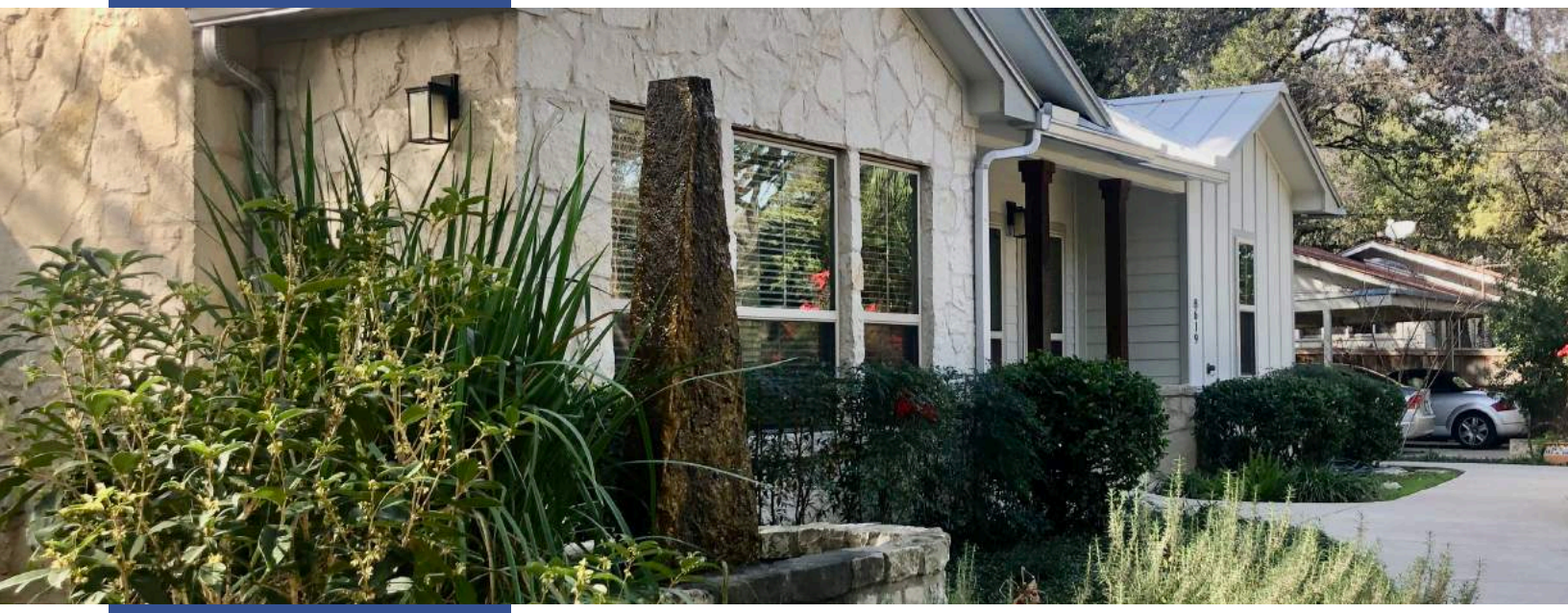
ABODE

CONTEMPLATIVE
CARE FOR THE DYING

NEWS From Home

WINTER 2020 | ABODEHOME.ORG



Our Mission

ABODE is Home. We offer compassionate, interfaith and spiritual care in a contemplative community so those who are dying leave this world with dignity and grace. We teach the art of contemplative living and dying.

Our Vision

We live in a world where death is not feared, and we live fully until we die.

SAVE THE DATE

Holiday Luminarias: Sunday, Dec. 13

The spirit of ABODE is especially bright during the holidays. We have so much to celebrate and to be thankful for – our Guests, staff, volunteers, board and all of you, our generous donors.

On Sunday, Dec. 13, we honor our Guests and all of our loved ones with Holiday Luminarias filling our backyard. Join us outdoors, 5-7 p.m., for our (socially distanced) annual gathering and enjoy the beautiful luminarias, the Conroy Christmas Carolers and Mexican hot chocolate, cider and holiday treats.

To purchase luminarias in honor or in memory of your loved ones, please visit **abodehome.org/luminarias**. Or complete and return the form on the back page of this newsletter. Luminarias are $25 apiece and will feature your loved ones' names.

Happy Holidays from ABODE!

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S UPDATE

Mary Thorsby

The end of the year is an exceptionally beautiful time at ABODE. The cool air invites us to keep our windows open. Our Guests enjoy time outdoors on their patios. And lately, the Monarch butterflies are swarming our butterfly garden. What a treat.

Jack enjoys an outdoor bedside manicure with Executive Director Mary Thorsby while BJ visits with ABODE Co-Founder Patsy Sasek.

While 2020 has brought so many unexpected challenges, ABODE remains focused on carrying out our mission, vision and values every day. We have so much to be thankful for – especially those we're honored to care for at end of life.

Healing Two Generations of Family Pain

Mark with his sisters Terry and Pam

Every Guest comes to us with such a unique story. This year, we've cared for folks from such wide-ranging backgrounds. Some have family and friends. Some don't. Some have lived very long and fulfilling lives. Some lives are cut terribly short by cancer and other illness. For some, death comes quite peacefully and easily. For others, we sit with them day after day, holding their hands, praying, singing and meditating – in essence, walking with them every step of the way as they complete their journeys.

The common thread that they all share is the love, warmth and peace that they find by spending their last months, weeks and even days with us. Through the work we do, we're able to change people's lives – *even at the end of their lives.*

Especially when they can reconnect with their families. Take Mark, for example. This Navy vet came to us in mid-July and died in early August. During his time with us, Mark's sisters, with whom he'd been estranged for many years, told us of their experience at ABODE: "You've helped heal two generations of family pain." That's a testimony that none of us will ever forget.

The sisters shared their story with us during our Oct. 25 Dia de los Muertos Celebration Brunch. There was not a dry eye on the Zoom. Please turn to page 7 for a recap of our brunch and our renewed HouseHolders program.

We Met Our Match Goal!

Your Love + Support
Are what make the beauty of ABODE possible. We are deeply grateful.

A Big Give (a Little More) Thank You

Many, many thanks for your gifts during San Antonio's Big Give campaign – twice! You may recall that, in light of COVID, Big Give was held in the spring and again this fall. With your help, we met both of our campaign goals, bringing in a grand total of close to $80,000, including matches by three very generous ABODE donors. We are very grateful to you all.

Several donors have expressed interest in making a gift of appreciated stock to us. We'd be delighted to accept! In fact, we've set up a brokerage account to make these kinds of transactions quick and easy. Please let me know if you'd like more information.

Stop by for Dec. 13 Luminarias!

Our home is your home – even during COVID. We hope you'll join us outdoors for our Dec. 13 Holiday Luminarias and on Zoom for our upcoming educational programs.

Thank you for an inspirational 2020. We wish you a very warm and wonderful holiday season and an even more exciting new year.

Mary Thorsby

Mary Thorsby
Executive Director

God's Waiting Room

One of our Board members, Christus Hospice Nurse Beverly Tuomala, calls ABODE "God's Waiting Room." It's a beautiful waiting room, tended by four of the loveliest angels you'll ever meet.

Our End of Life Navigators Sarah, Claudia, Diana and John (below) not only focus on our Guests' physical needs, they attend to their emotional and spiritual needs, as well. Their contemplative approach to care ensures that everyone who comes through our doors – including families, friends, hospice teams and more – feels welcomed, valued and celebrated.

We've had to learn an important new skill, though – that is, how to show our love for our Guests even with more than half of our faces covered in masks. While Guests can no longer see us smile, they can certainly see the compassion in our eyes, hear the warmth in our voices and feel our caring touch. When our Guests die, they know they're not alone.

Leading Our Way Forward

When Edwin and Patsy Sasek co-founded ABODE and opened our doors six years ago, a global pandemic was not on their radar. Yet with their vision and guidance, coupled with the expertise of this year's Board of Directors (below), we have met this incredible challenge and emerged even stronger.

Robert Soza
Jackson Walker

Benjamin Getter
Compassus Hospice

Roxanna Soza
Community Leader

Guy Acerra
Ameriprise

Peg Armstrong
Grief/Bereavement
Psychotherapist

Ken Michaud
Broadway Bank

Beverly Tuomala
Christus Hospice

Elsa Underwood
H-E-B

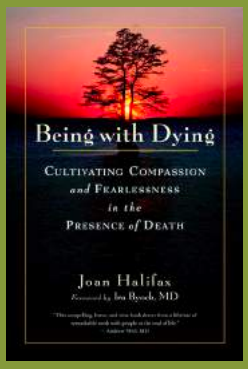
We are deeply appreciative of President Robert Soza and our entire Board for their wise counsel, tireless support, innovative ideas and wonderful resources and community connections. Our at-least monthly meetings are a wonderful mix of brainstorming, strategy and a healthy dose of humor. Thank you all so much for your commitment to ABODE. We've made such great strides this year.

Educational Outreach: It's Part of Our Mission

Along with offering compassionate care to our Guests, ABODE's mission includes teaching the art of contemplative living and dying. Our Education initiatives do exactly that, and we invite you to participate in any and all going forward.

Here's what we have planned:

Monday Meditation: Our Meditation Group meets 5-6 p.m. on Mondays.



ABODE Book Club & Study Group: We'll be reading the book that helped influence ABODE's beginnings: *Being with Dying* by Joan Halifax. The group meets 6:30-7:30 p.m., the second and fourth Tuesdays of the month, starting Jan. 12.

Powerful Tools for Caregivers: This evidence-based program provides much-needed support designed to help caregivers remember to care for themselves.

ABODE Academy 2: Our six-week program is set for 6:30-7:30 p.m., Thursday, Jan. 14 and meets each Thursday through Feb. 18. Topics include talking about death, planning your own funeral – and helping your loved ones do the same, Advance Directives, wills, alternatives to burials, green burials and the benefits of partnering with a death doula. More details at **abodehome.org/academy2**.

Interested in any (or all) of the above? Please email **info@abodehome.org**.

Our Guests, Our Hearts

Jamie

Sometimes Guests come to ABODE and find just the right peace and comfort they need, and they relax and let go very quickly. Such was the case with Jamie. We only had her for a few days in August. During that time, she was surrounded by family and, of course, our amazing ABODE staff.

Jamie grew up in O'Donnell, Texas. Her claim to fame is that she was friends with the actor who played Hoss Cartwright on *Bonanza* – he was from O'Donnell, too.

Jamie's son Pat (pictured here with his wife Carolyn) says his mom married his dad on a bet: "My dad bet this other guy $100 that he was going to marry her. And then he said to her, 'You're going to marry me, aren't you?' And she said, 'I guess I have to now. I don't want you to lose your $100!'"

Jamie's sense of humor made her the "life of the party," and she loved line dancing at Los Patios. We imagine she's up there line dancing with Hoss right now. Blessings to Jamie and her family.

Lilia

Lilia, 90, was with us for a handful of days, as well. She moved to the U.S. on her own when she was just 15, secured citizenship and then helped bring her various family members here, too. Her sister, nieces and nephews described Lilia as busy and energetic. She enjoyed computer classes and exercise programs at the community center – and she had many friends throughout San Antonio. She did so much for so many – we were happy to return the favor and ensure that her death was a peaceful one.

Christopher

Christopher was an emergency case. Despite being very ill, he was discharged from a local hospital with absolutely nowhere to go. The timing happened to be just right. He arrived on a Thursday and died in the middle of the night with our End of Life Navigator Claudia by his side

Jack

The very handsome Jack joined us in late September. He's 92 – a former oil man who managed the accounting function for Tesoro and later, Marathon Oil. He lost his beloved wife earlier this year. His face lights up when he talks about her – they were very happily married 42 years. His children and their spouses love to dote on Jack. And we love to dote on him, too.

Jack's a former Senior Olympics high jumper, enthusiastic Volksmarch hiker and tennis player. He has quite the playful sense of humor, and we are so enjoying our time with him.

Sandra

When we welcomed Sandra, 76, to ABODE in late August, she told us that she barely slept the night before because she was so excited to join us – and to hold her daughter, Joy, in her arms for the first time in six long weeks. The facility where Sandra had been did not allow in-person visits.

When the two reunited, there wasn't a dry eye in the room. They were so happy to see each other that Joy crawled into her mama's bed and held her tight.

Sandra's career included modeling, owning a modeling agency and then working as a sign language interpreter. The numerous flowers, cards, calls, videos and visits she received reflected how much she was loved by so many.

Sandra told us that she was ready to go meet Jesus and a dear friend of hers. And then one morning, her beloved son-in-law arrived for a visit. He sat down next to her, took her hand in his – and at that moment, she took her last breath. They were very close friends of 36 years.

Heaven is even more beautiful now with Sandra in it.

Eddie

Milo often helps greet our Guests, just as he did in October when Eddie came to ABODE. Eddie had quite the career, hobnobbing with celebrities even U.S. Presidents in Las Vegas back in the day. He moved to San Antonio a few years ago to be close to his family.

We were happy to care for Eddie in his final, few days. He passed away very quietly and peacefully, just as his daughters were arriving for a visit.

Esther

Esther came to ABODE in October. After losing her son, she'd lived with her daughter-in-law for many years. Our time together was just a few days, and her passing was very quiet and peaceful.

BJ

We welcomed BJ to ABODE in late September. She's 73 and has had a wonderful entrepreneurial career as owner of a janitorial and pest control service. She's also a wonderful artist and animal lover. BJ has always lived on her own and is, as you can imagine, fiercely independent. Her cancer, though, has made it impossible for her to live alone any longer.

Her niece and nephew live in Dallas but have traveled to San Antonio every weekend for many, many months to help care for her. So now when they visit, they can focus solely on BJ and leave all the care to-dos up to us.

We're delighted to take care of BJ. Her spunky nature fits ABODE just fine.

THERE'S STILL TIME TO GET THAT END-OF-YEAR-TAX DEDUCTION

If you're looking to fill that Gifts to Charity line on your tax form, we'd be delighted if you'd consider ABODE. You can still get your end-of-year tax deduction – or a couple of them! – by sending a check, calling with your credit card or donating directly at **abodehome.org/donate**. We'll provide you with a receipt – and our sincere gratitude.

Paul

With Paul as our Guest, ABODE is now a partner in the Compassionate Release Program, which allows federal prisoners to be released for "extraordinary or compelling circumstances." At age 70, Paul was serving his sentence in Austin when he stopped eating and it became clear his life was drawing to a very quick close.

He came to us in early November so that his wife, sons and grandchildren could see him in person and say their goodbyes. They were able to do just that, and Paul died knowing how much he was truly loved.

We're happy that we could help bring this family together so that they could look into Paul's beautiful blue eyes one more time.

Follow Along with Our Guest Stories

We often share Guest stories at **@ABODEcontemplativecare** on Facebook, **@abodecontemplativecare** on Instagram and **@abodecare** on Twitter. Give us a follow and some "love" and please share our posts with your followers.

To receive our e-newsletter, please look for the newsletter sign up section on our home page at **abodehome.org**. We're eager to share our news with you – and if you've got related news, we can share that, too. It's all about community here at ABODE.

Book Debut Benefits ABODE

Thank you and congratulations to Virginia Blakeney! Virginia, as we heard during our Dia de los Muertos Celebration Brunch, has written her first novel, *Richilene Trunk*, which follows the long historical journey made by families between Europe and the Deep South.

Virginia has reserved 100 copies for us, with all book proceeds going to our Peggy Smarkola Memorial Fund benefiting ABODE. If you'd like a signed copy, please donate $22 to ABODE at **abodehome.org/donate**. Or you can send a check payable to ABODE to PO Box 47640, San Antonio, 78265. We'll circle back on how you'd like your inscription to read and make arrangements for book pick up or delivery. So many creative ways to support ABODE!

SHOP 'TIL YOU DROP AT AMAZON SMILE

Here's a way to do holiday shopping that gives twice. When you shop via **smile.amazon.com** instead of amazon.com, you can select ABODE Contemplative Care for the Dying as your beneficiary and Amazon will donate a portion of your purchase directly to us. You'll find all the same great items – and an easy way to support our work. Happy holidays and happy shopping!

Dia de los Muertos Celebration Brunch

Festive Mexican music filled the air as 80 friends, family, volunteers and staff stopped by ABODE to pick up brightly decorated gourmet brunch boxes from FrankieB Bakery and sparkling wine from Judy Tierney of Scout + Cellar as part of our annual Dia de los Muertos Celebration Brunch on Sunday, Oct. 25.

We were delighted that so many of you returned home and joined us on Zoom as we shared our meals and such heartwarming presentations. Many thanks to Kathy Sakai for donating the box decorations, the Threshold Singers for sharing their beautiful voices, H-E-B for supporting our event and to our fundraising committee for putting all the pieces together. And, of course, to Frankie and Judy!

Zoom Recording Link

Our Zoom featured so many sweet moments. Especially moving: sisters Pam Lloyd and Terry Woods sharing their brother Mark's story. Mark came to ABODE in July and died in August. Pam and Terry recalled various aspects of Mark's life with us, including the fact that they hadn't seen Mark in decades. Once he arrived at ABODE, the three quickly rekindled their love and the sisters barely left his side.

Pam's story of our End of Life Navigator John helping Mark to "walk" again was such a perfect example of how every aspect of ABODE's contemplative care comes into play. One attendee wrote, "Did you see all of the eye dabbing going on? I had goosebumps, tears in my eyes and a lump in my throat. What a tribute to ABODE – the staff, volunteers, the mission, the love. It was wonderful."

Wonderful, indeed. If you missed our Zoom, you can watch the 47-minute recording at **abodehome.org/dia2020**.

WE ARE SO GRATEFUL

On behalf of ABODE, thank you all so very much for spending this special time with us. Your support helps us do what we do best – caring for those at a time when they need us most.

HouseHolder Perks

Our Dia de los Muertos event also honors our HouseHolders – those of you who make regularly monthly, quarterly and annual gifts to ABODE. We are so grateful for you – and to show our appreciation, we have a few new gifts to offer you:

- Use of our backyard for a private gathering

- Brother Cletus poster and set of greeting cards
- Private coffee hour for you and five friends/colleagues at ABODE

- Complimentary virtual or in-person Scout & Cellar wine tasting events for you and up to 15 friends, plus $20 gift card with any wine club purchase

- 20 percent discount at **nikkimay.com/shop**
- ABODE Fiesta pin
- Coffee or something more festive with ED Mary Thorsby

If you happen to have products or services that you'd like to offer our HouseHolders, please send an email to **mary@abodehome.org**. We're always looking for great ways to share our appreciation for our supporters.

ABODE

CONTEMPLATIVE
CARE FOR THE DYING

NON PROFIT ORG
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
SAN ANTONIO, TX
PERMIT NO 572

8619 Post Oak Lane
San Antonio, TX 78217

www.abodehome.org
info@abodehome.org

210.967.9891

ABODE LEADERSHIP

Mary Thorsby
Executive Director

Board of Directors
Robert Soza
President

Ben Getter
Treasurer

Roxanna Gonzales-Soza
Secretary

Guy Acerra
Peg Armstrong
Ken Michaud
Beverly Tuomala
Elsa Underwood

Advisory Board
Diane Datz
Arthur Dawes
June Ferguson
Rich Ferguson
Chuck Gibbons
Deborah Hanus
Petra McCann
Liz Newhouse
Edwin Sasek
Patsy Sasek
Hal Smarkola
Rev. Judith Rhodes
Susan Ruch
Peter Szarmach
Denise Miner-Williams
Jane Marie Young

Holiday Luminaria Order Form

Would you like to honor your loved ones with Holiday Luminarias? We invite you to order online: **abodehome.org/luminarias**

Or, mail this form and your check payable to ABODE to:

ABODE Contemplative Care for the Dying
P.O. Box 47640, San Antonio, TX 78265

Your Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

☐ in Honor of ☐ in Memory of

Name: _____

☐ in Honor of ☐ in Memory of

Name: _____

Luminarias are $25 each.
Pre-orders accepted through Saturday, Dec. 12.

Questions? Please contact Mary Thorsby, **mary@abodehome.org** or 415-271-4974.