

# AFD Profile

By Tanya Kenevich

# *the doyenne* of death

Gail Rubin deals with death a little differently, whether it's with funny films, jokes or slice-of-life experiences. A few onlookers might raise their eyebrows, but Rubin believes her educational methods encourage preplanning, which is a good thing.

Rubin's career didn't start in funeral service. She was a public relations professional, event planner and speaker with more than 30 years of experience creating memorable life cycle events.

After she married in 2000, she started writing "Matchings, Hatchings and Dispatchings" for the Albuquerque Tribune. The column focused on life cycle events like marriage, starting

families and death.

Interestingly enough, the columns on death elicited the greatest reader response; Rubin couldn't avoid the fact that there was a pressing need for more information on death. Her own experience with helping preplan her father's funeral showed Rubin that there had to be a better way to educate the general public on the topic of preplanning.

And it wasn't just her father that was face to face with mortality; in 2008, Rubin, then 50 years old, was diagnosed with breast cancer. The cancer was diagnosed early and the lumpectomy and radiation were successful, but "that brush with cancer was enough to really make you appreciate life," she said, and her resolve to educate the public on



**Left:** As part of her "30 Funerals in 30 Days Challenge," Gail Rubin blogs about each memorial service at The Family Plot. Visit [www.thefamilyplot.wordpress.com](http://www.thefamilyplot.wordpress.com) to read more.

Get Everything  
You Need to Know  
Before You Go

# A Good Goodbye

Funeral Planning for Those  
Who Don't Plan to Die



Gail Rubin

Gail Rubin takes on society's last taboo in a readable, practical manner with a light touch. It's a great read for anyone who isn't sure about this 'death thing' and how to best prepare for it."  
— Joe Sehee, Executive Director, Green Burial Council

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preplanning was stronger than ever.

### 'For Those Who Don't Plan to Die'

One of Rubin's biggest successes is her award-winning book, "A Good Goodbye: Funeral Planning for Those Who Don't Plan to Die" published by Light Tree Press. The book, which explains preplanning in a light and entertaining way, was awarded Best of Show in the 2011 New Mexico Book Awards and was a finalist in the Family & Relationships category of the 2010 Book of the Year Award from ForeWord Reviews.

For the book, Rubin drew upon her own experiences with death and also talked with well-known funeral professionals and clergy, who offered their suggestions on preplanning. "It was an eye-opening experience," she said about writing the book.

Rubin believes that being respectful of a death is of the utmost importance. "When someone dies, you can't be funny," she said. "You just have to get through it."

When the topic of preplanning comes up, however, Rubin has found that humor is an excellent coping mechanism and is a proven, successful way to open dialogue on topics that aren't always easy to discuss – especially death. She uses film snippets during her speaking engagements to break up the tension of the topic and open the floor to a more honest discussion about preplanning and death. "Anything that gets people talking and planning ahead," Rubin said.

According to Rubin, she's helping to lessen the fear of mortality. In her experience, planning a wedding has the same ideas and foundation as planning a funeral – but planning a wedding usually takes six months to a year, while planning for a funeral takes a few days.

And Rubin has seen firsthand the time and effort that goes into funeral services. She annually conducts her "30 Funerals in 30 Days Challenge" where she puts herself to the test and attends one funeral a day for 30 days (with the families' permission). Rubin then blogs



Out of the 30 events covered, only six people had planned their funerals in advance – four were women.

about each memorial service and her experiences with what she learned at The Family Plot Blog.

Most of the funerals were selected from the obituaries in Rubin's local newspaper, although she was specifically invited to two events.

### Starting a Conversation

Many might think Rubin's activities are unusual, but after her third time completing the "30 Funerals in 30 Days Challenge," she's more convinced than ever that her blogging and other activities play an important role in starting a conversation and "taking the pulse" of what is happening in funeral service today.

Through the laughter and tears of the services, Rubin has seen some interesting funerals in 30 whirlwind days (which ended in mid-September 2012), including:

- The motorcycle funeral for Freddie Drake



Quick Response Codes (or QR codes) on prayer cards and memorial folders offer an innovative way for family and friends to access online memorial guest books and tribute videos through smartphones and YouTube.

- The Albuquerque Art Museum memorial service for Ernest Garcia
- The home funeral and burial for Kent Gormley
- The memorial service for Charles and Claire Fenolio, who died within 20 hours of each other
- The webcast of the funeral of the Rev. Sun Myung Moon, seen in Unification Churches around the world

As varied as these services were, one constant held true. "People's love is very evident at all of these services,"

Rubin said. "People who planned ahead left their family in a better position to deal with the funeral."

### A Good Goodbye on TV

The interest in death and preplanning continues to grow. In fact, Rubin is bringing her knowledge and wit to the small screen in "A Good Goodbye," an educational and entertaining 12-episode series of 30-minute programs.

Rubin will interview people in the death-care industry to help people understand all the elements they need to know before there's a death in the family.

According to Rubin, the program will be on the local public access station and will be offered first in the Albuquerque, N.M., area. It will eventually be broadcast on 2,700 public access channels throughout the country.

Filming will begin in mid-February, Rubin said, with episodes expected to start airing at the end of February or the beginning of March. The anchor sponsor for the series is the French

Family of Companies.

"I'm so excited to open up funeral planning conversations through this television series," Rubin said. "By taking the subject of death and funeral planning out of the dark and talking about it on TV, it makes it OK for individuals to start talking about it to their families and actually preplanning."

"The interest that funeral homes,



Memorial services are taking place in settings other than funeral homes, cemeteries and houses of worship.

Assisted living facilities, nursing homes and private homes are among the venues where families are celebrating lives lived.

suppliers and financial planners have shown in sponsoring the series is really encouraging," Rubin said. "There's really no TV show like this and as an advertising vehicle it targets interested consumers directly."

If you can't find it on your local public access station, "A Good Goodbye" will be made available on DVD and as a video streaming download. Topics to be addressed include:

- The benefits of preplanning a funeral
- Cremation and memorial service considerations
- Cemetery questions and answers
- Funerals and green issues
- New trends, including celebrants and life celebrations
- Pet loss
- Financial issues before and after a funeral
- Reducing funeral costs
- End-of-life issues, including advance directives and hospice
- Grief counseling

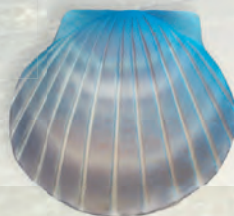
Even though this TV opportunity is a new and exciting venture for Rubin, she gets the most joy from those who say that her advice has helped them. "It's been really heartwarming," she said. "It's important to help people at such a sensitive time." •

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