

Gabe's Home Funeral

By: Rev. Olivia Rosemarie Bareham, Sacred Crossings

When Mitch and his partner Gabe completed the Sacred Crossings Death Midwifery program in 2012 they decided it was time to go ahead with their dream to create a hospice in Los Angeles and call it 'Anam Cara' – meaning soul friend. They found a lovely home in Topanga Canyon, and began renovations. I joined the Board of Anam Cara to help them realize the dream, and quickly Mitch and Gabe became my dearest friends.



In May of this year, they asked me to officiate their wedding ceremony on the Anam Cara property in the labyrinth of stones they built especially for the purpose– it was a glorious affair attended by many friends and family. Everything was falling into place. It really was a dream come true. And then life took a turn. Just six weeks later, after a morning of yoga and a bike ride in the canyon, Gabe died suddenly from a fatal heart disease that had presented no symptoms.

I was spun into a week of complete turmoil, struggling with my own grief, upholding a bereft Mitch and helping an entire community come to grips with the impossible. I moved into Anam Cara to help coordinate the events that followed and somehow we were able to come together and create a home vigil and funeral that truly honored the magnificent, kind and gentle Gabe who had given so much to us all.

His body was brought home after the autopsy and Mitch lovingly bathed and prepared him. We dressed him in his favorite shirt and pants, and then wrapped him in the beautiful saffron silk shroud (*by Kinkaraco*) that he had announced to everyone at the workshop was his favorite. We made prayer flags, we decorated river rocks and the cremation box and laid Gabe in one of the rooms that overlooked the creek that was to one day hold a hospice bed. His cowboy hat and his guitar were placed close by. During the next two days, over 200 friends and family came by to pay respects, to support Mitch and to gather in the same labyrinth where they were married, to say goodbye. It was tragic and glorious and transformational and none of us will ever be the same.

It was a week I will never, ever forget. I learned that it takes a village to do it right– both to raise a child and to lay a brother down. I learned that in spite of overwhelming grief, we are miraculously blessed with a strength and fortitude that we never thought possible, and we are upheld by a force of love that is with us night and day till we can stand on our feet again. I feel deeply honored to have walked this path with my brothers and helped their village come together with a home funeral for Gabe.