in South Dakota. Keith is the son. Bernard is the elderly father.



Anne Stuart & Dwight Caswell – Anne died from breast cancer and requested that her husband, Dwight, carry out a home funeral



Background Information

Home Funerals

According to Jerri Lyons, a home funeral guide, “A home funeral is where the family is involved in creating and carrying out all the funeral arrangements, and it doesn’t usually involve a funeral home or a mortuary at all.” Advocates of the practice summarize the benefits to include:

- Facing death with far less fears, knowing what to do and who to call
- Empowerment through creating instructions that allow loved ones to care for you personally after death
- Knowing that your body will be touched with respect and care
- Family and friends constructing or decorating a wooden/cardboard casket or urn as a healing act of closure
- Ceremony being held in a private, intimate, de-institutionalized setting
- Children learning that death is a natural part of the life cycle by being part of a home funeral
- Ecologically conscious disposition (cremation or burial)
- Your death as a heartfelt story that will change cultural beliefs for future generations

(source: Final Passages website)



Bernard Carr watches while son Keith decorates his homemade casket by burning the family cattle brand into the wood.



Using This Guide

This guide is designed to help you use *A Family Undertaking* as the centerpiece of a community event. It contains suggestions for convening an event as well as ideas for how to help participants think more deeply about the issues in the film. The discussion questions are designed for a very wide range of audiences. Rather than attempt to address them all, choose one or two that best meet the needs and interests of your group.

Planning an Event

In addition to showcasing documentary films as an art form, screenings of P.O.V. films can be used to present information, get people interested in taking action on an issue, provide opportunities for people from different groups or perspectives to exchange views, and/or create space for reflection. Using the questions below as a planning checklist will help ensure a high-quality/high-impact event.

- **Have you defined your goals?** With your partner(s), set realistic goals. Will you host a single event or engage in an ongoing project? Being clear about your goals will make it much easier to structure the event, target publicity, and evaluate results.
- **Does the way you are planning to structure the event fit your goals?** Do you need an outside facilitator, translator, or sign language interpreter? If your goal is to share information, are there local experts on the topic who should be present? How large an audience do you want? (Large groups are appropriate for information exchanges. Small groups allow for more intensive dialogue.)
- **Have you arranged to involve all stakeholders?** It is especially important that people be allowed to speak for themselves. If your group is planning to take action that affects people other than those present, how will you give voice to those not in the room?
- **Is the event being held in a space where all participants will feel equally comfortable?** Is it wheelchair accessible? Is it in a part of town that's easy to reach by various kinds of transportation? If you are bringing together different constituencies, is it neutral territory? Does the physical configuration allow for the kind of discussion you hope to have?
- **Will the room setup help you meet your goals?** Is it comfortable? If you intend to have a discussion, can people see one another? Are there spaces to use for small breakout groups? Can everyone easily see the screen and hear the film?
- **Have you scheduled time to plan for action?** Planning next steps can help people leave the room feeling energized and optimistic, even when the discussion has been difficult. Action steps are especially important for people who already have a good deal of experience talking about the issue(s) on the table. For those who are new to the issue(s), just engaging in public discussion serves as an action step.

How will you let people know about the graphic content in the film? Advocates for home funerals believe that people should not be separated from the natural process of caring for deceased loved ones. To reflect that belief, *A Family Undertaking* includes extended scenes showing people who have died. It also shows a portion of an autopsy and putting a corpse into a crematorium. Viewers need to know about this content before making their decision about whether or not to view the film.



Using This Guide

Facilitating a Discussion

Controversial or unusual topics often make for excellent discussions. By their nature, those same topics also give rise to deep emotions and strongly held beliefs. As a facilitator, you can create an atmosphere where people feel safe, encouraged, and respected, making it more likely that they will be willing to share openly and honestly. Here's how:

Finding a Facilitator

Some university professors, human resource professionals, clergy, and youth leaders may be specially trained in facilitation skills. In addition to these local resources, groups such as the National Conference of Community and Justice (www.nccj.org) or Study Circles (www.studycircles.org) may be able to refer you to trained facilitators.

Preparing Yourself

Identify your own hot-button issues. View the film before your event and give yourself time to reflect so you aren't dealing with raw emotions at the same time that you are trying to facilitate a discussion.

Be knowledgeable. You don't need to be an expert on end-of-life rituals or the funeral industry to facilitate a discussion, but knowing the basics can help you keep a discussion on track and gently correct misstatements of fact. Be sure that you are familiar with end-of-life rituals commonly practiced by the people attending your event, as well as with the laws governing your state. In addition, the home funeral advocates' critique of industry-based funerals applies predominantly to Christian practice in the U.S. Other religions and cultures do not conduct funerals or care for the dead in the ways they describe. For example, Jews do not embalm, and traditional Jews do not leave bodies alone, even in a morgue. The suggested websites in the Resources section on p.16 can provide more information.

Be clear about your role. You may find yourself taking on several roles for an event, e.g., host, organizer, projectionist. If you are also planning to serve as facilitator, be sure that you can focus on that responsibility and avoid distractions during the discussion. Keep in mind that being a facilitator is not the same as being a teacher. A teacher's job is to convey specific information. In contrast, a facilitator remains neutral, helping move along the discussion without imposing their views on the dialogue.

Know your group. Issues can play out very differently for different groups of people. Is your group new to the issue or have they dealt with it before? Factors like geography, age, race, religion, and socioeconomic class can all have an impact on comfort levels, speaking styles, and prior knowledge. If you are bringing together different segments of your community, we strongly recommend hiring an experienced facilitator.



Using This Guide

Preparing the Group

Consider how well group members know one another. If you are bringing together people who have never met, you may want to devote some time at the beginning of the event for introductions.

Agree to ground rules around language. Involve the group in establishing some basic rules to ensure respect and aid clarity. Typically such rules include no yelling or use of slurs and asking people to speak in the first person (“I think....”) rather than generalizing for others (“Everyone knows that...”).

Ensure that everyone has an opportunity to be heard. Be clear about how people will take turns or indicate that they want to speak. Plan a strategy for preventing one or two people from dominating the discussion. If the group is large, are there plans to break into small groups or partners, or should attendance be limited?

Talk about the difference between dialogue and debate. In a debate, participants try to convince others that they are right. In a dialogue, participants try to understand each other and expand their thinking by sharing viewpoints and listening to each other actively. Remind people that they are engaged in a dialogue.

Encourage active listening. Ask the group to think of the event as being about listening, as well as discussing. Participants can be encouraged to listen for things that challenge as well as reinforce their own ideas. You may also consider asking people to practice formal “active listening,” where participants listen without interrupting the speaker, then re-phrase to see if they have heard correctly.

Remind participants that everyone sees through the lens of their own experience. Who we are influences how we interpret what we see. So everyone in the group may have a different view about the content and meaning of film they have just seen, and all of them may be accurate. It can help people to understand one another’s perspectives if people identify the evidence on which they base their opinion as well as share their views.

Take care of yourself and group members. If the intensity level rises, pause to let everyone take a deep breath. You might also consider providing a safe space to “vent,” perhaps with a partner or in a small group of familiar faces. If you anticipate that people may be upset, be prepared to refer them to local support agencies and/or have local professionals present. Be sure to make it clear whether or not members of the press are present and whether comments are “on the record” or there is a reasonable expectation that requests for confidentiality will be honored.



General Discussion Questions

Death is a difficult topic for many people to talk about. So, immediately after the film, you may want to give people a few quiet moments to reflect on what they have seen. Then you might want to pose a general question and give people some time to themselves to jot down or think about their answers before opening the discussion. General questions might include:

- **If you could ask anyone in the film a single question, who would you ask and what would you ask them?**
- **What insights or new knowledge did you gain from this film? Did what you learned surprise you?**
- **Did any parts of this film disturb you? Why? Did any parts of this film delight you? Why?**
- **Two months from now, what do you think you will remember from this film and why?**

Unless you think participants are so uncomfortable that they can't engage until they have had a break, don't encourage people to leave the room between the film and the discussion. If you save your break for an appropriate moment during the discussion, you won't lose the feeling of the film as you begin your dialogue.



Keith Carr, Prairie City, South Dakota



Discussion Prompts

PERSONAL REFLECTION: CLARIFYING YOUR OWN BELIEFS

- Jerri Lyons believes that our culture is in denial about death. Do you agree? When, where, and with whom do you see, hear, or speak about death? When was the last time you spoke with loved ones about death?

do they attribute to institutional funerals and home funerals? What meaning(s) do you think are conveyed by our practices around death?

- Most people have not spent time with corpses, and many have not ever seen a corpse. Yet, as the film notes, we have ideas in our heads about how quickly decomposition takes place and what that physical process looks like. Where do your ideas about this process come from? Compare the ideas you have/had with what you see in the film. Were your ideas accurate?

- Jerri Lyons says our fear of death is a fear of the unknown, and that if we were more involved in the process of caring for our dead, the fear would go away. Why do you think people fear death? How might home death care address those fears? What else could you do to allay fears about death, either for yourself or for someone else?

- Beth Knox describes what she gained from home death care, saying it gave her “a sense of being able to experience those we love outside their physical body, transforming tragedy into something even beautiful, transforming grief into something higher and of comfort.” How do you think getting to spend time with a loved one who has died might help people in their grief process?

- Everything in *A Family Undertaking* was filmed with the family’s consent. In fact, in some instances a family member was given a camera and shot the footage themselves. How did it feel to watch families in such intimate moments? Would you welcome cameras at end-of-life rituals for your loved ones? Why or why not?



A vendor displays his embalming productions at the International Cemetery and Funeral Association Convention in Orlando, FL.

- If you were from another planet and you came upon our culture, what do you think you would learn about us from observing the ways we care for and intern our dead? Compare your answers to what people in the film say about how we have institutionalized death, made it into a commercial enterprise, and/or separated ourselves from the process. What meanings



Discussion Prompts

THINKING ABOUT RITUAL

- Based on what you see and hear in *A Family Undertaking*, list the advantages and limitations of family-run, home-based after-death care. Since home-based care is not always an option, can you think of any ways to incorporate some of its advantages into a funeral not done at home?
- The speaker at the funeral industry convention talks about the importance of making funerals meaningful to each family. How would you make a funeral a meaningful experience?
- The film references earlier times in U.S. history when people died at home and family took care of their loved ones. Families with property sometimes buried family members in a small plot on their land. Investigate what your family did prior to the advent of professional undertakers. Before undertakers, what was common practice in the community you live in now? Are there still small family or church plots? Where and how were people buried who did not own land, who were slaves, who did not have surviving family, or who were not Christian?
- In many families, children are not permitted to attend funerals. In home-based after-death care, children are not sheltered from the experience but rather are included. What do you think children learn from each option (i.e., being kept away or being included)?
- People in the film reclaim end-of-life care from commercial interests and/or institutional medical models. Can you think of parallels to other lifecycle events that have become commercialized or institutionalized that could be similarly reclaimed (e.g., weddings, birth)?

THINKING ABOUT PUBLIC POLICY

- Lisa Carlson notes that people in the U.S. pay twice as much for a funeral as people in England, France, or Australia, and that “we’ve been willing victims.” Why do you think people in the U.S. are willing to pay too much? How does the culture link a willingness to spend money with the depth of a person’s love? How do you feel about this link? Brainstorm a list of ways to show love that do not involve spending money.
- The U.S. economy is, in part, based on the notion of caveat emptor (buyer beware). But Jerri Lyons points out that, “It’s very difficult to be a good consumer when you’re dealing with the emotions around death.” Should the funeral industry be regulated differently than other businesses because grief is involved? If so, what regulations would you institute?
- There is a debate in the U.S. over whether or not embalming should be standard practice. Not all religions permit the practice. What does your tradition teach? Do you think embalming is a good idea? Why or why not?



A vendor displays his cremation products at the International Cemetery and Funeral Association Convention in Orlando, FL.



Taking Action



Three generations of the Carr family men pose with the casket that they built for their father (seated).

If family members are open to it, make a date with your family for everyone to make clear what their wishes are for end-of-life care and ritual. Have each person put their plans for death care in writing. Make sure that all appropriate loved ones, legal representatives, and health care providers get a copy of the plan. If needed, have the plan notarized and attached to each person's will.

information, resources, and existing organizations (see website in Resources section).

Often, part of a home funeral is decorating the casket. Decorate a casket or a cloth to drape over a casket for someone you love. Explain the significance of your decorations to others in the group.

Investigate the cost of funerals where you live. Work with funeral homes to ensure that they provide the range of services necessary to meet the needs of all segments of your community.

Find out what the regulations governing home funerals are in your state. If they don't meet your wishes, work with like-minded groups to change them. If they do meet your needs, brainstorm ways to publicize them so people in your community have accurate information when they need to make decisions about death care.

Assuming that it is legal in your state, find ways to let people in your community know that home funerals are an option they can choose.

Form or join a memorial society to help families who want to do family-run funerals. Check the Funeral Consumers Alliance for



Resources

Websites

P.O.V.'s A Family Undertaking Website
www.pbs.org/pov/familyundertaking

General Overview

Access the *A Family Undertaking* website at www.pbs.org/pov to find answers to your questions about home funerals and to explore the history of the American way of death.

Q&A

Ask an Expert

Got a question about home funerals or the funeral industry? Our panel of guides and advocates from the Funeral Consumers Alliance, Final Passages, and the Funeral Ethics Organization are here to answer it. Got a question about home funerals or the funeral industry? Our panel of guides and advocates from the Funeral Consumers Alliance, Final Passages, and the Funeral Ethics Organization are here to answer it.

PHOTO GALLERY

Gone But Not Forgotten

Photographing a loved one after their death was common practice in the 19th and 20th centuries, an integral part of the mourning and memorializing process. These images recall a time when death played a more visible role in day-to-day life and provide context to reflect on current attitudes about death in American society.

What's Your P.O.V.?

*P.O.V.'s online Talking Back Tapestry is a colorful, interactive representation of your feelings about **A Family Undertaking**. Listen to other P.O.V. viewers talk about the film and add your thoughts by calling 1-800-688-4768. www.pbs.org/pov/talkingback.html*

INTERACTIVE TIMELINE

Dying in America: A Chronology

Trace the evolution of the American way of death from the colonial days through the present. Along the way you'll find changes in beliefs about death and grief, the emergence of the funeral industry, developments in the field of medicine, and the impact of war.

Resources

Find out more about your legal rights pertaining to home death care and what's involved in planning a home funeral. Learn about a variety of cultural death customs and explore related PBS and NPR websites.



Resources

Websites

FUNERAL CONSUMERS ALLIANCE

www.funerals.org

A one-stop source of references on death care and funerals, including a directory of non-profit funeral service providers, information on current law, how-tos on caring for your own dead, state-by-state regulations, and an excellent list of links to related organizations. The FCA also offers a planning kit for families, called "Before I Go, You Should Know", which is state-specific and very useful, even if you don't want to have a home funeral.

FINAL PASSAGES

www.finalpassages.org

Jerri Lyons, who is featured in the film, founded Final Passages. The website articulates the benefits of home or family-run funerals.

LAST ACTS

www.lastacts.org

A project of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation "to improve care and caring near the end-of-life", the website includes a myriad of resources related to end of life issues.

THE NATURAL DEATH CENTRE

www.naturaldeath.org.uk

The website of the British organization The Natural Death Centre includes information on "green funerals" as well as an interesting collection of links to articles on topics relating to do-it-yourself and funerals that protect the environment.

THE FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION

www.ftc.gov/bcp/rulemaking/funeral

The Federal Trade Commission is responsible for overseeing the funeral industry. The FTC website includes current regulations as well as comments on the regulations (type in "comment/" after the final slash in the url).

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF RETIRED PERSONS

www.aarp.org/griefandloss

The website of the American Association of Retired Persons includes information on how to support people who are grieving.

CROSSINGS: CARING FOR OUR OWN AT DEATH

www.crossings.net

The website for Beth Knox's Maryland-based home funeral organization: Crossings: Caring for our Own at Death

FUNERAL ETHICS ORGANIZATION

www.funeralethics.org

The website for the Funeral Ethics Organization, which is dedicated to improving communication and understanding between funeral-related businesses, as well as state agencies, law enforcement, hospice, and consumers from a diverse population.

GROWTH HOUSE

<http://www.growthhouse.org>

This website provides a comprehensive collection of reviewed resources for end-of-life care.



Resources

Books

Lisa Carlson's book, *Caring for the Dead, Your Final Act of Love*, is extremely informative and lists all kinds of practical advice and state-by-state regulations. It is available through <http://www.upperaccess.com/books.htm>.

Nancy Poer's book, *Living Into Dying: A Journal of Spiritual & Practical Deathcare for Family and Community* is available by contacting: Nancypoer@directcon.net



Bernard Carr poses with the film crew and kisses director / producer Elizabeth Westrate.



How to Buy the Film

To purchase *A Family Undertaking*
go to <http://www.fanlight.com>



Now entering its 17th season on PBS, P.O.V. is the first and longest-running series on television to feature the work of

America's most innovative independent documentary storytellers. Bringing over 200 award-winning films to millions nationwide, and now a new Web-only series, P.O.V.'s *Borders*, P.O.V. has pioneered the art of presentation and outreach using independent non-fiction media to build new communities in conversation about today's most pressing social issues.

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P.O.V. Interactive

www.pbs.org/pov

P.O.V.'s award-winning Web department produces our Web-only showcase for interactive storytelling, P.O.V.'s *Borders*. It also produces a web site for every P.O.V. presentation, extending the life of P.O.V. films through community-based and educational applications, focusing on involving viewers in activities, information, and feedback on the issues. In addition, www.pbs.org/pov houses our unique *Talking Back* feature, filmmaker interviews and viewer resources, and information on the P.O.V. archives as well as a myriad of special sites for previous P.O.V. broadcasts.

American Documentary, Inc.

www.americandocumentary.org

American Documentary, Inc. (AmDoc) is a multimedia company dedicated to creating, identifying, and presenting contemporary stories that express opinions and perspectives rarely featured in mainstream media outlets. Through two divisions, *P.O.V.* and *Active Voice*, AmDoc is a catalyst for public culture; developing collaborative strategic engagement activities around socially relevant content on television, on line, and in community settings. These activities are designed to trigger action, from dialogue and feedback, to educational opportunities and community participation.



ITVS funds and presents award-winning documentaries and dramas on public television, innovative new media projects on the

Web and the PBS series *Independent Lens*. ITVS was established by an historic mandate of Congress to champion independently produced programs that take creative risks, spark public dialogue and serve underserved audiences. Since its inception in 1991, ITVS programs have helped to revitalize the relationship between the public and public television. ITVS is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people. Contact itvs@itvs.org or www.itvs.org. *A Family Undertaking* was produced in association with the Independent Television Service.

All photos courtesy of: Andrew Kist

Front cover photo:

Keith Carr visits a pioneer grave out on the prairie near his home in South Dakota.

