

## Elizabeth Fournier

Owner/Operator/ Undertaker, Cornerstone Funeral Services, Boring, Oregon

Elizabeth Fournier is very straightforward on how she found her way into funeral service.

“From a young age, loss shaped my world. In just two and a half years, my family endured a series of deaths that transformed our shared home into a place of mourning,” the owner of Cornerstone Funeral Services in Boring, Oregon, said. “It was during this challenging time that I discovered my calling: to support others as they navigate their own journeys through grief.”

So much loss in a short time could have had a negative impact on a child, but that wasn’t Fournier’s experience.

“I played in the sandbox, creating tiny graves for my dolls and aligning my brother’s Hot Wheels cars in solemn rows,” Fournier explained. “By 13, I knew I wanted to pursue a career in funeral service. Once I could drive, I began attending the funerals of strangers, perhaps to process my own grief through the lens of others’ losses.”

At those anonymous funerals, Fournier remembers seeing the desolation of the nearest and dearest, the sadness of close friends, and discomfort of coworkers. “They hurt, plainly, but they were lost and at loose ends and there was no solace for them,” she said. “I wanted to provide a better emotional setting/ritual for mourners but, at my young age, didn’t quite know how to do this.”

Even though her father was “dead” against her going to mortuary school, Fournier couldn’t stop hearing the calling to counsel others on life’s final stop. It wouldn’t be a straightforward journey, though.

First, she attended Linfield College, majoring in mass communications, doing commercials, and teaching ballroom dancing for Arthur Murray.



She likely could have gone on that way for years until, as she describes it, “opportunity knocked its bony hand on my door” in 1990. Fournier was offered a job as the live-in night keeper, sleeping in a trailer in Finley-Sunset Hills Cemetery in Portland, Oregon.

In those quiet moments in the cemetery, she also envisioned a life as undertaker, highlighting the beauty in the cycle of life and death.

Fast forward 34 years, and Fournier finds herself living that purpose every day.

Operating out of a transformed goat barn in Boring, Oregon, Fournier is dedicated to changing the way Americans honor their loved ones.

Established in 2002, Fournier built Cornerstone Funeral Services on a foundation of care with kindness. The cornerstone (or foundation stone) concept, she explained, is derived from the first stone set in the construction of a masonry foundation, important since all other stones will be set in reference to this stone, thus

determining the position of the entire structure.

As a one-woman operation, Fournier set out from the start to do things her way.

“I have the luxury of allowing families to stay the night in the funeral home if they need to be near their loved one, and I try to allow families to do everything their own way as long as it is legal and ethical,” she explained.

Fournier also allows families to make payments for her services, but she has raised her prices only twice since the doors opened in 2002.

“Sometimes (the payment) is \$100 a month; sometimes it’s a monthly box of vegetables. I even had one gentleman offer to paint the doors of my house, and another gentleman offered to trim the hooves of my sheep and goats for years to come,” she said.

Located on a 40-acre piece of property in Clackamas County, Cornerstone Funeral Services does not look like a funeral home.

“When people pull in, they see statues of deer and old farm equipment,” Fournier said. “There’s bunny rabbits hopping about, and we have a whole little sanctuary for birds.”

That peaceful feeling is intentional. “I want people to feel they can come over in their jeans and bring their dog. I want them to feel they can be relaxed here because they don’t feel they’re going to be potentially pressured into something they don’t want.”

A death is a highly personal experience, and what families need is that invisible hand to hold them and comfort them throughout the process. “They don’t want to be handed off to someone else; they don’t want someone looking at their watch during an arrangement, basically saying ‘your 30 minutes are up,’” Fournier

said.

That's not the experience in Boring. "Being in the country, people run on country time ... people sort of show up early, they show up late, so there's always the flexibility," Fournier said. "I'm the person who greets them at the door, I'm the one who takes care of their loved one every step of the way."

And what many families in the Boring area want are options beyond a traditional funeral service.

Acknowledged as the first green funeral home in the Portland metropolitan area, Cornerstone Funeral Services and Fournier are staunch supporters of old-school burial practices that are kinder to humans, the earth, and our wallets.

"I have had the pleasure of assisting people with sustainable burial options and love helping in this aspect of death," she said. "It truly makes people's eyes sparkle to feel as though their last act on earth contributes to a positive purpose."

It's little wonder that Fournier is known as "The Green Reaper," a name she has been given as the green burial funeral director, educator, and advocate who is always ready to lend a hand – or a shovel.

"I have had the pleasure of assisting people with sustainable burial options and love helping in this aspect of death. It truly makes people's eyes sparkle to feel as though their last act on earth contributes to a positive purpose," said Fournier, who has authored two books, "The Green Burial Guidebook" and "The Green Reaper: Memoirs of an Eco-Mortician."

Funeral service may be evolving, but the 58-year-old Fournier is committed to Cornerstone Funeral Services and the people of Boring and beyond.

"When I came out here, I was a single person. I was able to fall in love, have an engagement, get married, have a baby, and all this unfolded while I was here at this funeral home," Fournier said.

"My work is a labor of love. I don't take vacations; my phone is always on. I handle everything – from paperwork to the more practical aspects of the job. But every day I get to spend with families in their time of need is a day well spent," she said. "I may clean toilets or coordinate details, but I see it all as part of a greater mission: to ease the burden of grief and honor the lives that have touched us." •



**Cornerstone Funeral Services is located on 40 acres in Boring, Oregon.**  
*(All photos courtesy Elizabeth Fournier)*



**The Cornerstone Funeral Services property is home to a herd of rescue goats.**