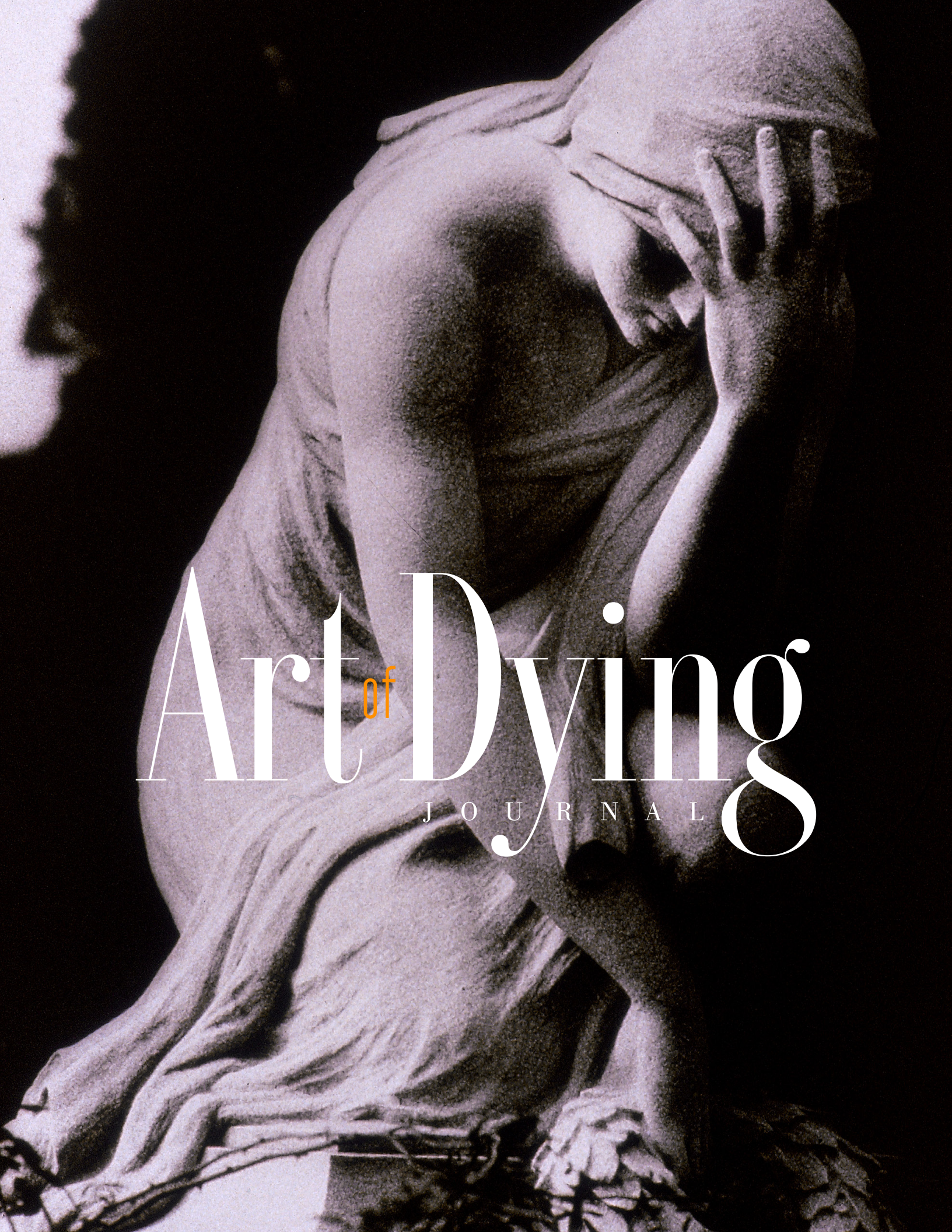

Art of Dying
JOURNAL

“When a person faces an absolutely extreme situation,
there is a possibility of a natural satori.
This is always the opportunity presented by death:
that if one can go into death with eyes open,
and have somebody help you if necessary,
to give up before your die,
this extraordinary thing can happen to you.
So that from your standpoint in that position at that time,
you would say:
“I wouldn’t have missed that opportunity for the world –
now I understand why we die.”
The reason we die is to give us the opportunity
to understand what life’s all about –
by letting go, because then we come to a situation
that the ego can’t deal with.
When we are no longer hypnotized by that,
then our natural consciousnesses can see clearly
what all this universe is for.
So therefore we have missed this golden opportunity
by institutionalizing death out of the way,
instead of having a socially understood acceptance of
and rejoicing in death.”

ALAN WATTS

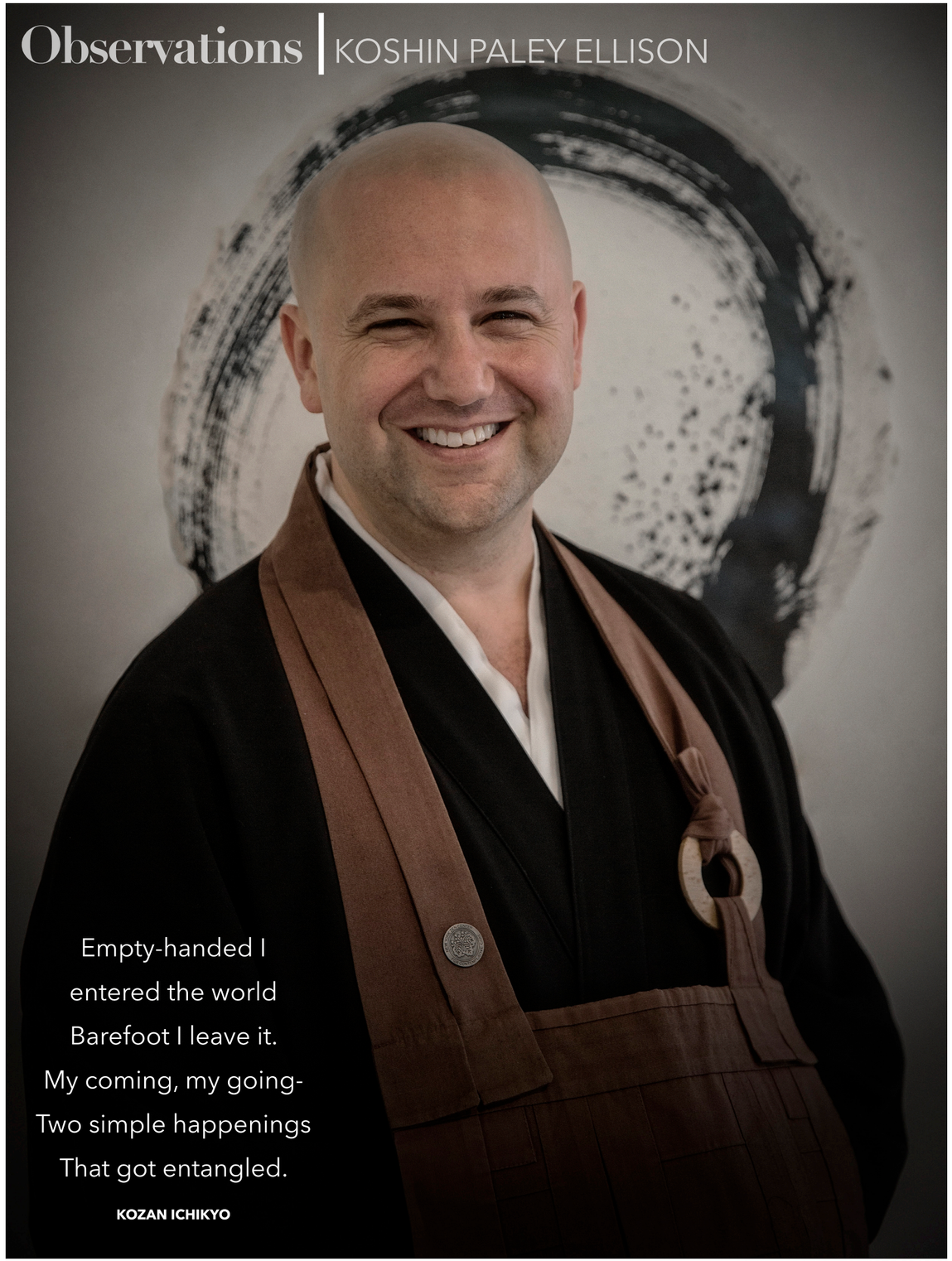
FOREWORD

Plato taught the preparation for death, the cultivation of death-awareness, to be a philosopher’s highest passion.

You and I are philosophers.

Each of us nurtures a unique philosophy of life, a constellation of beliefs, through which we define ourselves in a world that eludes definition. Our attempt to translate life’s mystery into accessible experience inspires perpetually changing self-definition, illumined by an unchanging awareness that we will die.

This first volume of Art of Dying Journal features meetings with kindred philosophers who live vibrant lives while preparing for death. May these dialogues, essays and works of art, affirm our eternity within the ephemeral.



JOHN WADSWORTH PHOTOGRAPHY

> What's incredible about working with dying people is that they teach you death happens a million different ways.
>
> KOSHIN PALEY ELLISON

The reality of birth and death is that everything arises and passes away. One of the reasons why I love the Zen practice is that it is deeply focused upon the birth and death in each moment. That this moment will never happen again. And so the only thing that makes sense is love and tenderness and absolute attention– which to me is the intimate understanding that, as we leave the house and look into the eyes of our loved ones; and look into the eyes of our neighbors and baristas; that that moment will never be repeated. There is a famous Zen proverb, 'Ichi-go, ichi-e' which means, 'one moment, one chance'– that's it! To me, it's incredibly enlivening and lively to allow that more and more.

What's incredible about working with dying people is that they teach you death happens a million different ways. And of course it should. It's just the way it is. The stars in the night sky. The diversity of the earth itself, so of course the same with dying, My wish is that people can die in the way that they feel moved to.

One woman took care of her parents who both had long chronic illnesses of Parkinson's and Alzheimer's until they died. She felt such a relief that her life was beginning again at 40. Two months later, she was diagnosed with Stage 4 ovarian cancer. Her husband couldn't deal with it. In fact, he didn't visit her in the hospital. She was so enraged and she had never been able to be enraged. People on her floor were scared of her because she was so angry. What she was so angry about was that she couldn't believe that this was happening. She had never expected this to happen. She felt that her life was supposed to start anew! Instead, she died sitting up in bed with her fists in the air and it was glorious because it was truly her expression of what was really intimate and what she was never able to experience while she was healthy. Something new came through. To me, that was a sacred experience. Kind of like Job raising his fists against God. That anger needs to be heard and experienced and honored. How few of us are that fearless to truly be in what's actually real. It's so rare. There was this defiant rage. And it was so beautiful. It was exquisite.

When Shunryu Suzuki was in the hospital dying of cancer, one of his students visited and said, 'I am here to see how a great Zen master dies.' And Suzuki said, 'It might be like this!' (Koshin screams and flails his arms.) The student freaked out and ran out of the room. It's such a great teaching. There's no promise of anything. Yes, Suzuki dedicated his life to practice; but he was so dedicated that he understood that death could be anything. I think there's a fantasy that if I practice in a certain way; and if I read the right books; or if I meditate a lot; or whatever, then I'll get something. It's like thinking you're in charge when you're not. No one is. No one can be.

Every spiritual tradition can tell you specifically what happens when you die. If it's your belief system, that's great. But which one is the right one? Islamic Heaven? Being with Christ? The Bardos? To me, they're all true. And I have no idea what The Truth is. Working with people who talk about where they're going, people talking about going to the cosmos– it's so fascinating. Maybe 10,000 different things I've heard. 'I'm going to be with my grandmother,' 'with my uncle,' 'with my great uncle,' 'my great aunt.' 'I'm going back to Russia,' 'back with my indigenous people in Australia.' To me that's the beauty of it. It's fabulous. Why not?

Is there one kind of plant? No. One kind of animal? Or mineral? So why would there be one kind of right spirituality or right way of dying? Taking refuge in 'I don't know' is comforting. It is not helpful having an idea of what a good death is. To me, the woman railing at the stars is just as good as blissing out and fading into the twilight. I can't say that at the moment I know that I'm dying that I won't get scared. I don't know. There are no guarantees.

We're attached to a false sense of continuity. It's fabricated. Life's really just about giving and receiving and just being in the flow of things. The only thing you can rest upon is that everything is changing and that to study The Way is to study the self, to loosen up and open your hand from self-clinging–to allow the 10,000 things to flow through you. That's just the way it is.

> The grasping to know something is the greatest deprivation.

We suffer because of our conditioning. Period. And the practice is about how to uproot our conditioning and self-clinging so that we can actually be free. If we call it life or call it death; or whatever it is; that's what I am most interested in. Dying people are the most amazing teachers because they have no time for bullshit. The smack in their face of the reality that this form is finite is so shocking for most people. Even your body cannot save you at the time of your death. Regardless of what you have, nothing is going to save you. We all come in empty handed and go out barefoot.

One of my favorite joys is to look at the night sky and to recognize the hubris of thinking that we know anything. To insist, 'Oh I know something.' Look up and tell the night sky that you know what you know and see what comes back. We have no idea. The grasping to know something is the greatest deprivation.

Is it life or is it death? I don't know. Those are just ideas anyway. Even the terms, 'life' and 'death;' 'this is life' and 'this is death'… maybe. No one has an answer but there's company. The connectedness of company and companionship in the not knowing is essential. The nourishment of feeling many voices saying, 'Wow, we're all in the unknown here.' The only thing that makes sense is to completely pay attention and care. I can't think of what's more valuable.

From a conversation with John Wadsworth

SENSEI KOSHIN

Sensei Koshin Paley Ellison, MFA, LMSW, DMIN, cofounded the New York Zen Center for Contemplative Care, the first Zen-based organization to offer fully accredited ACPE clinical chaplaincy training in America, which delivers contemplative approaches to care through education, direct service, and meditation practice. Paley Ellison is the academic advisor for the Buddhist students in the Master in Pastoral Care and Counseling program at NYZCCC's education partner, New York Theological Seminary. He is currently on the faculty of the University of Arizona Medical School's Center for Integrative Medicine's Integrative Medicine Fellowship, and he is a visiting professor at the McGovern Center for Humanities and Ethics, of the University of Texas Health Science Center of Houston Medical School. Paley Ellison's public programs have introduced thousands to the practices of mindful and compassionate care of the living and dying. More than 30,000 people listen to his podcasts each year. Koshin is a popular keynote speaker for national conferences, including the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization, Association of Clinical Pastoral Education, Integrative Healthcare Symposium, and the Palliative Care Symposium. His groundbreaking work has been widely featured in the media, including the PBS Religion and Ethics Newsweekly, and in numerous print publications such as the New York Times and Los Angeles Times. Koshin is the co-editor of Awake at the Bedside: Contemplative Teachings on Palliative and End of Life Care (Wisdom Publications, 2016). He began his formal Zen training in 1987, and he delightfully continues to study with Dorothy Dai En Friedman, Zen teacher in the White Plum Soto Zen Lineage. He is a senior Zen monk, Soto Zen teacher, ACPE supervisor, and Jungian psychotherapist.

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Observations | KAREN WYATT, MD

JULIANNA MONTANO PHOTOGRAPHY

Today everyone has the opportunity to be more informed and better prepared to die.

I became a hospice volunteer after my father committed suicide. I was a family practice doctor struggling with grief and guilt over his death. As a family practitioner, I had treated depression and worked with suicidal patients. The fact that I couldn't save my own father was devastating. As a doctor, it caused me to lose confidence in my practice. I had the idea that if I volunteered for hospice, diving headlong into death and dying, it would help me find my way. The moment I made my first house visit to a hospice patient, I knew that this was the work I was meant to do. So I switched from family practice to hospice care as my full time work.

I find it so illuminating to sit with people who are dying and to listen to their stories. They are viewing life from the perspective of its end and sharing insights about what really matters to them from that vantage point. I realize that it is a perspective most of us aren't aware of. We don't consider that when we're taking our last breath, we may look at life totally differently from how we're seeing life now. It is also powerful to observe the spiritual transformations that take place at the end of life. So many people open up spiritually in ways that they have never done before.

Whenever I am asked to see a patient, I know I am supposed to be there. It is never just a job. I always feel that I am a student, on a mission; and I am being sent to learn something from the patients I visit. But I also have something to give them. We share in this learning.

A hospice patient lives with the truth, 'I am now dying' and 'I have a limited time on this planet.' I now remind myself that 'today could be my last day; I may not have more time than this.' This truth helps me focus on what really matters instead of getting caught up with trivial distractions. Every day I make sure that I am practicing unconditional love and forgiveness; and that I am living in the present moment. Sustaining awareness that life is fleeting and that we don't know how much time we have, changes everything. I'm no longer fooled by deceptive ideas of what life is about.

At first I was surprised by the prevalence of laughter; of a family's ability to talk lightly of the past; and the shared humor of day to day life. I wasn't expecting that at all. I expected everyone to be steeped in sadness as I had been since my Dad's death.

I witness a lot of people working with forgiveness. They want to be done with the past, but they know they first need to forgive and to be forgiven. They are dying and they want to let everything go. Through them I realize that if I start working on forgiveness now, I won't face such a big task at the end of my life.

One patient was very proud and independent, refusing everything that his family offered him. He didn't want special meals, he didn't want to be taken for a walk, and said no to everything anyone tried to do. When we were alone, he said that his biggest concern was becoming a burden. But what I had observed was how desperately his family needed to show him their love. I told him that one of the greatest gifts he could give was to accept their help. I assured him that he was not a burden and that he and his family shared a unique opportunity to express their love for one another. He instantly changed his attitude and lovingly accepted their kindness. I observed the huge difference this made. Family members and friends always say that their lives are changed through caring for a dying loved one. I thanked him for helping me learn. I have since shared this wisdom with other patients, helping them through similar situations.

Often patients have said to me, "I feel like I didn't accomplish enough in my life. I didn't do anything for anyone else. I didn't make a difference in the world. I was selfish." I've had the opportunity to say, "Let me tell you what you have done for me, what you have given by allowing me to be a part of this process you're going through." This is a profound and beautiful opportunity to say, "You don't have to do anything: you're lying in your bed, you're ill, you're weak. By simply being who you are, you are giving something to life, to others, the world."

I have observed in hospice that the more prepared people are for death, the better their experience of the death process. Identities and accomplishments that had seemed so solid and important begin to slip away. It is as if they are returning to who they are as souls. My patients inspire me to realize that so much of what I busy myself with and think about in my life is actually superficial. The more I can be aware that I am a soul, the easier it is to let go of all the things that are illusions, all the attachments that create an identity that dies.

Today everyone has the opportunity to be more informed and better prepared to die. We have more resources offering opportunities to learn and talk about death and dying. Baby boomers will be better prepared for death because of these opportunities. And as younger generations participate in the conscious death movement, a more enlightened relationship with death will exponentially grow.

I advise people to consider what they want at the end of life and to prepare their advance directives but, honestly, I don't care that much. I will be fine in a hospital, fine if I am home. If my family is with me, great; but I'm okay if they can't be there. I'm okay if I'm in a nursing home. I'm not worrying about it any more. In my own heart, I will be fine no matter how things unfold because I understand what the process is and I just trust it will be perfect. I will prepare a living will and advance directive so that medical personnel will have guidelines to follow and my family will have an idea. But I am not worried about anything.

I feel that my Dad has been my silent partner.

From a conversation with John Wadsworth

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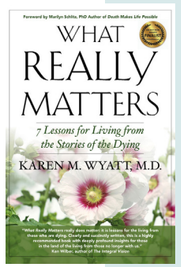


WHAT REALLY MATTERS

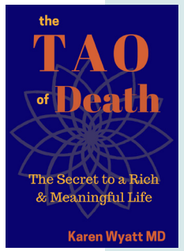
I became a student of death and dying as a hospice doctor. While I knew about pain and symptom management, I was learning about death itself from my patients.. They helped me understand impermanence; the fact that everything dies, everything changes.. They taught me how to practice forgiveness because so many were working on forgiveness. Many patients said to me, 'Why do I have so much wisdom now, when I'm only going to be alive for a few days?' 'Why do I have this insight, this way of seeing things when I'm not going to be here to share it?' I realized I could be the dying's voice, that everyone should have access to this information now, not during their last days of life. This realization led to writing *What Really Matters.* It took me 12 years to finish. I encountered so much resistance when I first started writing and shared its ideas that I put it away for a long time. The world wasn't ready then. Now it is.

www.amazon.com

END OF LIFE UNIVERSITY

End of Life University came about after publishing *What Really Matters*. Promotion was a struggle. People in the media weren't interested in a book about death and dying, Places where I sought speaking engagements, even in the medical community, didn't want to hear about it. So I created *End of Life University,* an online forum where people can learn about death and dying from a broad range of resources in a resistance free environment.

www.eoluniversity.com



THE TAO OF DEATH

I heard that Bhutan is the happiest country of the world and, as Buddhists, the Bhutanese think of death 5 times a day. I wrote *The Tao of Death*, based on Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching*, to be an accessible companion, from which one verse could be read and contemplated as a daily inspiration to embrace death's significance in our life.

www.amazon.com

When someone's body
can no longer perform its functions in the natural world
in response to the thoughts and affections of its spirit
(which it derives from the spiritual world),
then we say that the individual has died.
This happens when the lungs' breathing
and the heart's systolic motion have ceased.
The person, though, has not died at all.
We are only separated from the physical nature
that was useful to us in the world.
The essential person is actually still alive.
I say that the essential person is still alive
because we are not people because of our bodies
but because of our spirits.
After all, it is the spirit within us that thinks,
and thought and affection together
make us the people we are.
We can see, then, that when we die
we simply move from one world into another.
This is why in the inner meaning of the Word,
"death" means resurrection
and a continuation of life.

EMANUEL SWEDENBORG

Some people look forward to death, and going to heaven and all of that. I don't think it's pleasant at all. I'm probably a bad subject for your magazine.

I don't like to think about death. It's spooky. Every once in a while, I think that I should, and I get very upset, so I don't. I know I have to go, but I don't want to think about it.

What's fascinating about going to pieces or going to hell?

I don't think about those things. That's one of the reasons I'm happy. I don't think about the past. "I get these questions, If you could do this again," or "If you could stay in a certain period of time." I don't think about that. That's finished. I don't try to conjure up the future. That's coming. I don't know what's going to happen. When it comes, I'll attend to it.

You're asking me questions about things I don't like to think about. I don't see any point. Maybe it's important for other people.

I'm not denigrating it. For me, it's only confusing. When I have to face it, I will.

I'm very much a person who lives in the now, and that's what I concentrate on. Now. I don't even like to concentrate on two weeks from now.

Enough unpleasant things happen that I'm obliged to think about, so why should I conjure more up? I'm so busy, I don't have time to think about anything outside of what I'm doing. I really don't.

I love life and I want to be around.

Maybe there are people who dwell on death and have a plan. Maybe that's good. Maybe I should have one, but I don't.

I'm very much a person who lives in the now, and that's what I concentrate on. Now. I don't even like to concentrate on two weeks from now.

JOHN WADSWORTH

My business is living.

My business is living.

I get up in the morning and know I'm here. That gives me great pleasure.

I don't do things in terms of a legacy. When people ask what I'd like my legacy to be, I don't even want to talk about it, or think about it. What it will be, it will be.

I have never had a life plan. I've never had a business plan. I never expected to be where I am now. I never expected to be doing the things that I'm doing now. Everything has just happened.

Why change my relationship with life? It's worked for me for 95 years, so I don't want to screw myself up now.

I don't discuss mortality with other people. Nobody's ever discussed it with me. Carl never talked about it. Never. Never, never, never.

I consider myself quite fortunate. The man upstairs has been kind enough to give me all these opportunities. Without them, I'd be a basket case. Being active keeps my head together.

Carl and I used to say, "We don't want to be with people of our vintage. They're too old." We never considered ourselves old, which is ridiculous. But we were never garden-variety old people.

I can see why people think of death. When you're old and wake up in the morning, everything you have two of, one hurts. You're not in the best shape. You break hips and catch pneumonia. Some days you just have to stay in bed. But you have to push yourself and get up and do something. You automatically feel better. When you stop and worry about yourself you hurt more. Then you discuss it with your friends. And it's like 'Oh I hurt more than you do' and that kind of thing. It's a waste of life.

I'm convinced that Carl and my mother are both in heaven, and they're seeing each other and having a good time. I'm convinced of that. But that's about as far as it goes.

I've never felt the need to think about death. And if this makes me start thinking about death, I'll come and haunt you!

From a conversation with John Wadsworth

IRIS APFEL Maintaining an unexpected career as an accidental icon at age 96, Iris Apfel is a self-proclaimed "geriatric starlet" who lives gracefully in the present. Her early years running an interior design company with her husband Carl led to overnight fame at age 84 when the Metropolitan Museum of Art in NY premiered an exhibition about her style called, "Rara Avis." At age 90, Apfel became a visiting Professor at the University of Texas in Austin. In 2014, she starred in "Iris", a documentary about her life and philosophy by legendary film maker, Albert Maysles. Living life to the fullest despite losing her husband of 67 years in 2015, Apfel inspires with stylish presence, candid appeal and unsugared truth.

Let us embrace a new approach to death and dying.
Instead of fear, let us embrace joy,
for we know that we continue to live and love
beyond the dense vehicle of flesh.
Our exit from this temporary training ground
is a glorious return to our true spiritual home.
Let us open our hearts and minds
to the formless void of pure spiritual consciousness.
Let us embrace the journey of death
as a self-empowering launch pad
propelling us to the very core of our spiritual essence.
With this focused intention,
death becomes a powerful opportunity
for us to experience liberation.

WILLIAM & SUSAN BUHLMAN

JOHN WADSWORTH PHOTOGRAPHY

> The awareness of death nearby, that there is a given time limit, is a great awakener, it helps me, it concentrates my mind, as we say, very much. Death enlivens me. Why wouldn't it?
>
> **HARRY NORTH**

About a year ago, I received the dire diagnosis of prostate cancer. My brother had died of this shortly before. This cancer is mercifully slow in a way that gives you time to reflect and see yourself in a different light. There is a definite point when I know it will be painful and uncomfortable; but for now, it's not really distracting. I am able to do things and I am very engaged in what I'm doing. At the moment, I'm in a very good situation.

My brother was very courageous and amazingly kept his sense of humor. He was a good example for me. The actual experience of dying was hard for him at times, but he faced up to it which was wonderful because it has really helped me. I hope that I can do that same for other people.

If we get down to doctrine and ideas, the fact that we may not meet the people we have known ever again is a difficult thing. I don't allow my mind to dwell on it- there's no point. It would just weaken me and I need to be as strong as possible.

I've always been aware of death. I don't think a day goes by that I've not been aware of it. I'm inclined to be melancholy and somewhat depressed, but it's always been this way. If I allowed myself, I would listen to Mahler and fall into that mood very easily, so I made the decision that I wasn't going to do it because it wasn't productive, and didn't help people around me, nor help my own courage.

I find that humor, smiling and general goodwill is inspirational I to others. It comes back to me and it's a lovely thing because I have a lot of people I am very close to. I could be thinking about loss, which, of course, comes up at certain times. It's there very powerfully, but I don't give it energy. Now I try to be present and let it work its way through and go off. And then I deliberately try to bring my mood to a positive and happy state. That's easy at the moment, because the pain is not strong.

"Death brings us closer together, definitely. It makes heroes of us all, whether we like it or not. It's a big thing coming up."

Harry as a boy walking under a brick arch, into a tunnel– going from this life into...

The prospect of death has broadened my empathy with people and with the world.

ILLUSTRATION: HARRY NORTH

We always get pulled into our role. I'm truly at ease with the way I am. There are lots of amendments I'd like to make. I'd like to change the menu a bit. But overall, I think I'm much more accepting. I see the many foibles I have but if I react to one, I get into another. What I'm doing now is working on a book that I have no intention of selling. I have no interest in financial gain or anything like that. I don't care if any publisher likes it. It's very organic. It's about anything and everything. I call the book, "Boil and Bubble" because I've been ' boiling away' and very angry half my life; and now I 'bubble' and stuff just comes up.

I see a transparency to things, especially in crowds. We're all bubbling away. I feel a sense of unity, and that's what I'm looking for more and more. And that makes death quite acceptable. It's just simply a physical body moving on, things changing. The hardship is that I, as a personality, have formed attachments to certain things. If I'm not attached, then everything is acceptable.

I would suggest to anyone in deep despair that they read Eckhart Tolle's A New Earth– there's not a wasted word. Peace and courage are in presence of mind and body: holding on to now; not following the brain-train of thought-emotion-thought-emotion.

The awareness of death nearby, that there is a given time limit, is a great awakener; it helps me, it concentrates my mind, as we say, very much. Death enlivens me. Why wouldn't it? Okay, I'm ready. {Harry laughs} I'm ready.

From a conversation with John Wadsworth

HARRY NORTH
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HARRY NORTH

At age 77, I have a mind of a 15 year-old. School friends would confirm that, but I hesitate to try getting in touch because they may be dead. I've always been conscious of death, even before school. It may have been the war (WW Two, not One, okay!): blackout curtains, pitch-black, deserted streets, the mournful wail of the air raid warning, the air of foreboding people carried with them at all times along with their gas masks. Houses bombed, rubble in the streets, all that. I found the ending of the day was a sad thing for years and years.

My life has always been about why, why? Never how? When it comes to how, I am an amateur, bungling through; being lucky rather than pragmatic. And I have been lucky; born with gifts that I love to observe playing out. I know I do not own them, and I wonder, if I return, whether they'll be given again. I hope so. But that's something else.

At first I wasn't lucky. My aunt with whom I spent the war was...most uncongenial. My father, back from the war, was the same, and at school I was a dreamy mark for the bullies (I'm still faintly angry with myself for that, but it too was a teacher). An Outward Bound Course when I was 17 really opened me out; I lost my fear on the mountain, I became funny and popular–amazing! It prepared me for National Service in the RAF (Royal Air Force) where I affected to be a bit of a lad and was never challenged to prove it. The Officers and NCOs–many decorated in the war–were 'splendid chaps', I mean it, and photographic interpretation was actually interesting work.

Returning to civilian life I returned to bungling, I did a string of drudging jobs until 1970 brought my 31st year of going nowhere: frustration, depression, resentment: how can I change this? I need a chance! And a chance came. Taking my artwork around and around brought a phone call after two years. That caller, Dick Gregory, a comics editor, changed my life as my gifts blossomed. This is the first time I've thanked him.

Since then, I've drawn and to a lesser extent written and had a whale of a time, despite grumblings of depression, in London and in Paris and in New York. In all places I've made good friends that I keep up with and whom it is hard to think of leaving. The cancer I have now is a leisurely affair compared to the more aggressive forms there are available, and I have been given time to come to terms with it and with leaving this world of intense and gentle impressions–which we all do. Luck again, I guess.

DEAN BRANNAGAN

JON UNDERWOOD: I first got interested in death in 1998. It wasn't because of a bereavement or any personal experience. It was because I got interested in Buddhism and there was a teaching by the Buddha on the value of looking at impermanence and death that really resonated with me. I volunteered in a hospice and read Kübler-Ross and other texts and trained in spiritual care for the dying.

In 2010 I said to my sister, "I'd really like to create some websites around death." That was a transformational moment for me. Ideas flooded into my head, and I was really hyper for two or three weeks. I could hardly sleep. I've never experienced anything like it before or since. At the end of that time, I had developed some ideas for projects around death and dying. One of them was a project for people who aren't dying to get them talking about death.

About three months later, my step-father gave me an article from the Independent about the work of Bernard Crettaz and his first Café Mortel in Paris. That very day I realized "That's it. That's beautiful. It's democratic. It's open. Food and drink. What's not to like?" and I thought, "That's exactly what I want to do," and that was the moment I decided to create Death Café

I went to a local café and asked, "Could I run a Death Café here?" They looked at me really blankly and said, "What's that?" I tried to explain. They just said, "Can you email us about this?" So I did and never heard back. I was stuck. I wanted to do it, but I didn't know how. Then a friend suggested doing a popup thing, and I thought, "That's brilliant. Then I've got control of the environment. I'll just do it here in my house."

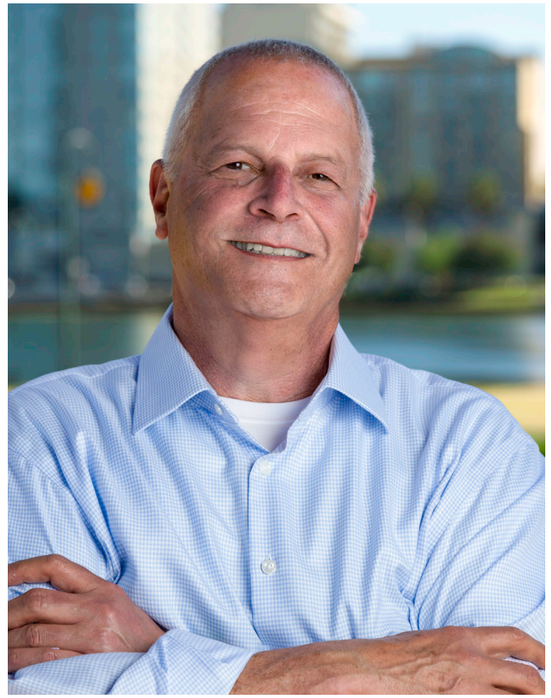
So I asked my mum to do the Death Café with me. She was like, "Well, all right. I'll do it. I'll bake the cakes. What is it?" I came up with this elaborate structure of having people write down their hopes and wishes that would then be ceremonially burned. In retrospect, it was all very controlling. I invited a few friends to the first Death Cafe. Afterwards my mum said, "That was really powerful, but all the writing and the burning and stuff–Jon, just let people talk." So for the second Death Café we just let people talk, and that's what we've been doing ever since.

BILL PALMER: Death Café personalized a whole bunch of experiences that I had had as a child and as an adult. I recall a grandmother of mine who passed away. My parents didn't tell me about it for a couple of days. They didn't want to upset me. I remember thinking – I was only seven or eight – what a stunning thing to do to not tell me that my grandmother died because you didn't want to upset me. There were other incidents like that. The other thing I noticed as a kid was that – I was embarrassed to say this at the time – I enjoyed funerals. I mean, I really liked going to funerals. The reason I liked it was not because I was happy that someone had died, but because of he way people treated each other. There rest of the time people weren't behaving that way.

Later in life, my mother as a hospice patient awakened death awareness. The hospice that she was in was a wonderful organization. They cared for her in a spectacularly compassionate way and also cared for my family, myself and friends. I was so taken that I decided to become a hospice volunteer.

Here in Oakland, we have a wonderful sponsor, a place called Chapel of the Chimes, which is an incredible presence in the community in terms of opening up their grounds and their facilities. Our attendance has been pretty consistent since 2012. At first, we were swamped with people. We had too many people: 25, 30 people in a group. It can be really difficult in a two-hour segment to lead and manage a group like that, but that was just an initial wave.

Now it's settled down to 10, 12, 15 people showing up.



CHARLES DAVIS

> So for the second Death Café we just let people talk, and that's what we've been doing ever since.
>
> JON UNDERWOOD

> Death Cafe meets my need to feel that I'm doing something that's worthwhile.
>
> BILL PALMER

We're here to support each other, not to debate the relative merits of one particular view of death or anything else.

BILL PALMER

There are people who come once and we never see them again. Some are what I would call regulars: they come to almost every one. Others pop in and pop out. They come for a staggering variety of reasons. I think a Death Cafe's appeal is that, regardless of our differences, we're all going to die. That seems to effortlessly bind people together.

One woman has attended at least 30 Death Cafes, and she says exactly the same things in 2017 that she said in 2013. I don't understand why she keeps coming back, but there's something about it that attracts her. Of course, she's more than welcome. Every time she says, "My own death is not real to me," there's always someone who says, "Yeah, I feel exactly the same way," so she gets the support that she asks for.

JON UNDERWOOD: There have been massive changes around death awareness since Death Café started. I think that Death Cafe is indicative of this shift. People like Caitlin Doughty from the Order of the Good Death have inspired thousands of people to become interested in death. Aging Boomers are more focused on death and dying now, and that's a cultural transformation. Another cause is the very visible instability of the financial system and traditional business, legal, and religious institutions. Part of their function is to minimize and manage death anxiety, and now they're tarnished and diminished, forcing people to look directly at death again.

BILL PALMER: At every Death Café I set some ground rules right at the top. There's no forced topic of conversation—no icebreakers, no guests speakers, none of that. Any topic of conversation regarding death or people's feelings about death is welcome. If you don't want to talk, you don't have to.

You can just listen. That's fine. No one, no facilitator will ever call on you and say, "Well, what do you think?" A Death Café is a learning and support community, so if you're tempted to argue or debate, that's not welcome. If you hear something you don't like or don't understand, you are encouraged to be curious and to ask, but we're here to support each other, not to debate the relative merits of one particular view of death or anything else.

With business or urban groups, I take a much more forceful stance with facilitation because there's usually an intended output. Facilitating a Death Cafe takes a very light touch because there's no one intended output.

JON UNDERWOOD: Death Cafe attracts a really high caliber of people, amazing volunteers who, like me, are not getting paid. They're passionate enough about death and dying to use their own free time to do this work. They bring an enormous amount of integrity to Death Cafe. It's a real privilege to work with them.

BILL PALMER: I like that it's not monetized. I don't want to make money off of Death Café because I think the kind of energy that comes with people doing it as a labor of love is the right kind of energy.

I'm never bored in a group even when the group is boring because I just love observing the dynamics and the interactions. There's an increased cultural awareness about death and issues around death, which is really important to me. Death Cafe meets my need to feel that I'm doing something that's worthwhile.

A lot of times people come with a particularly active issue. 'My mother died 40 years ago, and I'm still not over it.' There's a lot of reporting that, over time, because of coming to Death Café, they're able to work through some of that. I see a lot of progress in clarifying and resolving grief.

Some people come with deep philosophical and spiritual concerns. 'Is there an afterlife?' 'What's going to happen to me after I die?' I hear a lot of reports of some resolution of worry or anxiety. For other people it's "I've delayed creating a will, but now because of this group I've finally called an attorney and created one." I couldn't possibly quantify it, but I can assure you that Death Cafe's impact is profound.

JON UNDERWOOD: I don't think there's any doubt that Death Cafe is helping people, but I think there's a long way to go with accepting death as a part of life. A lot of the issues we face as a society can be tracked back to death, so getting to the bottom of death involves completely turning our society upside down, completely reconstituting our society on a much more compassionate basis. That's what I'm in it for. That's what I'm pursuing. I'll take it as far as I can.

BILL PALMER: I don't bring my politics to Death Cafe, but it's a relevant issue. How you die in America, and I suspect in other places too, is, to some extent, a function of your wealth, your race, your gender. That's not optimal for society. Jon talks about turning some institutions and social norms upside down. I agree with that. I don't know how Death Cafe does that, but I know it's a good starting place.

From a conversation with John Wadsworth

BILL PALMER has deep coaching, consulting and training experience in cross-cultural settings. He is designated as a Professional Certified Coach by the International Coach Federation and has worked for a diverse set of Fortune 500 companies and the United States military.

Bill is the founder and facilitator of Death Cafe Oakland.

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I've Led 50 Death Cafes: Here Are 50 Things I Learned.

BY BILL PALMER, FOUNDER OF DEATH CAFÉ OAKLAND

Wait, what? Death Café?

Death Café was founded in the UK in 2011 by Jon Underwood. People gather to discuss death– fear and frustration, dread and despair, grief and gloom, as well as hope and happiness, resilience and resolve, jokes and joy, There is no format other than open and free discussion about any aspect of death.

Everything is discussed, from the most mundane and obscure details of wills and funerals to wonderings about bodily decomposition to the deepest and most profound philosophical and spiritual concerns. There have now been over 4000 Death Cafes in 40 countries.

There is no suggested course of action, no philosophy or set of beliefs imposed by the leader. There is often, humor. I've never been to a Death Café where there was not laughter.

I founded Death Café in Oakland in 2013, and after the first 50 (there have been 56 of them) I decided to explore what I had learned.

1. How we die in America is largely a function of race and wealth.
2. A surprising percentage of adults in Death Cafes simply do not accept that their death is real.

3. The overwhelming percentage of people in Death Cafes Oakland are women. This is true globally as well. Is it because men frequently off-load much of their emotional life to women?

4. Many people in Death Cafes are grieving losses that are 10, 20, 30, 40 or more years in the past.
5. Those who cared for a loved one for a long time before their loved one's death report that they felt a deep shame over the dominant emotion they experienced when death finally came: relief.

6. Denial can be a lovely place of grace.

7. Many report that they feel numb after the death of a loved one, but feel devastated after the loss of a pet.
8. The approach of death for some means the long, slow loss of mobility, capability, sensibility, affability and availability. This progression is more dreaded than death itself.

9. There is laughter at every Death Café. Some of it is the nervous laughter of touching and speaking cultural taboos around death. Some of it is the deep appreciation that fear of death is fear of life.

10. Many intelligent, successful and otherwise responsible people have no will, no advanced care directive and in general have made no legal provision for their death, (much less an emotional one) even after hearing stories about the chaos and costs of dying in such a manner.

11. Story: As his wife lay comatose and dying, a man whispered in her ear: "I love you; please, please, please don't leave me." She miraculously recovered and lived 10 more years. "I will never forgive you for that," she told him. "I was ready to go and you pulled me back."

12. For many of us, secular life has isolated us from rituals, customs and community that could have supported us before, during and after a death.
13. For many of us, faith in some logically unprovable spiritual belief is a real source of comfort.

14. Unfinished business is gasoline sprayed on grief's fire.

15. Parents sometimes want to hide death from their children. But most children, early on, want to know about death.
16. Each loss can be all the losses that preceded it.
17. Though many of our institutions have failed us grievously (pun intended) a shining example of success is hospice.
18. Some doctors at Death Café view the death of their patients as their personal failure. Hence their resistance to talking about death with patients.

19. Many people who think they want extreme medical efforts at resuscitation change their minds when they hear the facts about resuscitation.

20. Some people tire of caring for an elderly relative, and simply drop them off at a hospital emergency room.
21. Story: "I looked at him and saw a disabled, confused and ailing person. He clung to life for his own reasons. I saw no reason for him to live. He was right and I was wrong. He gets to decide what quality of life is acceptable."

22. Often, modern medicine simply prolongs biological signs of life when there is in fact no life left.

23. Very few of us have actually seen a person die. Some who have, report it as a transformative, even magical experience.
24. Think of all the rituals we have surrounding birth and other life transitions. Too often we hide death and the feelings about it.
25. Estranged siblings often compound and confuse their grief upon the death of a parent.
26. Some hoard possessions of a dead loved one, sometimes for decades. Others get rid of everything, immediately.

27. Money and grief ignite spontaneously when mixed.

28. So many people say nothing because they don't know what to say. They miss that they need not speak, only listen.
29. Suicide is an act that we cannot help but project upon.
30. Sudden, unexpected death is deep, personal trauma for survivors.

31. Some people report that they never stop grieving, but that they get used to it.

32. Others report they never get used to it.
33. Grief after a miscarriage is often kept secret, and so those who do so grieve alone with little or no support.

1. Story: “At my father’s funeral, the minister said that the reason so many people showed up was that he was a devout, church-going believer. He was not.” She burst into tears.

2. Many of us wonder and worry about what will happen (if anything) after we die. We rarely think of all the time that preceded our birth.

3. Many who have lived through the carnage of war are ruined. Some seem unscathed. Those who study PTSD cannot say why.
4. One couple reported that after every funeral they ever attended, they had spectacular, passionate and deeply satisfying sex. They said they were affirming life.
5. There are laws about scattering ashes. You can’t just scatter them anywhere.

6. An older man reported that death only became real to him after a lover from long ago had died.

7. Some who have observed a death say they saw a “spirit,” or “energy” or an “aura” or “light” leaving the body.
8. We held a men-only Death Café. Most of the men said that it was easier for them to open up in the absence of women.

9. For the LGBT community, the specter of AIDS is never far away.

10. For the African American community, the horror of police violence commingled death with rage and regret.
11. Atheists, deists and agnostics all seem equally (un) comfortable at the prospect of their own or others’ deaths.

12. A Chinese death custom is to purchase fake money and burn it so that the dead can bring it in vapor form to the afterlife.

13. Frequently asked question: My (family, brother, sister, father, mother, etc.) refuses to talk about death. How can I get them to talk?
14. Immediately after mass shootings in the US or abroad, attendance at Death Café Oakland spikes up.

15. Argument and debate at Death Café Oakland is forbidden. Inquiry and curiosity are encouraged. People freely express themselves.

16. The death of a twin can be a grief echo chamber and an endless feedback loop for the surviving twin.

17. “S/he is in a better place” is the opposite of empathy for the grieving.

Death Cafe

WWW.DEATHCAFE.COM

“Socrates leaves the choice open between two possibilities:
death is either dreamless sleep
or migration of the soul to another world.
What he asserts, however, is that in either case,
fear of death is unfounded,
and that it is only under the influence of this fear
that death appears to be the greatest evil.
Yet as dreamless sleep, “Death will be an
unspeakable gain.”
And if it is “a journey to another place….what can be
better than this?”
But how could he convince his listeners that death is not to
be feared?
There is ample evidence in Plato’s report of the trial of
Socrates
that he could have talked his way out and gained acquittal,
or at least have avoided the death penalty.
Socrates, however, chose death,
for only in this way could he convince his followers
that death is not to be feared.”

JACQUES CHORON

In Memoriam | JON UNDERWOOD

DEAN BRANNAGAN

Jon Underwood was featured in Volume I of Art of Dying. You can read his feature article, "Death Activism" at www.artofdying.net.

Jon Underwood, the founder of Death Cafe, died suddenly on Tuesday 27th June from undiagnosed acute promyelocytic leukaemia. He was a quietly spoken, deeply compassionate radical, who bettered the lives of millions of people all over the world through his work creating Death Cafes. He was just 44.

Jon was always the first to point out the originator of the idea was Bernard Crettaz, a Swiss sociologist, but it was Jon's low key evangelism that gave the idea momentum here in the UK, and thanks to his confidence in the social benefits, and his generosity in sharing it (he held the reins so lightly as to be almost invisible) Death Cafes have become a global phenomenon.

Jon was married to Donna Molloy, whom he met at Corpus Christi College in Oxford, and they have two children. Jon was both intellectual and deeply spiritual - his degree was in Politics, Philosophy and Economics. Jon immersed himself in Tibetan Buddhism, giving up well-paid tech work to manage the Jamyang Centre in South London, working alongside his beloved spiritual teacher, Geshe Tashi. In 2002 he took up a role in Tower Hamlets Council leading pioneering projects to support ex offenders and tackle issues of the disadvantaged. He left Tower Hamlets in 2010 to develop his own projects around death awareness, compassionate funerals, and natural death facilities. He maintained strong links with Jamyang and always wanted the centre to hold funerals, and with irony that Jon would relish, his was first.

I have been privileged to host several Death Cafes, and while on paper the idea doesn't seem so groundbreaking - strangers meet, sit and drink tea, eat cake and discuss death for two hours- in reality they can become crucibles of extraordinary intimacy.

Jon understood that people have a thirst for the authentic, a longing to connect on a deeper level, and sharing our experiences of death, our fears and hopes, while enjoying one of the simplest of pleasures of our short lives, is such a way. Jon was really creating a space for moments of shared grace; intimacy through vulnerability, tempered and softened by the breaking of bread together. Though his influence on the Natural Death movement was huge, I'm sure he would have insisted that he was the rule, not the exception.

Working with death has taught me that the world is full of Jon Underwoods. Compassion, courage and integrity are the bedrock of most people's personality; only bad luck and circumstance bend us out of shape. Jon knew this too, and embodied it in everything he did.

Jon leaves behind his wife Donna, his two children Frank (10) and Gina (6), his sister Jools, his brother Matt, his mother Sue, his stepfather Alistair and his father Mike.

And millions of grateful people whom he never met.

Rupert Callender, *Radical Undertaker*.

"Pretend for a moment that you are a child,
and I am trying to undertake the particular chore
of explaining to you
what your most developed adult self will be like -
and in my explanation,
I say that this adult self is to some extent part of you,
an outgrowth, or projection of what you are.
And the child says
"But what will happen to me?
Must I die to become this other self?
I do not want to change.
How can I ever be this adult self,
when it is not what I am now,
without dying as what I am."

SETH

BY LOUISE WINTER

THIS ARTICLE WAS FIRST PUBLISHED IN THE NATURAL DEATH CENTER'S MORE TO DEATH MAGAZINE

DEAN BRANNAGAN

Jon Underwood was featured in Volume I & II of Art of Dying. You can read his Observations and his obituary at www.artofdyingmagazine.com.

I was on a night bus home through London with a phone that was rapidly running out of battery when I received a text from Jools, the sister of a friend of mine. She asked if I was available to speak to her as it was rather urgent.

"We've had some terrible news," she told me, after I'd rushed home, charged my phone and called her, just before midnight. The line was crackling and I couldn't quite make out what she was saying. "… had a brain haemorrhage and died this afternoon."

"I am so sorry to hear that," I said, wondering who she was talking about and wondering whether a friend of a friend of a friend had died and perhaps their family needed some advice about funerals. "Sorry, who did you say had died?"

"Jon."

The Jon she was talking about was Jon Underwood - her brother, my friend and colleague, and the founder of Death Cafe. It was inconceivable that the man who had started Death Cafe had died. But it was true; Jon had died suddenly and unexpectedly at the age of 44 from undiagnosed acute prolymetic leukemia on 27th June 2017.

Back in 2011, Jon invited a handful of people to gather in his front room for an open and honest conversation about death over tea and cake. Just six years later, over 5,300 Death Cafes have been hosted around the world. The movement received international press coverage, even making it to the front page of the New York Times.

One week Jon was taking his two children to school and planning the future of Death Cafe; the following week, we were helping to plan his funeral.

Jools, his sister, asked me to step in and announce his death to the press in relation to his life's work, the Death Cafe movement. Inevitably, the matter of his funeral came up during my discussions with his family and I passed on the many offers of support from the funeral community in London and beyond, as so many funeral professionals had known and loved Jon and his work and were keen to do everything they could to give Jon a beautiful goodbye.

Hasina Zaman and Allistair Anderson from Compassionate Funerals in Wanstead were the obvious choice to take care of Jon and help his family with the funeral arrangements. They were not only friends of Jon's but had also spent many hours wandering around the City of London Cemetery with him discussing the launch of their funeral service in Wanstead. He'd given them a particularly hard time about the use of the word compassionate in their company name and how that would be reflected in their work. They were and are exemplary funeral directors who were local to Jon's family home in East London, and I couldn't think of anyone better to take care of Jon and his family.

Allistair and I were invited to Jon's house on a Saturday afternoon to discuss the funeral. I'd been there several times before, either to enjoy a cup of tea with Jon in his garden or to discuss matters related to Death Cafe. Standing outside his house on the street in Hackney preparing to go in, we took a deep breath and knocked at the door.

It was like Jon was there, only he wasn't. He was there in his children's faces, his sister's eyes, his mum's eyes features and his lovely wife Donna, who he had talked about with such pride whenever I saw him.

"What will be the role of the funeral director?" Jon's step-dad asked, as we all sat around the kitchen table discussing the funeral.

"To be as unobtrusive as possible," Alistair replied. "I'm here to facilitate you doing whatever you need to do." I nodded at him. He was the perfect choice of funeral director - gentle, supportive and discreet.

Jon's funeral took place in the beautiful setting of the Jamyang Buddhist Centre in London on Thursday 6th July. Jon had managed the centre from 2000 to 2002 and had studied under Geshe Tashi, the centre's resident teacher. It had been Jon's dream to hold funerals at the centre; he'd been busy putting together detailed plans for how that might work. With an irony he would have appreciated, it was the plans he'd put together that formed the foundation of his funeral.

Jon arrived at the centre in an electric eco-hearse made by Brahms - a Nissan Leaf which had been converted into a hearse and was on its first ever outing as a vehicle available for hire for funerals.

He was carried into the centre by his friends and colleagues from the funeral profession and the Death Cafe community. Jon's rainbow willow coffin (from Ecoffins) stayed in the main temple space whilst everyone drank tea and ate homemade cake from Jamyang's beautiful cafe in the sunlit gardens, preparing for the funeral ceremony to take place.

Jon's funeral took place in Jamyang's main temple space, a converted courthouse. The ceremony was led by Geshe Tashi, who paid tribute to his student and friend of many years. Jon's wife, mother, father, step-father, sister, brother and children all paid tribute to Jon with moving speeches.

After the funeral, everyone travelled to Jon's local pub, the Chesham Arms, on his street in Hackney to continue singing, playing music and sharing tributes. Jon had been part of a community initiative to save the pub from being taken over by property developers and he lived just a few doors away.

Jon was cremated the following day at the City of London Crematorium.

Jon's funeral was beautiful, touching and personal. It reflected how important Jon had been to so many different communities. All of his family, including his two children, were involved in every part of the funeral from choosing his coffin to being part of the ceremony on the day. It was every bit as inspired, inspiring and memorable as Jon himself.

LOUISE WINTER

is a progressive funeral director and the founder of Poetic Endings – a modern funeral service creating funerals of style and substance, relevance and meaning in the UK. She's also the director of Life. Death. Whatever. - an award-winning festival and community that exists to change the dialogue around death and dying. In 2017, Louise won a Death Oscar at the Good Funeral Awards.

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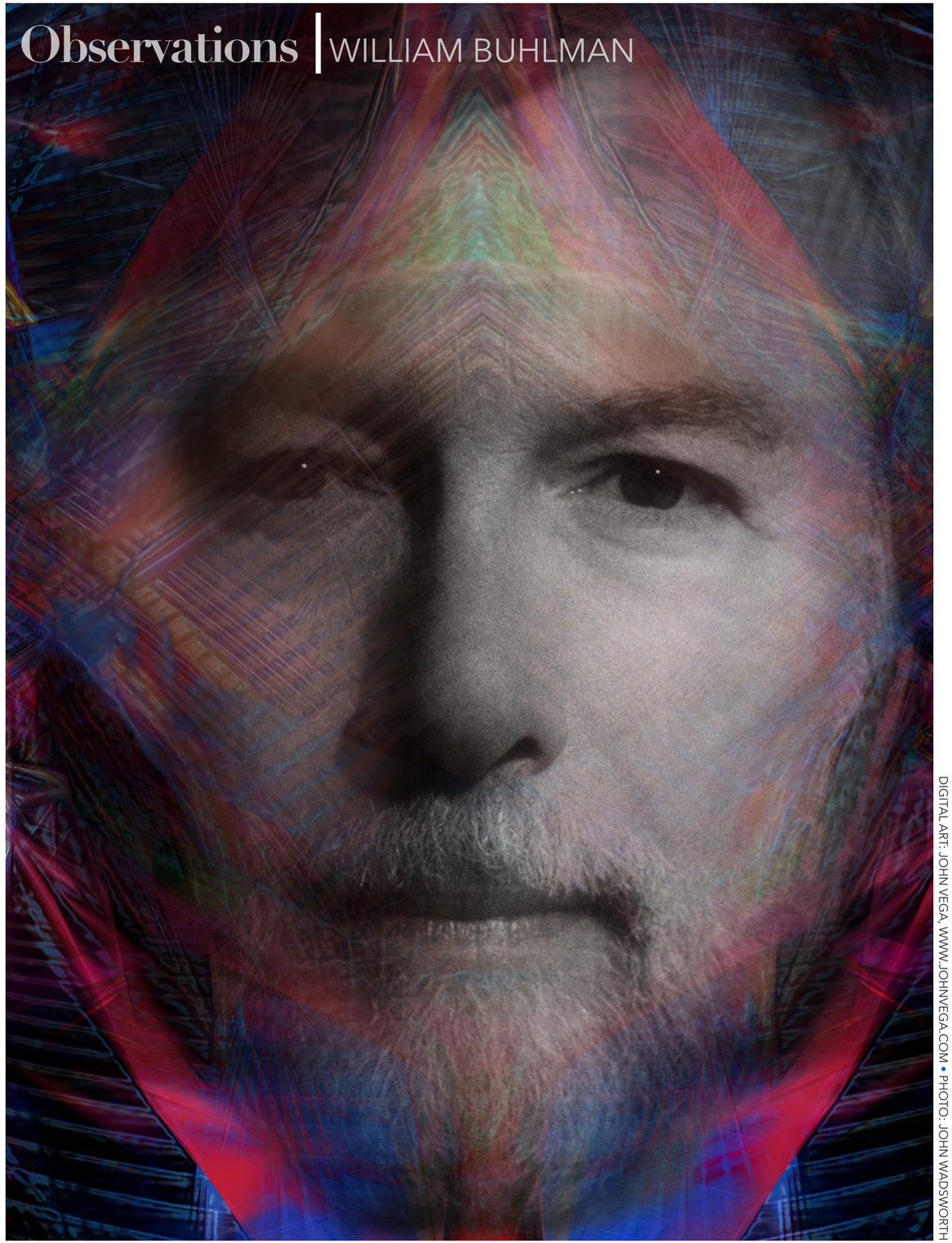

DIGITAL ART: JOHN VEGA, WWW.JOHNVEGA.COM • PHOTO: JOHN WADSWORTH

> This complete lack of self-knowledge is why there is so much fear in our world today.
>
> WILLIAM BUHLMAN

Death is not the end. I know this from over 40 years of out-of-body experiences. We are actually at the beginning stages of awakening to our true identity. Evolution has nothing to do with biological change; it is better described as an inner process of awakening consciousness. Because we are immortal, it doesn't matter how long the process of evolution may take. It might take an individual hundreds of lifetimes to become a fully awakened, multi-dimensional being. No one dies! Ever! Death is simply a continuation of life because our entire state of consciousness survives when we die.

When we look at the core of insightful religious texts; and the profound spiritual journeys recorded throughout the history of mankind, we discover the experience of transcending the biological body. Revered documents such as Revelations and the Koran offer direct accounts of repeated and extended experiences beyond the body.

Why is movement beyond our biological identity so important? In my books I detail multiple benefits, the most important being self-knowledge. Our belief systems confine us in a box of flawed assumptions that distort the perception of who we really are. The average human has no concept where they come from before birth. They have no idea where they are going after death. They have no idea of our purpose for being here. This complete lack of self-knowledge is why there's so much fear in our world today.

We keep identifying our biological existence with flags and religions; or with a piece of dirt we live on for a limited time. We're not biological beings. We're not men. Not women. Not fathers or mothers. These are temporary labels that we have given ourselves based on the roles we have chosen for this lifetime. Soul or consciousness has no form. The humanoid framework by which we define consciousness is false. I know from OBE experiences that, as I prolong my experiences, I lose my humanoid form.

Keep in mind that people do not naturally aspire toward a more expansive self-concept. It's almost too much for some people to even consider. "Well, if I'm not a human, then what am I?" We do not intuitively suspect that, once we drop all the facades and their attaching limits, we can create our own world.

But there's nothing stopping us. We are pure consciousness, which means that we can create any form to express ourselves. We can create anything because we are no longer attached to the limits of form. It's liberating to be free from biological constraints.

Based on my observations during out-of -body experiences, the average person after death moves only a fraction into the infinite universe. Instead of fully experiencing the wonders of worlds beyond the physical, the average person will find themselves in a consensus reality created by the collective thought of individuals who still believe they are biological beings. In other words, they've gone from a dense physical environment to a dense *non-physical* environment. They have not accelerated their growth because they still identify with the limits of their biological body.

To be truly prepared for our afterlife journey, we must become active spiritual explorers today. Not believers, not students, but active explorers. Only direct experience sustains a lasting shift in consciousness.

There is no single, best way to explore. I am well aware that even though having an out-of-body experience is a profound method for spiritual understanding, this is not the path for everyone. So in my new book, *Higher Self Now!* I encourage personal meditation practices and provide many techniques to help the reader open a door to self-discovery.

In this book, I've concentrated on preparation for death and developing awareness about our voyage beyond death because this is the key. We're immortal, creative, multi-dimensional beings. Everyone is looking at death as the end, when it is really just part of our soul's continuing journey. Human life is like a flash. When you're in the afterlife, this life seems like the blink of an eye.

Our thoughts create our environment and self-identity. We do it every day in the physical by choosing our home, our partners and our hobbies.

So why would we stop creating just because we no longer have a physical body? This is especially true at death where we will enter an incredibly subtle, thought-responsive dimension of existence, and this is where our ability to manifest our creations expands exponentially.

We are not matter-based. We are pure consciousness using a multitude of various energy bodies to experience and explore an infinite and beautiful reality. Each of us is a microcosm of an eternal universe. This is critical knowledge to support an enlightened transition to the non-physical.

I've aligned my work with **The Monroe Institute** in Faber, Virginia where experience is emphasized over theory. I teach people there how to empower themselves to be explorers of consciousness; to follow their own process; their own intuition–to become knowers instead of believers. That is what self-empowerment is all about. The more you know before your transition, the more emboldened you will be after death.

From a conversation with John Wadsworth

It's liberating to be free from biological constraints.

CREATING YOUR OWN ENLIGHTENED SPIRITUAL TRANSITION

For decades I have written about the need for us to become explorers of consciousness. As creative spiritual beings it's important that we take complete responsibility for our current life and our transition at death. With this in mind the following personal action plan is presented.

1 **CREATE A DETAILED WRITTEN PLAN** for your transition. Select allies you trust who will support and assist with your detailed spiritual action plan. Make sure they are aware of your instructions prior to the dying process as you may have limited communication ability as your transition draws near. (Refer to the Spiritual Directive document in the appendix.)

2 **RELEASE ALL YOUR ATTACHMENTS** to the physical world and your physical body. Take the actions you need to assure your state of consciousness and emotional frequency is at the highest possible point. Provide forgiveness where needed and gratitude for all that you have experienced during this physical life.

3 **FOCUS YOUR MIND** during the entire process on your ultimate spiritual objective. Create and repeat your highest intention for an enlightened transition, (Spiritual Essence Now! Higher Self Now!) Use the terms that resonate with you.

4 **CREATE OR PURCHASE A VERBAL AUDIO GUIDANCE RECORDING OF AFFIRMATIONS** for yourself and your loved ones. These affirmations should support your specific spiritual goals. Make sure this is documented in your written plan. (My audio program, Destination: Higher Self was created for this purpose.)

5 **MAKE YOUR PERSONAL AFFIRMATION PLAN AND RECORDING ACCESSIBLE** to those who will assist you during the entire process. Play your personal affirmation recording at your bedside before, during and after death.

6 **CREMATE THE BODY** to break any remaining attachments to the physical world and our biological body. Do this as quickly as possible.

Hope and beliefs alone are not an effective spiritual plan for our transition of consciousness at death. We have the ability to break free from the institutional indoctrination and become an active explorer of consciousness during our life and at death. A pivotal shift of awareness is now occurring worldwide as millions realize that we design not only our current reality, but our afterlife as well. As spiritual beings we are not victims at death, we are empowered to design and experience an enhanced spiritual transition of consciousness.

Excerpt from William Buhlman's latest Book, **Higher Self Now!** ***Awakening to the Infinite Journey of Soul.***

WILLIAM BUHLMAN

William Buhlman's forty years of extensive personal out-of-body explorations give him a unique and thought provoking perspective of death and dying. His first book, *Adventures beyond the Body* chronicles his personal journey of self-discovery through out-of-body travel, and provides the reader with techniques that can be used for their own exploration. In addition, William has developed an extensive series of audio and video programs designed to expand awareness and assist in consciousness expansion. William has appeared on numerous worldwide television and radio shows.

WILLIAM BUHLMAN
WWW.ASTRALINFO.ORG

> This year I want to see the lotus on the other side.
>
> **JAKURA**

Dia de los Muertos

by Helmuth Humphrey

I was raised in Germany surrounded by some of the world's most beautiful churches and cathedrals. I have always felt drawn to religious iconography and ritual, especially in relation to death. Western culture traditionally regards death with sadness. We are told we will reunite with the departed in a distant future, in another world.

Dia de los Meurtos, a festival celebrated by the indigenous people of Central and Southern Mexico, affirms a joyous perspective of death. It is their belief that the departed are alive in the realm of Mictlan, waiting for an annual return among the embodied when the veil between worlds is thinnest. The dead, guided to their earthly homes by candlelit paths of marigold flowers, reunite with their families, listen to music, and enjoy their favorite food and drink. Children witness love and respect for the departed. Death is embraced as a friendly aspect of life.

This vibrant celebration of the dead's presence contrasts starkly with our culture's somber mourning of the dead's absence. I prefer cascading flowers to flowing tears.

JOHN WADSWORTH PHOTOGRAPHY

Death is embraced as a friendly aspect of life.

HELMUTH HUMPHREY

Helmuth Humphrey is a fine art and commercial photographer, filmmaker and world wanderer. His work, spanning locations from Iceland through New Orleans to Oaxaca can be explored at www.helmuthhumphrey.com.

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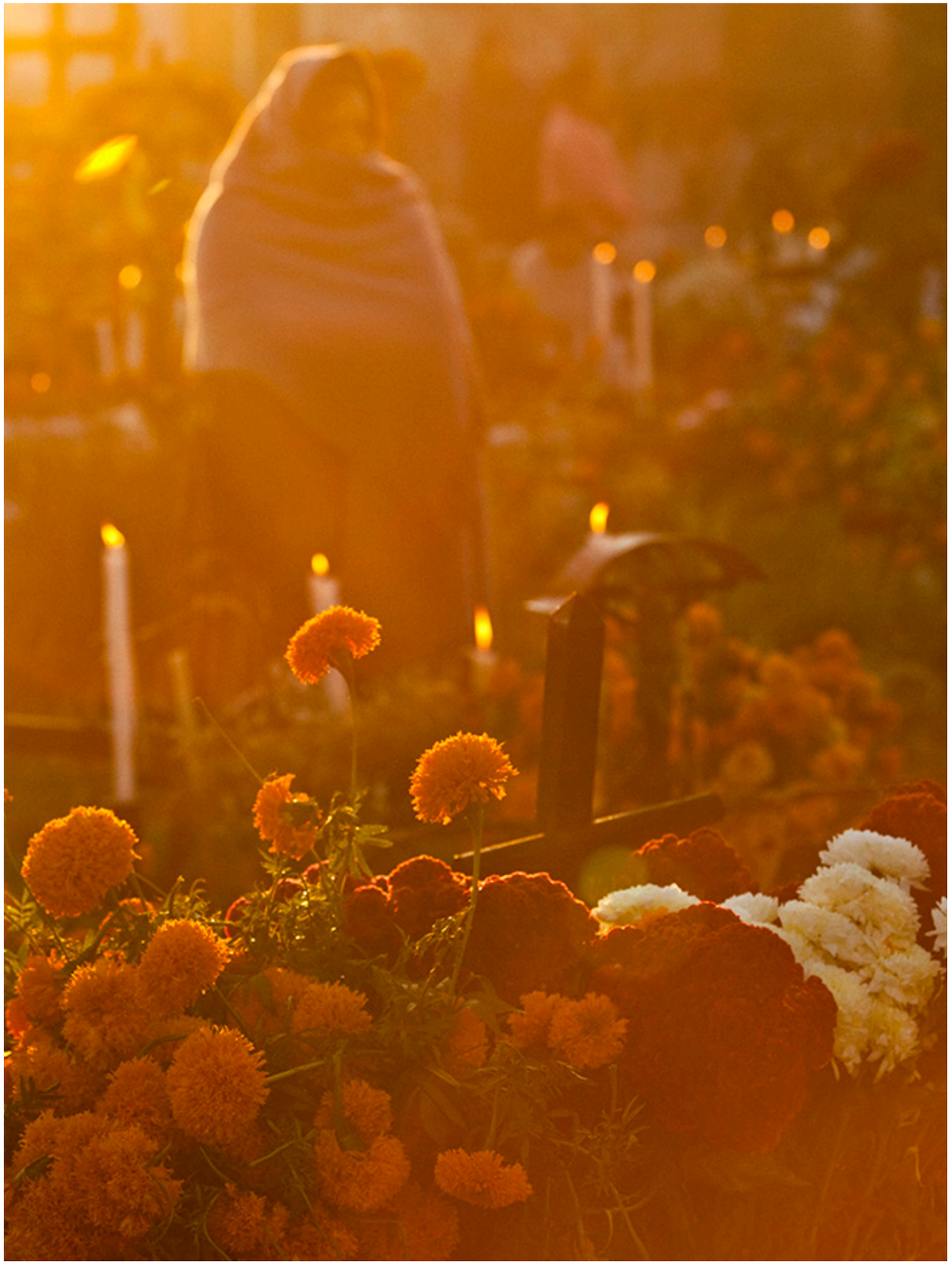



J.M.Z.
E.C.G.
A.M.S.
P.O.
C.A.
M.S.O.
N.S.R.
D.R.L.
O.R.S.
H.C.R.
J.M.H.
P.D.O.
F.G.M.
H.J.M.
A.F.J.
Manuelito
FLEMITA
Joelito

Observations

CAPSULA MUNDI

DESIGNERS RAOUL BRETZEL AND ANNA CITELLI

FRANCESCO D'ANGELO PHOTOGRAPHY

Envision an egg-shaped pod- an ancient and perfect form made of biodegradable material- where our departed loved ones are placed for burial. This is Capsula Mundi, a cultural and broad-based project which embraces a different approach to the way we think about death. Ashes will be held in small Capsulas; bodies will be laid down in a fetal position in larger pods. The pod will then be buried as a seed in the earth. A tree, chosen in life by the deceased, will be planted on top of it and serve as a memorial for the departed and as a legacy for posterity and the the future of our planet. Family and friends will continue to care for the tree as it grows. Cemeteries will acquire a new look and, instead of the cold grey landscape we see today, they will grow into vibrant woodlands. The project is still in a start-up phase, but encouraged by worldwide enthusiasm for this concept, we are working to make it a reality.

Capsula Mundi can help people change their approach to death. We think that our design will create a cultural shift. For this reason, we decided to use the egg as a secular and universal symbol of life, incorporating the fetal position and tree as inspirations for re-designing the traditional coffin. Our clients are sensitive and eager to talk about death and dying. They always emphasize their appreciation of the profound difference between visiting their deceased loved ones in a forest instead of a cemetery. And they love the idea of giving back to the Earth!

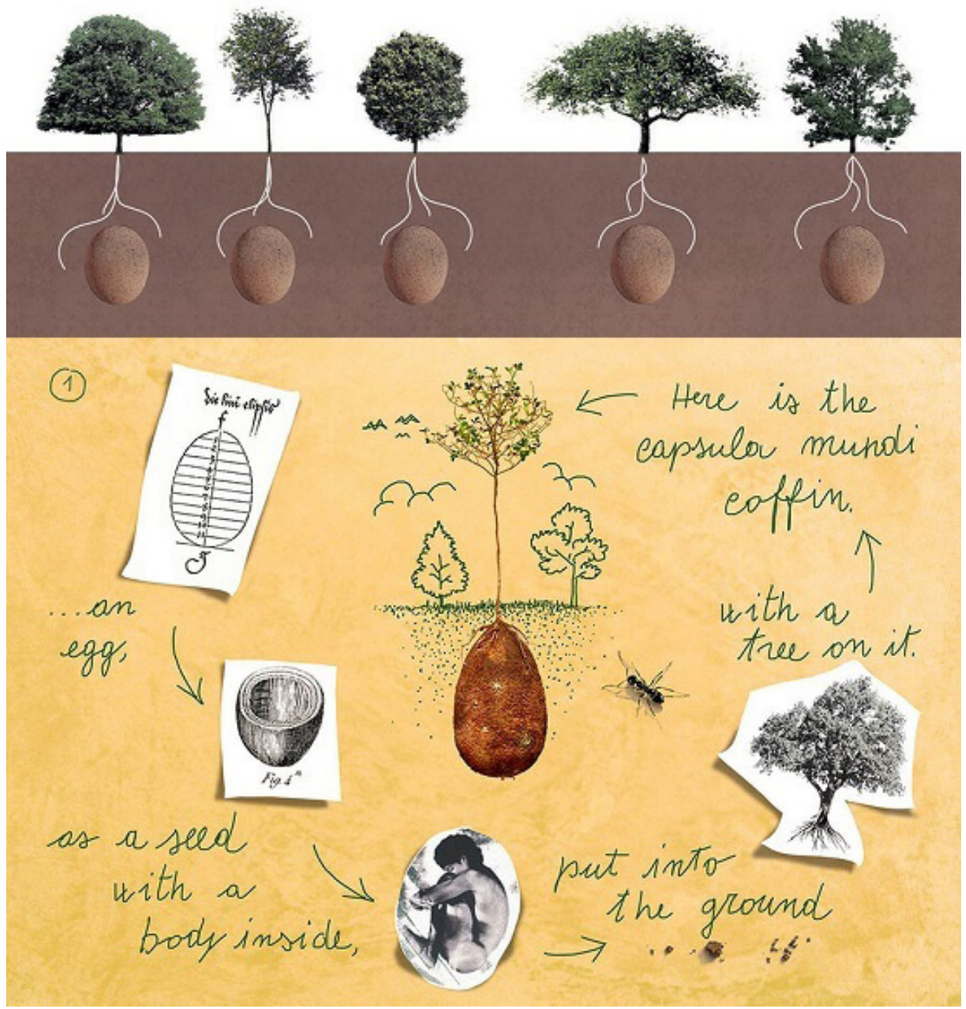
Modern society is far removed from Nature and we lose awareness that death is just a natural passage of our life. We have forgotten that we are part of Nature: the human body is mainly made up of nitrogen, sulfur, phosphorus, calcium, magnesium (in addition to carbon, hydrogen and oxygen,) all indispensable substances for vegetation. Capsula Mundi offers a way we can return to Nature's life cycle.

One can choose the tree their remains will feed. We suggest making a choice in respect to the climate zone and the local environment. We have recently asked our audience, "Which tree would you like to be?" and received so many answers. It feels good to pick a tree instead of a headstone and almost everybody has a "favorite" tree!

The Capsula for ashes will be available worldwide very soon, followed in the near future by the Capsula for the body with each being a unique piece. The only restriction is that green burials are not legal in every country. For example, in Italy where we are based, they are not allowed by a very old law. But we are confident that laws will change. Soon a living tree will be our legacy.

From a conversation with John Wadsworth

CAPSULA MUNDI
WWW.CAPSULAMUNDI.IT



Death ought to form how we live our lives
because the qualities that define a good life
are those that make up a good death.
When we allow ourselves to be confronted by death,
it is not easy.
It's tough to recognize that our lives on this earth will end,
and it can be hard to realize
that much of what we pursue in life
has little ultimate meaning.
In response, we may deploy a range of methods
to avoid being confronted by death.
We zealously seek medical treatment to forestall the inevitable
or we simply maintain lives that are too busy
to be interrupted by a trip to the nursing home.
Whatever method we pursue,
avoiding death often means refusing to recognize
what is valuable in our own lives.

ROB MOLL

I am a lay person. I didn't go to school for the work that I do. I'm not a doctor. I'm not a social worker. I don't have a job at a hospice. I do volunteer at a hospice, but that came later to legitimize and further explore this conversation about death and dying. I wanted "You're Going To Die" to be more than just a show. It's inspired me to research and invest my time in ways that help me see deeply into this and maybe get a little, if I could be so bold, wisdom that I can share. I am a lay person.

This is our death, and our approach to it, and our experience of it, and our work around it is ours. It should be that unique. We shouldn't let people take over the driver's seat. And while there's plenty of wisdom out there and plenty of doctors and nurses and social workers and chaplains and whatever you want to fill the blanks, it's ourselves that need to take responsibility for our relationship with death.

Death has a lot of sides, and most of them are understandable. I accept when someone comes to my show and they're like, "I can't deal with this." Or they hear the show's name and say, "I don't want to go." I completely understand, and I would never force the issue. I get it.

NEIL BUSKIRK

> This is our death, and our approach to it, and our experience of it, and our work around it is ours.

When death seems creepy, it's about the parts of it you can't control. A good example is my mother-in-law Kathy's death.

My wife and her dad and brothers were there by Kathy's death bed. It was powerful. When you leave it at that, it's like that's wonderful, thank you, she died at home, as we were all there singing, "You Are My Sunshine." What a blessing.

Then, in the final minutes, Kathy vomited a little bile, which is very common when people pass. These sort of traumatic visuals happen. And there's no stopping that.

So our blissful, beautiful, heartbreaking, powerfully heartfelt moment included that, too. This experience revealed death's complexity.

But that's the work—being with the dying. Going through the nightmare and the beauty, and being able to figure out who you are in relation to it. And hopefully, it inspires better deaths and better lives.

It's bizarre to live with the unfathomable ridiculousness of a society and a world that deny our inevitable death. Part of why I keep doing this is that I need to keep exploring and processing. The way that I am with "You're Going to Die" comes from wrestling with all of that and then baring myself in front of community. By working with the audience to arrive at something that isn't necessarily 'The Answer' to all that stuff, but that awakens solace, connection, sacredness.

I need my show to say, "Okay, don't take it all so seriously because as ridiculous as it is, it's fleeting." There are ways to feel sacred and to see the sacred in others. I feel good that there is no one answer. That's important to me. We're all wanting to have a unique conversation without the need for an answer.

We're individuals on these little stages in our head acting out things in relationship to the world. It helps to acknowledge that we are the main actor or actress in the midst of this drama or comedy or whatever it is. It breaks through barriers and reminds you of the gift of connection with others. You sigh in relief that you're not alone.

You're still uniquely experiencing all these joys and losses, sorrows and mortality. It's still yours. There's something about our relationship with mortality that we don't want to have taken away from us.

Who I am as the host of "You're Going to Die" is someone who isn't so far into the death and dying conversation as to be unavailable to understand

BRETT CLINE

parts that we all suffer; the parts that are confusing, that make us feel dark or lost, the parts that break our heart. I never feel far away from that.

I know my work producing "You're Going to Die", is staying close to death's core experience, not dramatically pushing myself, but staying in touch with the suffering so that I can authentically say, "I get it." I willingly and openly go forward into those parts of life and death so that I can meet and understand other people.

"You're Going To Die" came from the parts of life that haunt me and the parts that make me feel joy and the ways that I want to work on life and the things that I need to keep returning to. The show comes from all that.

Sometimes I'm surprised that I haven't shut off many of the struggles I've been through. Like why, after my mother passed away, did I aggressively explore that heartbreak and wound? I went to grief therapy and am still engaged with one-on-one therapy. A lot that comes up is related to "You're Going To Die" conversations.

If there's anything that would stop me from doing the show, and it certainly seems far off if even imaginable, it would be coming to some kind of complete okay-ness, some otherworldly wisdom. But that seems far away from how I feel now. It would have to be a state of being that shuts down my interest in exploring death. But, even in that state, I don't feel that I would lose my empathy with other people's pain.

One night a girl played an audio experience of recordings related to her father's death. It started with a voicemail he left, telling her about his cancer. Messages left by him and other people followed before she played recordings from his death bed, his breathing, his death rattle. She then played several recordings of awkward calls, people saying "I'm sorry." "I'm here." I love you." When the last message ended, everyone just sat silently. There was no place for applause. Everyone could feel that death, through her father, was asking us to be quiet.

I'd like to be more and more open; open and wiser about this conversation about death and dying. I feel like what comes up for me now more than ever is just facing life's losses and changes and the shortening of time. Everything gets mixed up and dissolves in all of that. I want to keep opening.

There was no place for applause. Everyone could feel that death, through her father, was asking us to be quiet.

I want to be present, and maybe quieter. And maybe more at peace. But still in this and holding space with people and being able to look into someone's eyes and say, "I see it, you know? I get it. And, I'm here with you in that. And, you don't have to change it. You don't have to get where I am. You don't have to do anything but know that I'm here and I'm open, and that's my work. To be with you in that. And to be with you and these truths." I believe that my life will be richer for it and that I'll be deeper even though sometimes it will hurt more than ever.

I hope that my work inspires others to turn to their pain and losses and their grief, to be with everything, knowing that it's work they need to do for themselves and everybody else. Because that's the point. I don't know what else we're doing here but to be in these things with each other. That's what the show is. You're Going To Die is a willingness to be there with one another. I don't know any other purpose for us to be here.

From a conversation with John Wadsworth

NED BUSKIRK is the creator and host of the 501c3 nonprofit You're Going to Die, a movement intent on bringing people creatively into the conversation of death and dying, through unabashedly confronting loss and mortality. The first live event was held on March 6th, 2009, as a simple poetry night held in the golden belly of a San Francisco apartment. Now the live event series, You're Going To Die: Poetry, Prose & Everything Goes … encompasses more than simply open mics and live shows, but is also an online international community creatively engaging with our shared mortality and all its inevitabilities.

"While I think there are several reasons to account for the movement's success, I'm certain the greatest cause for its momentum and relentless support is that we, as community, desperately need communal spaces, online and off, to gather and grieve, to suffer the losses we've endured and/or stand to lose eventually, to be with one another in this often unspoken truth that we ALL share: We Are All going to Die Eventually. Let's accept that fact together and see how we can use this truth to inform and inspire better lives."

WWW.YG2D.COM • NED@YG2D.COM

I'm not here to place a judgment on someone's decision, but I do my very best to explain to people what that life might look like, as much as one can.

MIKE BOLAND

In medical school, there is very little taught about death and dying. We are basically taught about pathology, the study of disease. We learn how to fight it, how to treat it using our vast array of medical technology, which is fantastic. We've come so far since the days of medicine where we would just sit and watch our patients suffer and not be able to do anything.

In my first year of residency I did several months of ICU training, meaning more acute care. I found myself feeling uncomfortable that we would admit frail, elderly patients who had very advanced, really end-stage illness. Whether it was cancer, or heart failure, or something else, we'd admit them to the ICU and hook them up and that's where they'd spend their last moments of life. It was very obvious that we weren't going to be able to cure their illness at that point, or even turn around what was going on. They were so ill. I thought to myself, "Why is this happening. It doesn't seem like a place where anyone would want to spend their last few moments or days life." We had them away from their family and their loved ones. I started asking the question, "Why is this happening?" It turns out there are many reasons.

Physicians have a hard time seeing the bigger picture. We're very good at looking at blood pressure and heart rate. We get obsessed on particular metrics and stop thinking about the person in the context of their illness and their lives. I think that that's unfortunate. No matter what you do in medicine, you need to keep the bigger picture in mind to best serve your patients-- asking the question, "Is this treatment, or this route, in line with this patient's goals and values?" To get at that question, you have to talk to patients and their families, which is something that's been lost in medicine. I absolutely think that the lay public, meaning anyone who is at some point a potential patient or caregiver, needs to understand that the default mode of the Western medical system, meaning America's healthcare system, is to do everything for everyone for as long as we can. If you are to say nothing and you come into the hospital, and you're quite ill, you'll get everything

done to keep you alive. In many instances that's totally appropriate. I am absolutely for intensive care and the use of technology in medical care. I just think that there are instances in which it behooves patients and families to have conversations way upstream from an acute crisis moment where they say–no matter if they've been diagnosed with an illness or not-- "Listen, this is what's important to me in my life. This is what gives my life meaning and purpose." Have a conversation with yourself about that, but then also share it with family, with friends, whoever you consider your loved ones, so that if you end up in a moment in time where you're unable to speak for yourself, or even if you are able to speak for yourself, that you have a clear sense of what you really want.

Back in the day, all we did was focus on comfort. We've come so far from a technological perspective and I think that's wonderful. We also need to recognize that we aren't at a place where we're preventing and curing all illness. I hope that day comes, but until then, we need to focus on what to do when a cure does not exist. I think we've forgotten about that in our medical education. As a consumer society we're so used to getting everything quickly. We love the magic bullet to make us better. That doesn't exist for everything.

> To normalize death as a part of life early on is the right thing to do.

Often in a moment of panic, especially when you feel like your health is slipping away from you, you may have a better sense of how to tailor the conversation and discuss it with a healthcare provider. If I'm hearing, "I'm having a hard time breathing," and if it looks as though things will continue to get worse, are you somebody who would want a breathing tube to help you breathe even if it meant you may have to stay on that machine for many weeks or many months or the rest of your life? I think it's very helpful to have these conversations early on and to know that for patients at this point, you have to advocate for yourself if there are specific things that you want and, even more importantly, things that you don't want. The medical system has a way of doing things that you really have to aggressively opt out of if you don't want those things done.

There are plenty of cultural and religious factors that play into this conversation. For some people, not doing everything possible to sustain life goes against their core belief system. Who am I to say that that's wrong? That's not what I would choose, but it's really about making sure that the care patients receive is the care they want and that they're fully informed about that situation. I think that it's probably too late to have that conversation once somebody is close to the end and in the ICU. You would hope that conversation would have taken place much further upstream. That the conversation had occurred over weeks or months. This is a conversation that needs to be continually revisited depending on someone's state of health and what's going on in their lives. If at 55 you pull out a living will and you designate a healthcare proxy and state your wishes, you need to review from time to time and make sure that it's still consistent for you.

> We've taught sex education, but there's been no instruction for death and dying.

For some people it's enough to breathe without having any way to communicate or to take in nutrition via mouth or even move their body. That's enough for them and that's okay. I'm not insisting that what's suffering for me has to be suffering for you. I'm not here to place a judgment on someone's decision, but I do my very best to explain to people what that life might look like, as much as one can. Most of the time, people don't want that. With a realistic understanding, they opt out of it.

To tell you the honest truth, I have mixed feelings about California's End of Life Option. People will often get a prescription for the drug that would end their lives, but they don't use it. Maybe just having it gives them a sense of control and a sense of calm that is powerful within itself.

My friends and I in the world of palliative care are torn. On one hand it makes sense for people to have this autonomy, but on the other hand it's like we've skipped the progress we've made in making sure that every single human being has access to good quality care with an emphasis on easing suffering. We are making great advances in alleviating the reason why people are wanting to end their life. It's tricky.

For younger people, I think the distance from what they see as the likely end of their life actually can be powerful. You're not as fearful of death because you see it as far away. To normalize death as a part of life early on is the right thing to do. There are some fantastic groups creating death education programs in middle school and high school. We've taught sex education, but there's been no instruction for death and dying. I am fascinated that here are many young people interested in this topic outside of healthcare. This is not something that I would have come to if it weren't for my personal experience of taking care of patients. I'm thrilled to see millennials and younger people thinking about death and innovating this field.

We're just at the beginning of a social movement, a groundswell. The real shift in understanding and practice is going to come from the consumer; from the patient and the caregiver, not necessarily from the healthcare facility. That will make the biggest change within the system.

From a conversation with John Wadsworth

DR. SHOSHANA UNGERLEIDER is an internist practicing hospital medicine at California Pacific Medical Center in San Francisco. She received her medical degree from Oregon Health & Science University in Portland, OR and completed residency at California Pacific Medical Center where she is now on the teaching faculty and serves on the Foundation Board of Trustees. In her spare time, Shoshana enjoys traveling, exercising and eating great food. She lives with her husband in San Francisco.

JOHN WADSWORTH

My work is based on this principle: That when we experience care, love and healing, the nature of our heart is to give back what we have received.

I grew up in a Tennessee town of 1,200 people, a community where everyone showed up for births, weddings, deaths and funerals. At an early age I was witnessing these sacred transitions and felt comfortable being a part of them. My mother was a natural caregiver. Throughout my childhood I went with her as she visited people who were sick or dying. My best friend's parents owned a funeral home. I watched her dad embalm bodies. I helped families prepare meals for after the funeral. I saw families in the parlor, praying on their knees, grieving.

Today we're living in a death denying culture where most of us have never expressed pain, grief, sadness, anger, or fear. We have no idea what we have lost by living in a culture where grief is rarely fully expressed. Grief is a primary means of re-setting, re-wiring and calming our nervous system to inner peace.

People come to learn how to be with people who are dying, but it's essentially about all human-to-human connection. I founded the Conscious Dying Institute as an end-of-life doula education and healthcare training organization that expands the innate healing presence of frontline caregiving. Our programs instill the confidence to have end-of-life conversations, while preparing doulas who offer multi-dimensioned healing care to patients in hospices, senior communities, and large healthcare systems across the United States and Canada.

Though palliative and hospice care are a part of most major hospital system practices, most medically based caregivers have neither the time nor training to support the patient beyond pharmaceutical pain management. The doula care model enhances support to patients and their families through dedicated attention to emotional and spiritual dimensions of the death experience.

Doula education is a grassroots movement like natural birthing was decades ago. There are probably more people training to become a doula than there are people who know that end -of- life doulas exist. We are creating a "Doula Careforce" that will respond to the growing desire for conscious and natural ways to die. Death is finally being integrated

People who are drawn to this calling are like moths drawn to flame.

into a holistic way of life.

My work is based on this principle: When we experience care, love and healing, the nature of our heart is to give back what we have received.

The doula learns to give in ways we all used to give to one other when we were living closer together, when families and neighbors were connected. It's the gift of creating a healing environment. We can always make it better.

People come to learn how to be with people who are dying, but it's essentially about human-to-human connection in all circumstances. Students complete our training and can better communicate with family and friends. End-of-life communication is about elevating human-to-human communication in all circumstances.

My program cultivates sensitivity to the myriad of energies surrounding death. My students learn to provide emotional and spiritual support as stewards of conscious living and and conscious dying. We learn the importance of authentic presence and of integrating the unexpected revelations that death always brings.

I teach a practice called "Reading the Field." Reading the Field heightens a doula's sensitivity to changes in their patient and environment. Reading the Field allows a doula to enter subtle energy realms that expand awareness of how best to perceive and support a person's death process.

People who are drawn to this calling are like moths drawn to flame. The flame is our work in that precious last few hours when the veil is lifting, revealing the transformational portal of death. The moth is the doula who is drawn to these moments when they share the rarified, exquisite subtle energy field of the person who is moving from form to formlessness.

Another practice I call "Witnessing the In-Between." This is a time when the dying are between worlds, a little ways off-shore, but not fully launched on their voyage to the other world. The doula knows how to relax into this period when we don't know when the final moment –the last breath– will happen. Doulas learn to invite loved ones to witness the beautiful experiences that take place during this "in-between time."

Our doulas are also trained to protect the time of crossing over, to "Gate Keep." Every person has a different labor of breath that lasts as long as it takes to get them from where they are to where they need to be. The doula knows from the patient's breath when there is no turning back. The doula protects the dying from unnecessary measurements of pulse and other vital signs. It is essential that the dying's energy be allowed to flow, that the dying be allowed to fully launch. The body and breath will do the work of departing no matter what we may do or not do. There are no mistakes. Every death is unique.

I call the last subtle energy realm, "Breaking Into The Light." This is the time when, as all major religions teach, the dying person leaves their body and enters an exquisite light field. If the doula feels drawn, he or she can center awareness in their third eye, toward the pineal gland, and open themselves to the beautiful promise of entering that light-field with their patient.

The last three months of life are generally an awkward time when nobody knows what to say. When told they are terminally ill, most people fixate on how to stay alive. This is so human. We are wired for survival. And the medical system is a great partner in this realm. Yet while we are surviving, no one asks why we want to live longer. No one asks us about our essential well-being or objectively assesses the quality of the extra life gained. Those who choose another round of chemo or surgery can suffer so much from the treatments that they lose sight of what they wanted to live for.

An important question is if the person is in pain. Often, the dying person isn't suffering. Often we decide to medicate the dying person because we cannot tolerate what's going on within ourselves.

I have developed a "Best Life Care for Best Three Months of Life" training model where we ask questions about our priorities, as though we have three months to live. We expand the timeline around what we call death and dying, allowing people the opportunity to fulfill what they care about and value most in a longer period of time–while they have enough physical and mental energy to do what they desire to do. We help people identify the steps that they would take to move from their current reality to a realized vision of their spiritual life goal. Maybe they're not the best months of their life but they are the best last months they could possibly have.

The "Sacred Passage: End of life Doula" certificate training, if integrated into system training, would be tremendously effective to help achieve what everyone wants: an improvement in patient care and satisfaction; a decrease in cost around the last three months of life; and an enriching increase in staff satisfaction through elevating their calling to that of a spiritual practice.

The Conscious Dying Institute furthers the evolution of human consciousness through restoring death to its sacred place in the beauty, mystery, and celebration of life.

From a conversation with John Wadsworth

TARRON ESTES is founder of The Conscious Dying Institute. She is an End-Of-Life-Educator, Organizational Learning Consultant, Caritas Coach, an Associate Faculty with Dr. Jean Watson's The Watson Caring Science Institute. She designs and facilitates "Sacred Passage: End of Life Doula Certificates" in the United States and Canada.

Tarron graduated from the University of New Hampshire with a Bachelors in Creative Writing and Journalism; Professional Coaching Certificate, Leading Learning Communities; Certified Massage Therapist, Regina School of Massage; Alaya Process Certification in Somatic Psychology.

Tarron lives in Boulder, Colorado, where she hikes, bikes, writes, designs, collaborates and cooks up fun things with people she loves.

WWW.CONSCIOUSDYINGINSTITUTE.COM

Bert

I'm part of the whole.

"You drive hard to get yourself ahead and you want to be better than everyone else when you are young; and the more you live the more you find that that's not as important as you think. The fact is, as you get older you don't compete as much. You don't have to compete as much. Now, aging is no fun. You lose a lot - you lose people, you lose your health, but again you gain otherwise. You find that you have more time to look around. See life. See how beautiful it is. See a tree as it really is. And the same even with human beings; I feel a draw to them much more and I feel I can identify with them a little better because I know a little better now.

The closeness of human beings to one another and the beauty of it all is something that has been fairly new with me. I had a very great deal of difficult with my parents and I couldn't stand the fact of being around my family. I felt something was wrong but I couldn't lay my finger on it and when I finally had the stroke I saw exactly what happened, that he raped me when I was four years old. I always thought something was wrong with me but I couldn't put my finger on it and then suddenly I saw what happened to me and I understood. And understood the pain that I went through and it made me feel so much more relieved. Tremendous relief. I started to live more intensely.

This happened when I was 72. That doesn't give me much years. I'm sick as a dog, I know that, and I try my best to forget that. But the feeling of giving up life now is very hard because it's too beautiful. I find myself becoming part of that beauty. It's in me. I don't believe I am that important anymore, but I am part of the whole."

Bert and I met at the Yountville VA Medical Center where he had been moved onto hospice care due to congestive heart failure. On our first meeting Bert gave me a copy of a book he had put together of his paintings and poems. Bert reflected on his life as a Jewish man born in 1920s New York who worked as an accountant and had a wife and three children. With sadness he remembered how he used to be a person who was afraid of the world and getting close to people. For Bert, life really changed at 72 years old when a stroke revealed the memory of a terrible event. Bert shared with me what he found to be left over when he thought he had lost everything – something that had been there all along but he hadn't had the time to see.

Judith

I wanted to love people

"I remember the time when I was about 4 years old; I thought "I wonder where all the people who died really went?" And I remember asking people about it and nobody seemed to know, just like that, nobody knew.

I wanted to live doing a lot of different things. Of course I wanted to love people, both men and women, just loving them as a person and I always wanted to have children. I never really was afraid of dying when I was the only one who had a brain tumor because I just... I wasn't afraid, I just thought, Jamie was here. And then just about a year had passed and then Jamie woke up one morning and he said: "I'm very sick would you please call an ambulance." So we had two craniotomies and two brain tumors within a year. And Jamie died fourteen months after his diagnosis and he died like a scientist would die. He wanted to be in every experiment. And that was totally up to him. But I've seen with my whole family that they're the same way, always looking for a cure and I said: "I'm in hospice because I'm dying." I mean people are born and people die, that's part of life but we don't deal with it, we don't talk about. It gets better, after you talk about it for a long time. I mean it isn't something you talk about for a minute and get.

I think Michael, my son and I are still dealing with leaving each other and we are in the throws of that. And it's rough, to look at your son who is in his 20s and say, "I won't see my grandkids, I won't see your guitar playing and I won't see which field you go in, which of course is going to be great." And I feel now that I've lived about as long as I can live. There's a few things that's ending too short. But if I really look back and think about everything, I'm very happy about my life."

Judith and I met at Zen Hospice Project in Hayes Valley, San Francisco. A Boston native, Judith moved to the Bay Area as a young woman where she pursued a career as an oral historian, working with illiterate communities in the East Bay. Judith's room at the hospice was filled with colorful items, objects of meaning and new things that made her happy. She might have been dying, but she was still alive, and each week she would tell me of new friendships she was making. Judith had the same brain cancer her husband died of and she knew that when she died she would be leaving her young son behind with no parents. With deep love for her son, she committed herself to ensuring that they communicated openly and honestly about what they were both experiencing.

Randy

We're here to learn.

"I made peace with dying last year. I paid for my funeral in advance, bought my headstone. I've done all that stuff so that when I die no one has to do anything. And I'm ok. That's the one thing I won't do is look back on my life with regret. There was no book with instructions on how to do this. So you learn as you go along and you stumble and you fall. And I've stumbled a lot in my life. I don't know of anybody that hasn't.

When I left Tennessee I felt suffocated. I was ashamed of being gay. I felt less than everyone else. Wanted to get as far away from Tennessee as I could. I did - I fell in love with California almost immediately. I remember thinking how free I felt. I felt like the whole world was mine for taking at that moment. The drinking took off soon after that. What started off as casual progressed into daily drinking: drinking at home, drinking at work, drinking at bars. And I went out and got drunk with some friends, went back home with this guy and we're having sex and the condom breaks and we were so drunk that we don't care. And I know in my heart that's when I seroconverted because it was immediately after that that I got the flu.

You know when you are young you make these wild choices, which is I guess what youth is about, that you can make these mistakes and learn from them. It's so funny because those things that I was reaching for in my twenties, I got hold of and they are never what you think they are. I was always looking for the next best thing. Now, it's not what I would do. We are here to learn something. I'm learning it as a gay man, whatever my life lesson is and being HIV is part of that life lesson. If I die today or if I die next week, I'm at peace with living and I'm at peace with dying. I am a culmination of all the things I've done up to this point."

Randy was the first person I interviewed for this project. I met him on Tuesday mornings in his room at Maitri Compassionate Care in Duboce Park, San Francisco. We would sit and talk for about an hour, or until he felt too short of breath due to his lung cancer. The N train would periodically clack down the road outside and there were several pairs of cowboy boots stacked neatly along the wall from Randy's rodeo days. As a gay man, Randy never felt at home in Tennessee and spent his whole life moving through America's major liberal cities. Plagued by a nihilism that was pacified by drugs, alcohol and sex, Randy eventually turned to God to find his solace. He told me that it was only through this loving God that he found the strength to forgive himself and accept his life. Randy died on September 27, 2014.

Harlan

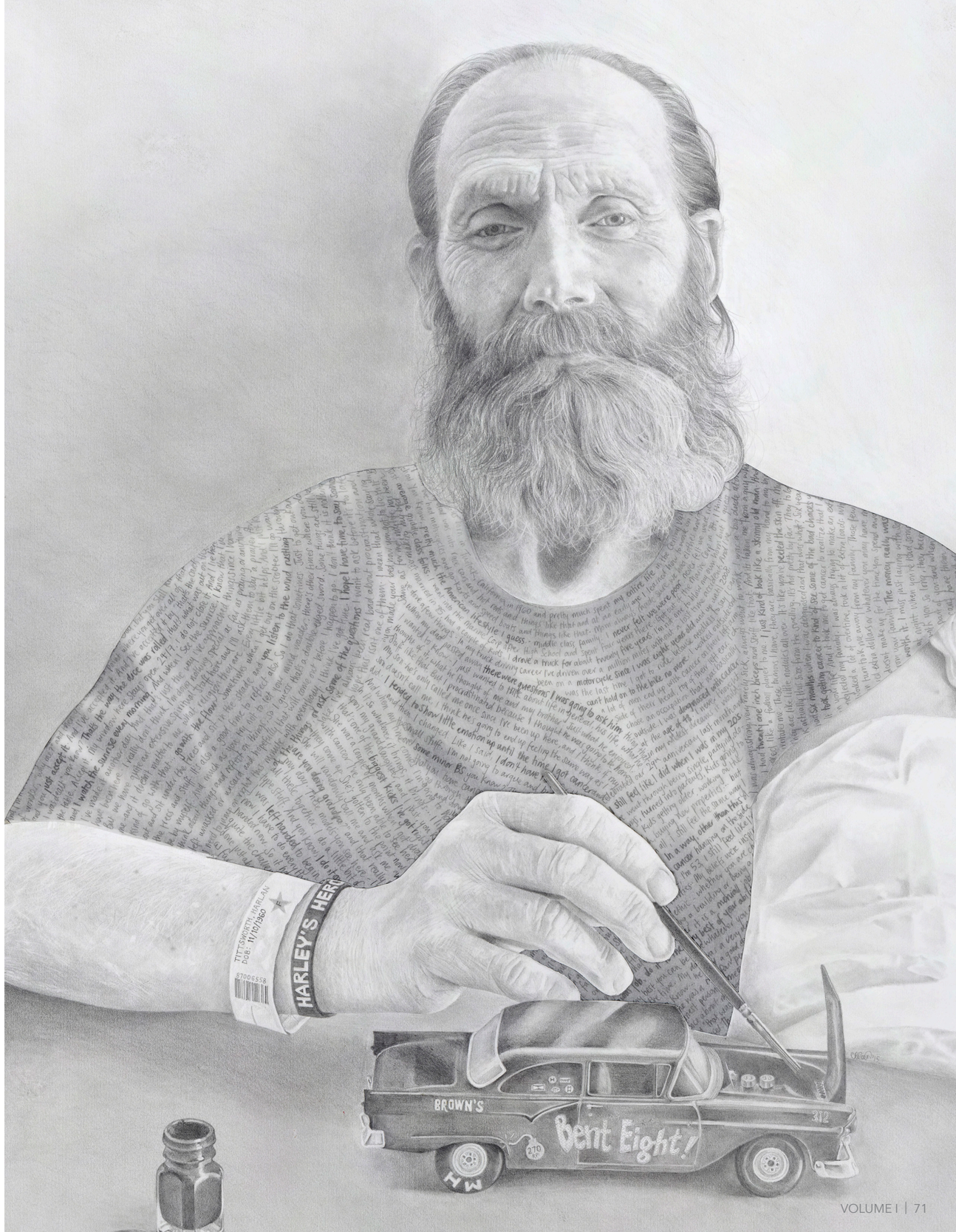
I watch the sunrise.

"I was born in Turlock California in 1960 and pretty much lived my entire life in the Central Valley. I think I got married in '85, had a couple of kids. I never felt that we were poor, never felt that we were rich, just average middle class folks, you know? I drove a truck for about 25 years, and I ended up with this cancer in 2008. You go through the ups and downs of "why me?" and then you come to a point where you get over all that and just accept it. And I've accepted it by "that's the cards I was dealt". My window here stays open 24/7. I do not close it. I watch the sunrise every morning. And when I can see the sunrise, I know I've made it another day. I live by a day to day basis. You know, sometimes when I get out on the scooter I'll go way out and about and sit under the trees and sit in the shade and you listen to the wind rustle through the trees and stuff. It's also a good time to reflect.

It took getting cancer to kind of see some of the bad choices you make in your life. I was always trying to make an extra buck. Worked a lot of overtime, took a lot of extra loads. She wanted me to be there beside her and I do miss that. I miss just laying with someone at night. When you've had someone with you for so long, I mean they become part of you and then when you can't have them, it's almost like losing a part of my body. If I had it all over to do again, I wouldn't work as much as I did because, in the end, the money really wasn't worth it. I could have spent more time with my family.

When my dad passed away, he was in the hospital and I was under the assumption that he was going to come home the next day. Well I went home, because I was going to go to work the next day, I got a phone call about 11:45 at night, my wife told me my dad has passed away. And that irritated me to the point because there were questions I was going to ask him. My son, he's only called me once since I've been up here and I think if my son doesn't talk to me, I think he's going to end up feeling the same way I did. I tended to show little emotion up until the time to when I got cancer, but then I changed. I don't have time for the small stuff. I'm not going to argue and bicker over some minor BS you know? I hope I have time to say some of the things or ask some of the questions I want to ask before it's too late."

When I met Harlan, he had been a resident at the VA Medical Center in Livermore for more than three years. Harlan grew up on a farm in Central California where he learned to hot-rod cars and fix up motorcycles. The tumors consuming his left arm were thought to be the consequence of decades of driving a truck in the California sun. No longer able to drive fast cars, Harlan taught himself to build and paint model vehicles with his non-writing hand. As the boundaries of his world closed in on him, Harlan continually found new ways to create meaning in his life. Once a self-proclaimed unemotional man, Harlan opened up his life to me and shared his deepest regrets and fears. Harlan died on November 2, 2014.



Jenny

You're that sick person.

"Hospice. You know you hear words; you have an idea of what they are. And then when it is happening you don't have a clue what hospice is. It's just a word. And now all of a sudden this word has meaning and you look around and you think, a sick person must live here. And then it dawns on you that you're that sick person.

Sometimes I wonder what I have to look forward to. And the more I think on that, the more it draws me to what it was. As a child I had nothing. And I had to make my life work, 'cos I was kept in the attic. And not having anything I would purloin things from the school. And in time I had paintbrushes, scraps of paper. Art would take me to another world.

Oh I tried to tell people that things weren't right at my place, but nobody listened. By the fourth foster home they didn't have a clue what to do with me. They started to give me medication and they had me on 28 pills a day and I was introduced to shock treatment. Nothing terrified me more than that. And I would hang in the back and the paint on the walls would seem to bubble up and there would be insects and snakes crawling underneath the paint. And I think where my head is now; I have come so far.

Art is like the giver of life for me. To look at something and then to draw it, it's like becoming one with the object and it makes you feel more whole and more whole. Throughout my entire existence I enjoyed going to that place of peace. And I wonder about people who never ever know high peace and I felt lucky that I knew, little old nobody me could get high peace."

When I met Jenny through Pathways Hospice, she was living in an SRO building in San Francisco's Tenderloin district. Surrounded by a lifetime's work of stunningly intricate paintings and sculptures, Jenny would monologue for an hour, stopping only to light another cigarette and slurp on her grape soda. Jenny was an artist in the purest form: she was compelled to create and she did so in order to heal herself. Jenny explained that all the way through her life – through physical and sexual abuse, hospitalization, mental illness and homelessness – art had been the thing that saved her. In September 2015, Jenny's portrait was selected be exhibited at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington DC. When Jenny and I went out for lunch to celebrate, she told me that participating in this project had validated her life.

Daniel

It's all a fantasy.

"It was one day, I don't remember the day right this very second, I was probably 6 or 7 or 8… but the anguish of thinking, of feeling, of realizing that I would die one day was overwhelming. I didn't confide in anyone about this, these feelings. I mean, I just couldn't. If I would be giving advice to my younger self, I would very simply say, "Not to worry", that things are much more normal and natural than people make them of.

I really think that the big mystery, the big mystery, comes from the moment we are born. Where are we coming from and how do we form this geometric profile of ourselves that is already sealed upon this birth, from way before? Instead dying is much more concrete.

If you want me to tell you what I believe in, I think I would believe in just about nothing at all. Really truly. It's all a fantasy. There's an abyss involved, but I don't feel it. The more each day passes I feel less resentful. Resent is not something that is part of what is happening to me. I'm not angry. I feel I don't criticize the world as I used to. I feel I accept the world as it comes and it goes. And I don't think it's that important, the world.

I always thought that in the end one is afraid of dying, and I may very well be eventually. But as far as I can tell you right now, this very minute, I kind of have the feeling, the idea that it is not going to be a major event. It's just going to happen."

Introduced through Hospice by the Bay, Daniel and I met weekly in his room in a high-rise SRO block in San Francisco's SOMA. A graduate of Harvard University and friends with Spanish royalty, Daniel lost all of his wealth when he was cut out of his father's business empire and struggled with mental health issues. Now sharing hallways with the city's most disenfranchised residents, Daniel would still go for caviar and champagne once a week using money from his estranged son. Daniel was adamant that death did not trouble him and that he was simply letting the "gentle flow of a river" carry him towards the end. Several weeks after our interviews were completed, I went to visit him at Coming Home Hospice in San Francisco. In floods of tears and wrecked with terror, Daniel held onto me like a child. The next day, on July 22, 2015, Daniel died alone in his room.

Ora

I have to live this day.

"My name is Ora L. Tyiska-Smith. My birthdate is 1916. And you figure out how old I am. I have nothing to hide. My life story, I can't tell it all. I was born and reared in Texas. I grew up on a farm. I am not ashamed. Raised most of our food. I never went hungry a day in my life, but I had to work. I'm not ashamed. I grew up in a community of people who loved each other. Whoever had something, the others needed, we shared what we had. We didn't care whether they would pay it back or bring it back or anything. I accept what God has given me. I'm not a rich person, he didn't say I would be rich. I accept what I have worked for and I am satisfied.

I realize, that we didn't come here to stay. We're just passing through. One day I'm going just like my mama did. I know the hospital sent me home to die. I know that. They gave me medicine to ease the pain, not to cure the pain, but to ease the pain. I can't live today for tomorrow. I have to live this day. And whatever happens tomorrow, you don't worry about. You find yourself worrying about tomorrow and you know, tomorrow's not promised. I don't have any fear. When God gets ready for me, he going to take me. Regardless what they do, what kind of treatment I'm getting, he will take me.

You go through some scary moments. You go through a rough edge, sometime it get to the center. You just keep moving. Just like you go on up a hill. You don't stop because you're tired. You don't go as fast. Sometime you almost level to the ground you be so low in life, but you keep climbing. Don't give up."

I was introduced to Ora through Pathways Hospice. We met in her home in Portola where she lived with several generations of her family. At 99 years old, Ora was a great-great-grandmother of two and the last living person of her many siblings and school friends. Ora was a staunch believer in resilience and hard work and was proud that each of the generations of her family had more opportunities than the last. At the age of 8, Ora decided to be baptized into Christianity and went on to be an active member of her Church community throughout her life. She attributed her ability to move through life's challenges to her unwavering faith in God and told me that she had spent her whole life in preparation for the day that God would decide to take her from this earth. Ora died on January 8, 2016.

Osamu

I just deny it.

"I'm not convinced that I'm sick. I don't go there. I just deny it. So I'm treating this as just a deterrent that I can grow out of. I don't think about death and dying as much as have I provided for the family as much as I can. But it's tough in this world, especially when you are a minority. We were born of an immigrant family, barely making it. I was Asian in the very white community. And in this life that we have right now, the easiest way is to be the right color, right education.

We were the lost part of a population. I didn't know what the world was and I wish I was better educated towards what my possibilities were. I wanted to go into architecture, but my background everything was short of following that as a true educational development. So I gave that up and went into some place where I could be used as a worker, rather than a creator. Everything was work first, pleasure after if there's time. I felt that I should help the family out as much as I can economically. I don't believe I missed too many deadlines. We were probably close to 100%.

When you try and work and get ahead, you give up time. You have just a very few hours in the week to enjoy people, education, religion. I wish I can back off on how much work I did. I would try to go back and make a more creative mind so I can fully enjoy what's available. There's so much the world has to offer. I just barely skimmed it."

Osamu and I met in his home in Moraga through the Asian Network Pacific Home Care. Throughout our interviews, Osamu denied that he was dying and told me that he refused to "go there" psychologically. Instead he spent his time with me talking about his childhood years in a Japanese internment camp in California during WW2. Not only was Osamu set back by being taken out of the education system throughout the war, like other Japanese people at the time, he was to suffer from widespread discrimination. He lamented upon the cultural ceiling this created and how his life choices had to be focused on financially providing for a family rather than following his passions. Osamu died on March 25, 2016.

Ena

I have lots of regrets.

"When I was young, which is like a million years ago, I made up my mind I was going to help people. You don't think for yourself when you have a large family. I've always been more interested in other people than myself and it seems like, when you are a nurse, they think that's what you should do – take care of everybody that comes along. So I did. There was always somebody to take care of. But then when I arrived to my own old age they were all gone. It's hard to lose all your family and friends. You'll see what I mean when you get to be an old lady.

I have lots of regrets. I don't think I did much for myself. I didn't accomplish very much with my life. I had lots of opportunities. I had a chance to have a job as a nurse traveling all over the world and I turned it down because I had to take care of my mom and dad. But most of the things you plan don't come true. At least it didn't for me.

When you are young you think everything should go your way I think… go to a dance and dance all night and all that stuff - and you think that's part of your life. But then, it doesn't last for long. It's not a forever thing. You have a different opinion of things as you get older.

Mostly if you want to write a thick book you could write about what I didn't do that I should have done but I didn't do it, no matter what it was. You know I drew a horse when I was in high school and I never could put a tail on it. I think it is still wondering around the family somewhere with this horse with no tail. And I couldn't do it. I tried and tried. I traced them and tried all different tails but it never came out right. Maybe he was born to be without a tail. I don't know."

Ena and I met at Vintage Golden Gate in San Francisco where she had been living for a number of years. Ena was always beautiful for our meetings – her hair was done, her nails painted and her jewelry pinned upon her ears and sweater. Ena is the kind of person who calls you "sweetie" and "darling" and makes you feel as though you have always known her. A nurse, Ena was a natural born caretaker; but reflecting back, she realizes that she never made the time and space to follow her own dreams. She was full of regret that she did not take the opportunities that she believed would have made her life more fulfilling and exciting. Even though we met several times, she could never understand why a young person like me wanted to interview her for this project. Ena died on February 20, 2016.

“I was looking for people who were willing to let a stranger, and more specifically an artist, into their life at one of the most vulnerable points of their existence.”

CLAUDIA BIÇEN

Thoughts In Passing **wasn’t a scientific project where I represented every experience of what it means to be dying. I was looking for people who were willing to let a stranger- and more specifically an artist- into their life at one of the most vulnerable points of their existence. I don’t think many people seek that experience. In order to do that, they need to be very open and accepting- which is a very small proportion of people in hospice.**

The sole purpose of my being there was for them to tell me about what they were feeling and going through. It wasn’t therapy. I wasn’t trying to solve their problems. I wasn’t being paid. I think that made our relationship an important one. We often dived into deep conversations that most people don’t have. This built a trust between us because if they asked me questions about my life, thoughts, or fears, I shared my views and put my vulnerability on the line. It certainly wasn’t a one-way process.

All of my subjects were accepting of death except for one. Osamu ruggedly held on to the belief that he was not sick. You could tell that this was a very strong defense mechanism for him. Initially, I said that I would only work with people who were very open about the fact that they were dying and accepting of it. It was easier for me to delve into the issues if they were willing to talk about it. Having Osamu as a part of the project was very important because some might have come away thinking that everybody meets death in a peaceful and accepting way. That is certainly not the case.

I worked with very ordinary people. Sometimes I would interview a person week after week. Many interviews were hours of normal conversation. I spoke with nine people who had lived their lives in different ways with their own sets of values and experiences. These were people who really hadn’t had a huge revelation at the end of their life; and had not suddenly become enlightened beings.

Response to the project varied. Jenny said that being involved validated her life. Bert, one of the most grounded and spiritual in terms of his reverence for nature and being part of the oneness and wholeness of everything told me, "Anyone who tells you they're not scared of dying is lying. Death's a scary thing. We have no idea what's going to happen. We're going through this one way door and we've no idea what's going to be on the other side. And there's no way to get around it." The last time I saw Daniel, he wasn't making full sense and knew that he was about to die. Until that point, he said, "Everything is going to be fine. Birth is the big deal, I don't think death is a big deal." Twenty-four hours later he died.

I showed the completed portraits to three subjects. Everybody was extremely taken aback when they saw theirs. It was a very powerful experience. I put Bert's portrait on his hospital bed so he could see it as its accompanying audio from our conversations played and he cried. We sat silently for a long time. Bert said that he was deeply grateful. We held each other and he cried again. His tears were of happiness, sadness, and many other things. To have yourself reflected back in a drawing is a very unique and unusual experience, especially when you are on your death bed.

Judith brought her entire family to see her portrait at a staged exhibition in San Francisco. She has a brain tumor and is rapidly losing her ability to communicate, so being able to see her portrait and listen to audio from a time when she was able to talk about her experience at a time when she felt more herself was very important.

Through this experience, I discovered that confronting death brought people further into the Now while reflecting on their life and their past. This makes sense because suddenly there is no future. This entire part of planning life, making goals and the aspirations that go with them is fundamental to the way we are taught to live; and now planning is over. Harlan and Bert both talked about the importance of the Now and how time is really squeezed into this short period when you don't know what is going to happen tomorrow. The important things become the beauty of the tree outside the hospital window, the sound of the leaves rustling, and the sunrise. Simplicity becomes the most beautiful aspect of life.

From a conversation with John Wadsworth

CLAUDIA BIÇEN

Claudia Biçen is a self-taught British-American artist living in San Francisco. Her work has been selected for a number of exhibitions including the Outwin Boochever Portrait Competition at the Smithsonian in Washington DC, the Royal Society of Portrait Painters at the Mall Galleries in London and the Pastel Society of America at the National Arts Club in New York where she was awarded the Herman Margulies Award for Excellence. Fascinated by the human condition, Claudia has worked with communities across the world in both mental health and therapeutic art settings. In 2013, she was invited to Project 387's artist residency where she produced a contemplative art piece in the forest exploring the relationship between transience and wellbeing. Claudia holds a BA in Philosophy & Psychology from the University of Oxford and an MSc in Social Anthropology from University College London.

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"Everybody is afraid of death
for the simple reason that we have not yet tasted life.
The man who knows what life is,
is never afraid of death;
he welcomes death.
Whenever death comes he hugs death,
he embraces death,
he welcomes death,
he receives death as a guest.
To the man who has not known what life is,
death is an enemy;
and to the man who knows what life is,
death is the ultimate crescendo of life."

OSHO

I've stopped thinking about how the world impacts me or I impact the world because it's too big.

Most people probably don't start thinking about their own mortality until much later in life. At that point they don't have the ability to change or to focus on the relationships that matter. One of the things I always have to remind people of is that I started writing napkin notes to my daughter for five or six years before my first cancer diagnosis. I recognized that there was this need to have more interaction and a better relationship with my daughter.

If my doctors came to me and said, "By the way Garth we made a mistake. You don't have cancer anymore. Go off treatment, do whatever," I wouldn't change how I'm going to live the rest of my life. I recognize that my physical being is a really short time. Any one of us can die tomorrow or this afternoon.

I've stopped thinking about how the world impacts me or how I impact the world because it's too big. I just need to share our story and write a note to Emma every day and everything else is going to take care of itself. I value the privilege to share our story. I share the interactions that Emma and I have had and how the notes have impacted our life. Then I let it be. People can take our story and hopefully use it to impact their own lives.

I've had to mature and come to recognize that I am mortal like everybody else on the planet. But I just have it kind of up front and center in my life. On top of that, I still need to, every day, be a husband and a dad.

The past few years everything about me has changed. There was a time when I wasn't spiritually, mentally, or emotionally in a good place. I made a conscious decision to walk away from that path. I was always thinking about death. I was not able to project out into the future. It was impacting how I interacted with my family, not because I was actually avoiding a lot of family interactions, but because I had this shroud of death around me.

JOHN WADSWORTH

We are bound to our bodies for a short amount of time.

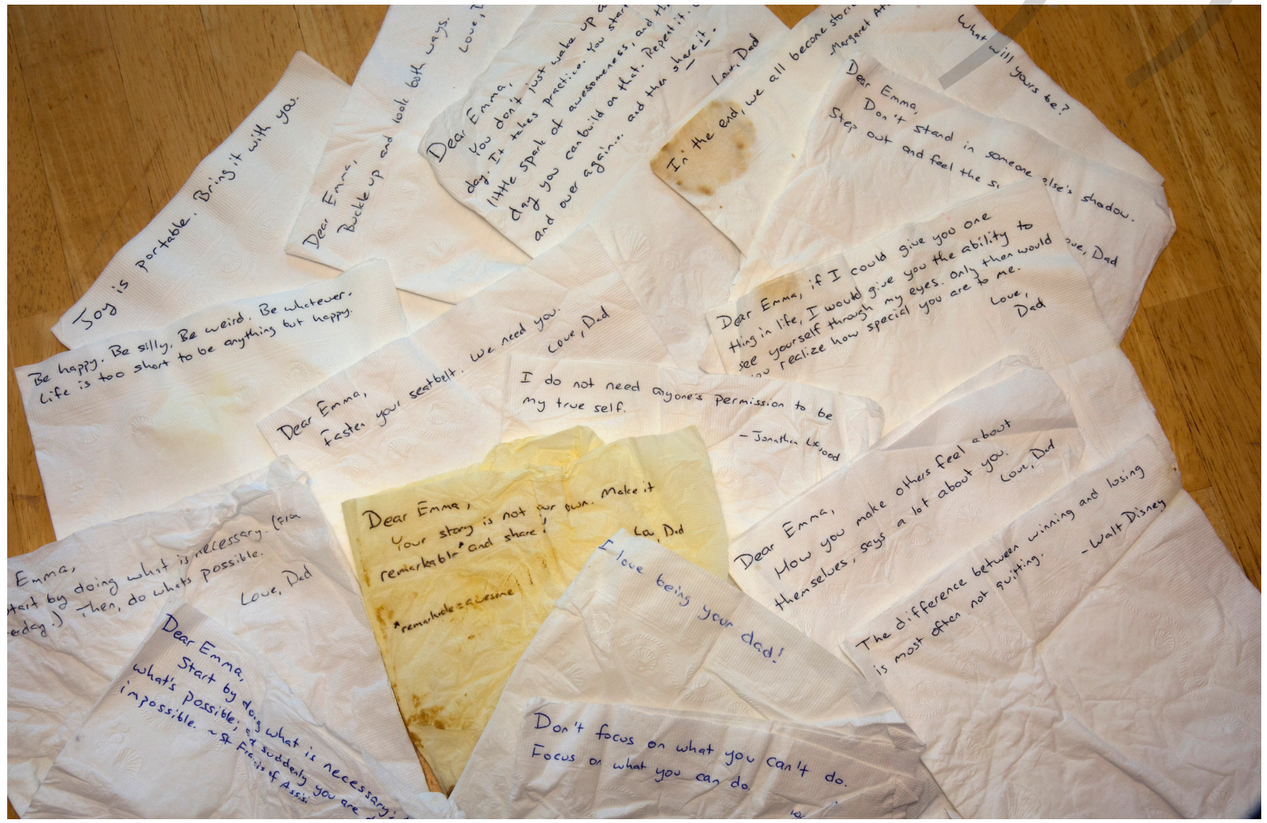
I think that I knew that I couldn't win because winning meant no cancer. It impacted me in such a way that I avoided participation in life. I was that way for a few months. I thought that I was doing an okay job hiding it. There was this part of me, this outward part of me, that on the surface looked okay and looked like, "Hey I'm a survivor." Inwardly I was not.

I decided I was going to allow myself to have a pity party and feel sorry for myself for one-third of a day each week. The other six and two-thirds days I needed to buck up and be a good husband and father. One Sunday afternoon or one Thursday morning or whenever it was, I could sit around the house or stay under the blanket or whatever. What's really interesting is by giving myself permission to feel self-pity I actually found that I didn't need to. I think I only did it once and after that I was like, "Oh you know what? If I'm feeling bad for myself I'm going to allow myself to feel bad but I'm not going to shroud myself in this self pity and wear it like a badge of honor." I really was able to dig myself out of that darkness. It hasn't been easy and I certainly don't want to come off as being overly simplistic.

We are for the most part bound to our bodies for a short amount of time. I have a very firm belief that whatever makes us us, our soul, exists without a sense of time, per se. This helps me to endure some of the physical challenges that I have.

I am transformed. I resisted it for a long time. I was angry. Now I've come to look at this as, "Okay. Here is in fact where we are, we can only live in one direction in terms of time and that's forward. How do I best do that?" Frankly, how do I best do it to make sure that I'm being a good example to my daughter so that at some point in the future, whether it's next week or 40 years from now, she can look back and say, "You know my dad never gave up. My dad persisted. My dad decided that he was going to get into the game despite all of the challenges that he had."

I am incredibly average. I am the most boring person that I know. I believe in my heart that anybody who was put into the same situation has it within themselves to do exactly what I've done and face life and death in the way I have. The only difference could be that I am open to sharing our story and to being public about it. I got lucky in a couple of ways and had a family that supported me and a priest that supported me and doctors that supported me. I made a couple of good choices and we were off to the races.



JOHN WADSWORTH

I do not hold back. I put it all out on the line. I talk about the embarrassing things. I talk about throwing up at work, I talk about the pain of biopsies. Sharing it all gives people the ability to understand that what they're going through and what I'm going through, is, finally, not unique. Everybody has some sort of pain in their lives, some sort of barrier and it's our job to help others get through that pain and get over that barrier. We can't do it alone. That's why I'm so open to sharing my boring, average life.

One of the reasons I'm open to sharing our story is to open people's spirits to the idea that what you do matters and that having a purpose, being purposeful in your actions and your decisions, is important. As I talk with my friends, I don't know what their individual purpose is. I don't know if they know what their individual purpose is, but there is a purpose. It's a shame if you don't get to fulfill your purpose. Again, part of that is recognizing that today could be your last.

I absolutely know that there is a God and that He is actively encouraging me in my life. Before this health crisis, although I had a deep faith in God and I felt that God existed, I actually felt like He was hands off. I feel that I've been put on this path and that when I walk this path God is really happy. That is so humbling to go through and to recognize that none of what I do is really of my own power. Frankly, I was kind of an arrogant SOB before this health crisis. I was absolutely overconfident in my own abilities. Now I am a much humbler, kinder, Garth and I could never go back to being that other guy.

From a conversation with John Wadsworth

ABOUT GARTH CALLAGHAN

Ever since his daughter was in kindergarten, Garth Callaghan put a small inspirational note, written on a napkin, in her lunch box. When he was diagnosed with cancer a third time, Garth worried that he wouldn't make it to his daughter's graduation, and neither would his notes. He decided to write them in advance, just in case, for all 826 remaining school days.

Garth encourages people to write notes and create deeper relationships; to do something that uplifts the lives of others. It doesn't have to be what we commonly define as a "big" thing. Like a napkin note, something small can have a tremendous impact.

WWW.NAPKINNOTESDAD.COM

The contemplation around death doesn't mean you're not living in the moment, it means, in that moment, you contemplate a bigger picture.

DEATH HANGOUT

Keith: We are working towards introducing death awareness in our coaching practice, integrating the subject of death into our leadership workshops. We think death is a topic that needs to be talked about every day. We started our Death Hangout podcast to expand from that.

Olivier: Our ambition with Death Hangout is to explore and talk about death in a different way. There are many TV shows and documentaries about death. And there's always this kind of very depressing feel. I'm not saying that death cannot be depressing. But we want to bring a different angle where you have humor, where we can laugh about it, because for us, it's about living a better life.

As one of our Death Hangout guests Sheldon Solomon said, the more you don't want to think or talk about death, the more death is stressing you, manipulating you. It's a healthy habit to think and talk about death.

Keith: We have a "17-70 Exercise." We ask our client to look at their life from the perspective of their 17-year old self and ask themselves what would they look at now, what advice they would give, what questions they would ask. Then we ask them to think about themselves at the age of 70 looking back, what would they tell themselves now. We are finding that you can't look at death without looking at the whole life. We need to think of life and death as a whole piece.

Olivier: Coaching is a process, a methodology. It can be executive, it can be team, it can be life coaching. It's all the same to us. It's just asking questions for our clients to find their own answers. No matter what coaching I'm doing, there's a place where people are stuck. They cannot find their own answer. We as coaches don't bring any answers. We don't bring any guidance or solutions. Otherwise we'd be called consultants. In order for people to find their own answer, we bring awareness to their own values. We open them up and ask them to look inside to find what is important inside them. We guide them to their core.

In one of the exercises we ask our client to visualize themselves lying on their death bed. What is important to you now? Looking back, what does your life look like? This helps them to pause and to search for what is most important to them. In this sense, death can be a great tool for clarity.

Keith: The contemplation around death doesn't mean you're not living in the moment, it means, in that moment, you contemplate a bigger picture. The contemplation of death brings you a different perspective and focus on how you live in the now.

We start with death and go off on tangents, talking about anything and everything at the end. That's the point.

Olivier: You're mistaken if you believe that you'll be ready for the death experience without having thought about it.Thinking about this tremendous experience does more than prepare us to die; it also helps us lead a better life.

Keith: Death Hangout guests who have spent a lot of time contemplating death have a deep sense of calm, yet they are very active, very productive. I've noticed that their lives don't have that busyness, that sense of hurry. There seems to be a greater sense of authenticity because their perspective creates a measured approach. They don't waste time chasing things that aren't important. The time that they spend on things is meaningful and brings a sense of peace. There's a lack of panic, of striving.

Olivier: Before Death Hangout I had another podcast which was called Raw Voices. It was really difficult to get guests. I was getting one response for every ten requests. With our Death Hangout guests I just send one email and they reply straight away, saying "Yeah, I will do this for you."

Everyone is interested about this topic. Our guests don't have to be part of the death community. For instance, we interviewed a well-known comedian who doesn't talk about death in his act. What he had to say was funny and profound. Our interest is how death impacts our life, that's it. Life interests us more than death. We use death as the great revealer. We start with death and go off on tangents, talking about anything and everything at the end. That's the point.

Keith: The aim of the show is to open up the conversation to everyone and anyone. If you look at books, at TV, at movies, death is everywhere. I don't think there's a subject where you can't reference death.

Olivier: You want to have fresh perspectives, to bring something unexpected, something new to the table. How great it could be to encourage anyone, a politician or a corporate guy, anybody, to say, "Well this is what I think about death, and this is how death impacts my daily life."

Keith: All of us experience mini- deaths on a regular basis. There are endings of relationships. There's growth and change in ourselves, where we're different to what we were before. There's a constant birth- death cycle going on. I think back when my kids were toddlers and look at them now; it's like those people are gone. It's about living in the now. It's about being prepared to let go. That's what death is and if you live in the now and can't let go of clinging to what is, then it makes living in the now harder. Contemplation of death helps us process change in our lives.

I was with a corporate client the other morning, talking about processes and procedures and that kind of thing. We ended up having a conversation around death. It can come in anywhere. There are no restrictions. That's what makes it exciting. And the more people we talk to, the more we branch out, the more the message gets out there.

Olivier: Despite the data that says everything is better than ever, we feel that something is lacking. We're not that happy. I think it's because we deny parts of our humanity. We don't think about death. To be happy, we need to live fully, we need to be conscious of our mortality.

Keith and I try to not to make this death thing morbid or scary. Maybe it is in reality, yeah, death can be bad, but also there are also good parts to death. There are two sides here. That's why when you visit our website, there's a nice death character, not a terrifying dude.

From a conversation with John Wadsworth

MARICHIEL BOUDWIN • INANUTSHELLSTUDIO.COM

The Death Hangout is the creation of Olivier Larvor and Keith Clarke. The Death Hangout is a very special and humanistic place (non-religious and non-political). We believe death has a very useful function in our lives. And no, not just to wipe us mercilessly from the face of the earth.
Rather than ignore our mortality and pretend it is not there, we believe in openly thinking, chatting, and learning about it. Oh, and having fun along the way. Yes, so much fun…with Death in mind! The Death Hangout offers a podcast, a book, and coaching services.
WWW.DEATHHANGOUT.COM

OLIVIER LARVOR A former HR Manager for one of the Top S&P 500 companies, Olivier is French but has lived in Bulgaria, Ireland, the UK and the UAE. He is an accredited Executive/ Team Coach, 360 degree facilitator, author, and podcaster. He is the father of two boys and a guitarist in an obscure indie band.

KEITH CLARKE A former HR Manager in the logistics industry, Keith has lived half his life in England and half in Ireland. He is an accredited Life and Business Coach, training consultant, author, and podcaster. He is the father of two teenagers and sings and plays bass and guitar in an alternative rock band.

There are many facets to the end-of-life experience. There's the dying process, and then the postmortem process. Both are equally significant. As of now, they're regarded as entirely separate. I think one of the revolutions we're going to see in the next 10, 20 years is recognizing the connection between them. Even the best case scenario—a beautiful hospice death with the best nurses—and immediately the nurse's job ends and your body is handed off to some unknown person from a funeral home that you may not have previously contacted. It's a whole new process at that point. Integration between dying and the death industry will help people comfortably design their death experience.

The funeral industry in general is desperate to sustain the status quo. They have massive overhead costs that include all the real estate, the caskets, the fleet of hearses, their outfits, the embalming and prep rooms, all of the tools. They need families to continue to buy the same kind of services they've bought for the last 50 years. Their largest existential threat is families taking more control, just wanting a couple hours after the death for everyone to come over and sit with body that's been prepared by the family and the hospice nurse, instead of an embalmed viewing. All they need is for the funeral home to pick up the body for cremation. This trend threatens a funeral home's livelihood.

Hospices taking over some of the duties of a funeral director is a great idea. If you have someone who you've been working with for a period of time, a nurse or someone at the hospice who you're really comfortable with, after death, you could continue to talk to the same person. They can help you prepare the body in the home. It's a more seamless process. It helps a family integrate the death.

It's difficult to accept that you have to enter hospice, but it can be thought of as the start of the journey. Like, "Okay. Here we go. I'm going to be here with

The funeral industry in general is desperate to sustain the status quo.

MARA ZEHLER

If you come to us, we start with the premise that you want to be more involved.

you through death and after death. I'm going to be your social worker. I'm going to be your nurse. I'm going to be this person who can liaise with your family to have these difficult discussions. We're going to know what you want. It's all going to come together in a way that is meaningful."

Funeral directors may have a constituency that has seen a PBS special or New York Times article on green burial. Families are saying, "Hey, what about this?" Funeral directors are having a change of heart. That's wonderful. That's how the revolution happens. That's how we change the industry. But there is a concern that the funeral directors who proclaimed, "You know it's a hippie myth. Nobody wants green burial" will start to come around and figure out how to make it work financially for them. All of a sudden, you have green embalming fluids.

There are ways to see it as a good thing, but I don't want to see green embalming used when it's not necessary. One of the essential components of having a home funeral is not having unnecessary things done to the body. Not having all of the blood drained and filled with chemicals, even organic green chemicals. It's not having the family spend more money after a long fight of cancer or other debilitating disease.

In the past, women were in charge of the death process and of the dead body in the home. It was part of the domestic duty. Only in the 20th Century did men sweep in and professionalize the experience and say, "Now you have to pay for this. We're going to come in and take the body away. We're going to wear a suit. We're going to charge a lot of money. This is now a commercial industry and by the way, we don't really have room for women in the industry. You can be the secretary, or the accountant, or the flower gatherer, but the real work with the dead has to be done by men."

Women were taking care of the dead just fine for thousands of years prior to this. For me, it's connected to feminism. It's connected to my history. It's connected to women wanting to reclaim relationship with the dead body.

I started in the industry eleven years ago, and public advocacy a little over seven years ago. My magical utopia is a conservation cemetery, saving endangered land through green burials. The opening of green cemeteries across the United States affirms the growing demand for natural burial. But when you have something that is this difficult to talk about, the needle is not going to move quickly. We're running a marathon, not a sprint.

I worked in a funeral home where you would buy advanced cremation plans that insulated the spouse and kids from the death experience. The person who bought the plan was thinking, "I'm so generous. I've put everything in place so my family doesn't have to do a single thing when I die." There are families who really want to do something, who really want a task. It's the task of grieving. It's the task of mourning. It's the task of being involved when someone you love dies. Maybe these plans remove the burden of funeral costs, but they also remove the option to experience significant tasks and rituals.

There are people who value embalming and it's still going to be available to them, but there are so many people who don't realize what embalming is. They don't realize how much it's going to cost. They don't realize what their other options are. Embalming, especially to younger people, doesn't have any meaning. They don't like that the embalmed body's not really grandma and it creeps them out.

There's a place for death doulas. Many death doulas consider themselves ritual experts. There are deeply meaningful ceremonies relating to the body that they perform with the family. But many families are more secular and self-reliant. They want to know all of the things they have to do but they want to be alone with their loved one's body.

It's physically easy to be with a dead loved one's body. It's closing the mouth. It's closing the eyes. It's dressing them in their favorite sweater before they go into rigor mortis. Honestly, it's simple stuff. That's the fallacy of the funeral industry. You don't need professionals to do this. Anyone can do it. It doesn't mean that it's emotionally easy. If it's your mom, there's the hard work of grief.

My funeral home, Undertaking LA, reintroduces rituals that give people something to do around death. We don't offer embalming and we don't offer traditional burial, so if you're going to have a burial it's going to be a natural or green burial. Otherwise, it will be a cremation. If you come to us, we start with the premise that you want to be more involved.

Part One of a conversation with John Wadsworth. Part Two to be featured in Art of Dying Volume IV.

CAITLIN DOUGHTY Caitlin Doughty is a mortician, activist, and funeral industry rabble-rouser. In 2011 she founded the death acceptance collective The Order of the Good Death, which has spawned the death positive movement. Her first book, *Smoke Gets in Your Eyes* and *From Here To Eternity*, was a New York Times best-seller. She lives in Los Angeles, where she runs her nonprofit funeral home, Undertaking LA.

Caitlin's webseries "Ask a Mortician" and her work to change the death industry have led to features on National Public Radio, BBC, *The New Yorker*, Vice, *The Atlantic,* the New York Times, and *Forbes*.

She frequently gives talks on the history of death culture, rituals, and the funeral industry, presenting for groups as diverse as the TED, SXSW, The Upright Citizen's Brigade, and universities and libraries all over the world.

I'm not anyone special. I'm just a person who's going to die, and I want to do it right.

A Buddhist monk said to me, "Always use death as your advisor." That was a radical acceptance of the fact that I'm going to die, and to use death to give life priority and meaning. This plays out in practical ways. If I spill my granola, I can get upset or I can say, "You know, I'm going to die." I say that little mantra to myself 20 times a day, at least. That has changed my life in big ways.

I'm not anyone special. I'm just a person who's going to die, and I want to do it right.

My entire life I was terrified of dying because misguided religion in childhood taught me that I could end up in hell and because I witnessed so many painful, anxious, angry deaths. I was waking up in the middle of the night with panic attacks. I thought to myself, "Look, you have to make peace with death or death will haunt you for the rest of your life."

My interest in death isn't a morbid pursuit. It's a way of clarifying my life. It's a way of not being distracted. You can go kicking and screaming if you want, but if you've done your homework, and you've practiced giving death attention, you can relax into dying by using death as your advisor. That's my goal.

Since I was a child, my big dream has been to write books. I want to die knowing I've given my big dream my biggest effort. That and parenting well. I've said no to more lucrative jobs and finery. I've used death as my advisor to stay on track with what matters most to me—on a big scale, which is my life, and a small scale, which is not getting upset with the spilled granola.

Death has always been at the top of the list of my greatest fears. It was an unhealthy fear. Then I decided, "Okay, I'm going to go around and interview wise people, and I'm going to go to conferences. I'm going to find out what people who have found some peace with death have to say." At first, I was writing *Making Friends With Death* for me. Meanwhile, friends were being diagnosed with cancer or dying traumatically. Their families were torn apart because of unplanned medical decisions and other unanswered questions. I then realized that Making Friends With Death was a book for others.

I'd love for people to buy two copies. One for themselves to work on while they're helping their mother or brother die. I think they go hand-in-hand.

Most people have a fear of death and they either let it cast a power over their life, or they just live in complete denial. Both of those choices don't add to a full, vibrant, beautiful life. We can have a fear of death, but I prefer to think of it as a wholesome fear. It's a good fear when we can acknowledge it, honor it, and lead our lives with vibrancy.

My generation wants to talk about death because we've seen the painful results of our parents not talking about it. My generation truly believes that it is incumbent upon us to give a gift to both ourselves and to others by talking about death, preparing for it, coming to terms with it.

In the natural order of things parents die first, but we

JANET FREEMAN

know that's not always the way it goes. Thinking about my children's death is the one thing that can bring me to my knees in agony. But it happens. One of my son's best friends just died in a hit-and-run car accident. I could think only of his parents. Who's thought about their 18 year old, whether he should be cremated or buried, and if buried, where? How do you even start to think through that kind of stuff? I couldn't imagine the pain they were in. Although the very worst thing that could happen would be to have my children die, I am comforted by the fact that we've had these conversations. They're young and death seems so unlikely, but I know exactly what they want done with their bodies.

After *Making Friends With Death* came out I realized I'd done most of what I had been preaching. I had my advance directive. I had a will. I'd answered my questions about how I wanted my life to be celebrated. One thing I hadn't done was leave my two kids any knowledge of who I am. I forced myself to go through all my files, all my books, and prepare one box for each of important things that spoke about who I was and how much I love them.

It would be untruthful to say that I've made complete and utter peace with my death and understand it fully. However, what I have done is started a deepening relationship with death that makes every day feel better. I'm definitely on the right path, pointing my ship in the right direction. Most days I feel like I can say, "Yeah, I'm good to go." It will be a gift if people see on my face that I'm good to go. I can't promise I'll feel that way when the moment comes, but I have certainly put a lot of tools in the toolbox, and at one point I didn't even have a toolbox.

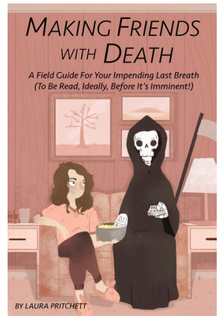
Create space for death. Create mindfulness for it. You take the time to get your teeth cleaned, or the oil changed in your car. Those aren't pleasant activities, but you know you're going be grateful that your car's running and your teeth aren't aching. Spend a couple of minutes every night establishing a conscious death awareness before going to sleep so that when the time comes you've created a peaceful passing. To the person who has very little time, I would say, develop a quick death mantra. As I say in the book, a death mantra can be an image that makes you smile. An image of your kids when they were infants, or your dog's face, or your cat batting a toy mouse. Something that's going to make you smile. Get that in your head and focus on it. Let it bring you a smile. Dying that way, with something beautiful in your mind seems a good way to go.

From a conversation with John Wadsworth

LAURA PRITCHETT is a mere mortal who will someday die—and she's feeling better about that after writing *Making Friends with Death: A Field Guide to Your Impending Last Breath* (To be read, ideally, before it's imminent). Laura has spoken to palliative care associations, death cafes, and given classes.

She's also the author of nine other books. She began her writing journey with the short story collection *Hell's Bottom, Colorado,* which won the PEN USA Award for Fiction and the Milkweed National Fiction Prize. This was followed by three novels, which have received starred reviews from Booklist, Publisher's Weekly, and School Library Journal. Her book *The Blue Hour* was listed as one of the "Top 5 books that will make you think about what it is to be human" by PBS and made the Booklist Editor's Choice for 2017.

LEARN MORE AT WWW.LAURAPRITCHETT.COM • EMAIL LAURA L_PRITCHETT@MSN.COM
WWW.MAKINGFRIENDSWITHDEATH.COM



What you call "death" is wonderful.
So do not grieve when a person dies,
nor approach your own death with sadness or foreboding.
Welcome death as you have welcomed life,
for death IS life in another form.
Welcome the death of another with soft celebration and deep happiness,
for theirs is a wondrous joy.
Here is the way to a peaceful experience of death—
your own or that of another:
know that the person dying is always at cause in the matter.
You are the cause of your own death.
This is always true, no matter where, or how, you die.

NEALE DONALD WALSCH

We don't have a lot of healthy bereavement or healthy grieving in contemporary Western society. That's why the need for ritual is reappearing.

I dressed my grandfather, my Nonno, in a traditional suit that he'd worn to the last family wedding. I was very naïve. I didn't know what to expect. You cannot dress a dead body as you would a living person. You're rolling the body side to side, so physically it is quite strenuous. You need several people. Our clothes are designed for vertical wearing, so nothing drapes as intended.

I realized that his clothes were going to outlast his body's decomposition. The leather shoes really hit home for me. They were difficult to put on. They were pointless in terms of their function. Where was he going to walk? But the most transformative part of my experience was the fact that I hadn't experienced a dead body before. Seeing a dead stranger is quite different from seeing someone you love. I was struck by the surreal stillness of his body. Your eyes play tricks on you. You expect to see movement. But I was aware that he was no longer in there and he no longer needed this body.

That my Nonno's essence was gone didn't reduce the need to address his body. There are so many levels to what happens when you're dressing someone. Yes, you're putting them in clothes, but what you actually experience is far more nuanced and intangible. After almost a decade, I'm still affected by it—but in a positive way. Dressing him in his clothes transformed him from an old dead man in a hospital gown into my Nonno. And through this dressing I was also transformed.

Dressing someone who has died places you in a state of healthy bereavement. We don't have a lot of healthy bereavement or healthy grieving in contemporary Western society. That's why the need for ritual is reappearing. People have been paying huge amounts of money for funerals that don't touch what's going on emotionally. It's been, "Yes, we need the ornate coffin. Yes, we need the flowers. Yes, we need music. Yes, we need to give an eulogy in a lavish venue." But none of those things are actually soothing the fact that someone you love has died.

The body's transience inspires the way I work. Biodegradability is a primary facet of my designs. Wrapping the body in natural fiber is harmonious with death and decomposition. When you consider life as a composition of notes, everyone's essence is a song. Decomposition is our notes' return to the bio-system to be reworked into new compositions. I use fabrication that won't hinder that process and is palatable to the soil. I think of the body as a gift that you give back to the earth. You present the gift of your body in a beautiful wrapping that life delicately opens and receives.

My prototype is basically a very long piece of

DEVIKA BILIMORIA

fabric. The back section of the garment is laid down on a bed before the body is placed on top. The dignity of the dead is important, so an apron is first draped over the body. The front piece flips over the shoulders with an opening for the head. Cords running through silk highlights allow adjustment of the garment's length and shape.

You are dressing, and addressing, each part of the body individually. The head, hands and feet, commonly associated with identity, are each dressed with additional layers. The feet are placed together inside a footbag, and each hand is placed inside an organza sleeve. Lastly, the face is covered with a sheer veil. While the bags and veils also have practical applications, the main reason for these different pieces and differing opacities originates from people saying that closing the coffin lid felt like they were slamming the door on the person they loved. The intention with the layering is to slow this process down, to softly and gradually cover the body, a fading away rather than a harsh separation from sight.

The simplicity of my designs offers a graceful ritual for an emotional situation. The ease with which a body is dressed allows people to relax, to sit with and savor the last moments with their loved one. I always encourage families to bring the person's favorite perfume. A husband who doesn't want to feel the coldness of his wife's skin can still participate in the ritual through spraying perfume as the last veil in the dressing process. Whilst you're veiling, you're also unveiling.

If it weren't for death, I would never share this sacred part of life. Yes, I make frocks, but they make me as well. Each experience I have with someone and their dressing becomes part of my life and inspires me to move forward and transform.

My clients often want to integrate beloved garments that are not made from natural fibers. I don't say, "No, you can't use that because it isn't biodegradable." Our bodies can have false teeth, silicon implants, knee reconstructions and other artificial elements. These are moments when I step back from my ideal and adapt to my client's wishes. It's a symbiotic relationship.

One of my clients loved a 70's metallic tube dress. We used that as the central panel surrounded by plain white cotton that her family painted. It looked galactic. When I'm fashioning a garment, I'm making a piece of clothing, but I in turn am being fashioned by the person, family or community whose journey I am joining.

In January of 2017, Paola Antonelli, the senior curator of MoMA, commissioned me to make a piece for their *Items: Is Fashion Modern?* exhibition. I was asked to create a new prototype for the 'Little Black Dress', to sit as it's final stage of evolution next to designs by Gabrielle 'Coco' Chanel, Christian Dior, Thierry Mugler, and Rick Owens. I wanted to return to the original origins of 'black' as associated with death in Western culture. I also wanted to highlight that my garments are never really about 'The Dress', but the 'dress-ing' process. I dyed a shroud with a heat-sensitive thermochromic dye

> The simplicity of my designs offers a graceful ritual for an emotional situation.

DEVIKA BILIMORIA

that would momentarily illuminate the handprint of the final touch, turning the fabric from black to white, before fading back to black. I embroidered hand outlines on The Little Black (Death) Dress's central panel, within which I painted a 'mood ring' ink that added color gradations to the dye's thermal reaction to touch.

People ask if I make garments they can personalize at home. This is something I'm looking into as an online platform. I also plan to write an illustrated book about dressing the dead. Plans to dress and be dressed should be made while we are alive and well. It's hard to see someone you love in the hospital, in pain, and ask, "Oh, would like us to dress you for your funeral? What would you like to wear?"

I'm making these shrouds to rot. None will exist beyond me. This is my surrender. This is my loss. I put undying love into creating garments for death. I'll cut out the head hole and the curves off the edges and keep the pieces. I intend to create my shroud from scraps of shrouds I've made for others.

From a conversation with John Wadsworth

DR. PIA INTERLANDI is a fashion designer holding a PhD in Architecture and Design from RMIT University, where in 2013 she completed her doctoral study [A]Dressing Death: Fashioning Garments for the Grave. A full time academic in the School of Fashion and Textiles at RMIT, she also freelances as a Creative Ritual Facilitator within the funeral industry.

In 2014, Pia co-founded the Natural Death Advocacy Network (NDAN), and has served as its Chair since its formation. Pia is also is an ambassador for Dying2Know Day and a member of the Order of the Good Death. She has spent over a decade years immersing herself in the funeral industry, including the award-winning Clandon Wood Natural Burial Ground.

The Cemetery Club was founded by Sheldon Goodman and Christina Owen in 2013. I was invited to join after giving Sheldon and the Club a tour of a north London cemetery where I volunteered as a guide. The Cemetery Club's mission is to demystify cemeteries.

Sheldon describes cemeteries as "Museums of People/ Libraries of The Dead." I couldn't agree with him more. I love the architectural style and ambiance of the Victorian and Edwardian eras. Guiding tours of these cemeteries is one of the best things I've ever done with my life.

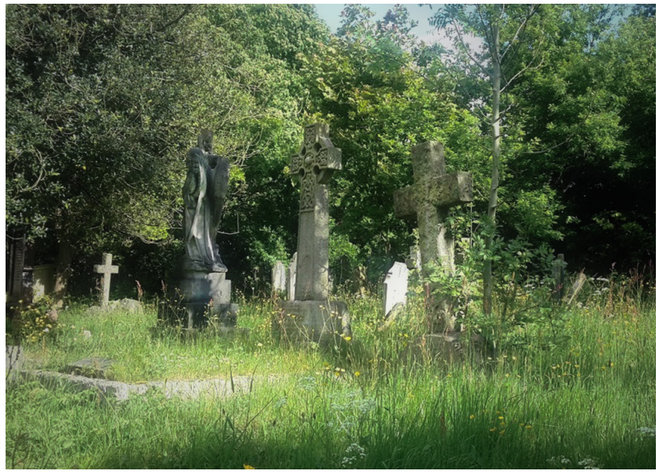
At the turn of the 19th century, there was a huge influx of people moving into London. The infrastructure couldn't cope with the number of living, and thus, the subsequent number of dead. In the Victorian era, the general population lived in very close, cramped conditions. The mortality rate spiraled out of control, to the point where the parish churches that traditionally buried the city's dead were unhygienically oversubscribed. As a result, an act of parliament allowed for the establishment of seven large commercial cemeteries in the greater London area, that we refer to as The Magnificent Seven. The first was Kensal Green, which opened in 1833.

The last of the Seven, Tower Hamlets, opened in 1841. The cemetery companies were out to make money. The cemeteries were strategically placed and immaculately landscaped. Most of these companies had to pay a tax to the local parish on the dead bodies they took in because the parish graveyards were being put out of business. Highgate, for example, had to pay the local parish 10 shillings per body. So a lot of the money that these commercial ventures made went straight back to the church.

Not all of the Magnificent Seven are filled. You find plots that were originally purchased for an entire family– for seven, eight, ten coffins– with only one or two people buried there. Many of these plots were purchased in perpetuity, i.e. the cemetery company would look after it for all eternity– your headstones would be maintained with fresh flowers, surrounding vegetation controlled. The desire to be buried changed with the introduction of cremation. At the end of the 19th century, cremation really started to pick up. By the 1960s and 70s most of the cemetery companies had gone

JOHN WADSWORTH

"I have had adverse reactions when people hear that I am a cemetery tour guide.



SAM PERRIN

bankrupt. Who looks after these headstones now? As it stands, no one but volunteers from local councils and friends organizations.

We thoroughly research each cemetery's history. We discover people who weren't well known but who had an interesting incident happen to them or who did something unusual. It's not necessarily about the famous or infamous. People just love to hear intriguing stories that they wouldn't know by reading a book, or going online.

We created a "Vice and Virtue Tour" for Abney Park because it is the final resting place of some fantastically interesting people–from abolitionists to police officers killed in the line of duty to musical stars.

Rebecca Jarrett's buried there. She was a reformed prostitute who worked with a journalist, W.T. Stead, in1885, to expose how easy it was to procure an underage prostitute in London. Through her help, the age of consent was raised.

Another of my favorite people buried there is Benjamin Mitchell Jenkins. He conducted an orchestra of 150 mandolin players, 130 of whom were women. He's part of the Virtue part of the tour because after the First World War, he taught blinded servicemen how to play mandolins and guitars. You could apply the Vice and Virtue theme to a tour of any cemetery.

I have had adverse reactions when people hear that I am a cemetery tour guide. People have expressed everything from raised eyebrows to horror. When people feel apprehension about taking a guided cemetery tour it's largely down to the fact that they don't understand what the tour involves. People can have a misconception that we focus on the sinister and the macabre, which is completely not what we do. We celebrate the lives of the people who are buried and the ornate funerary art and architecture.

> We celebrate the lives of the people who are buried and the ornate funerary art and architecture.

SAM PERRIN

A number of children come on tours. They've got such incredibly inquiring minds and have asked me questions that I was frankly unable to answer. It's refreshing that children aren't frightened by the fact they're in a cemetery but are, instead, quite intrigued by it.

I've guided tours of one. Other times 25 or 35. It actually doesn't vary on the time of the year. There were days when we were expecting absolutely zero visitors due to weather conditions, but then we'd have 25 people on a tour. You can never predict how many people will turn up, which is nice. Keeps you on your toes.

The Magnificent Seven are now regarded as wildlife havens. There's nothing wrong with having wonderful green spaces within a cramped, packed, city like London. However, in some instances, the term used by certain cemeteries is "managed neglect." Too often this is just an excuse to allow the plants and wildlife to take over. In some ways this is good, but many headstones and elegant memorials have been tragically lost.

Online memorials are the 21st century version of buying a Victorian cemetery plot in perpetuity. Once it's out there it's going to stay online, forever and a day. We've now a far better chance of our memory living on when compared to an inscription on a crumbling headstone that no one takes care of anymore.

From a conversation with John Wadsworth

SAM PERRIN has been an historic cemetery tour guide for the past 15 years, taking walks around Hampstead, Highgate, Tower Hamlets and Abney Park cemeteries. Her main focus is biographical - she especially enjoys researching people now lost to the mists of time who accomplished something unique or experienced something amazing, specifically pertaining to social and women's history. Sam has delivered talks for Museum Showoff, Pride in STEM, the National Archives and Foster Hill Road Cemetery. She is pursuing her Masters Degree in Victorian Studies while writing a full-length historical biography.

Feature

London Cemeteries

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN WADSWORTH

In 1992 I traveled to London to photograph cemeteries. I chose February when the sun sustains a twilight paleness throughout the day. For five mornings my driver greeted me with "It's a good day to roam among the dead." Each cemetery was a garden in rebellion against decaying memorials to eternal life.

In five days I saw one person, an elderly woman, who sat on an ivy-covered granite bench, gazing upon what could have been her family's overgrown "in perpetuity" plot. I envisioned ivy engulfing her, fulfilling the bankrupt cemetery's obligation to receive and respect her family's dead.

Original "London Cemeteries" images are available for purchase.
For pricing information contact john@artofdyingmagazine.com

LONDON CEMETERIES I

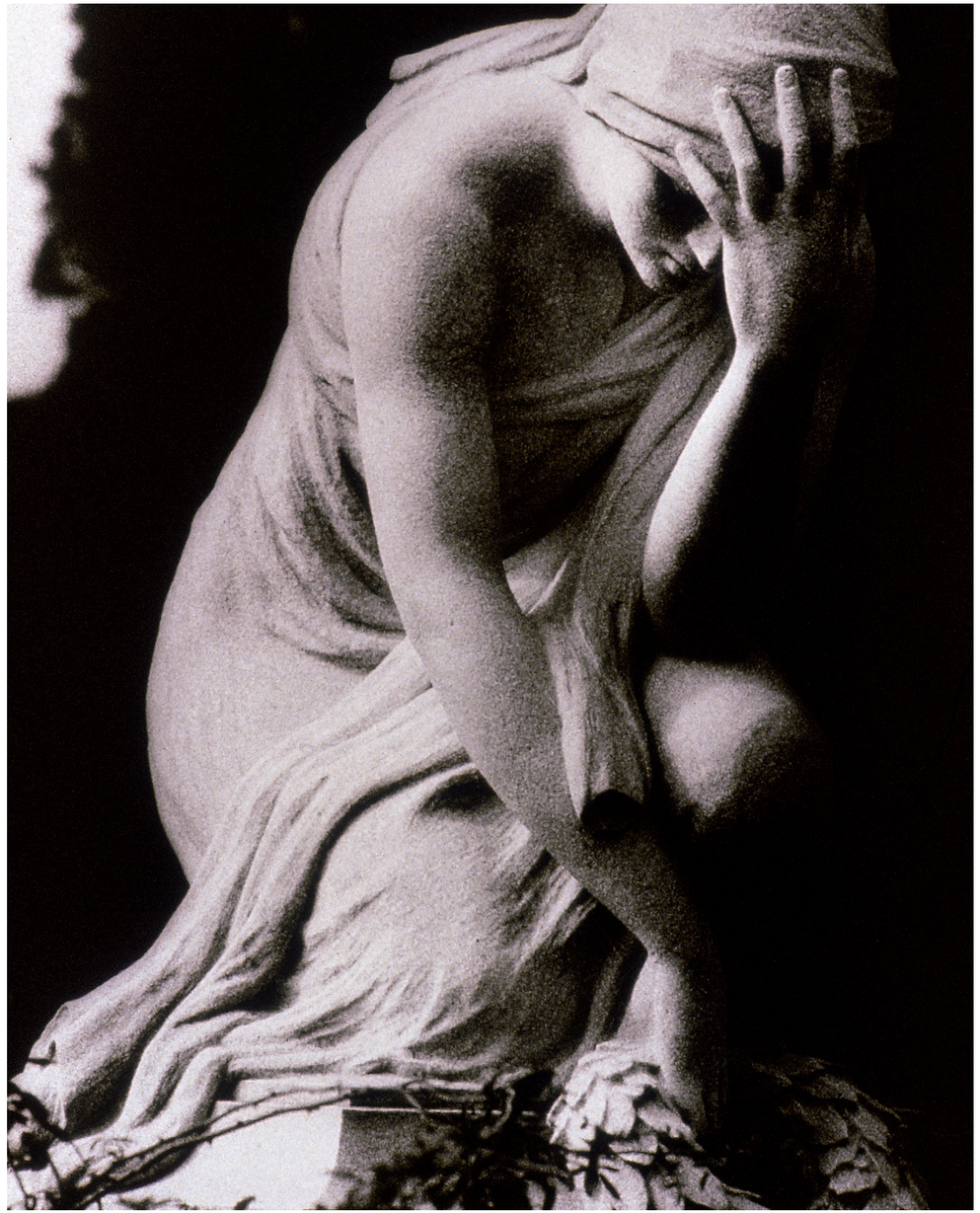
LONDON CEMETERIES II

LONDON CEMETERIES III

LONDON CEMETERIES IV

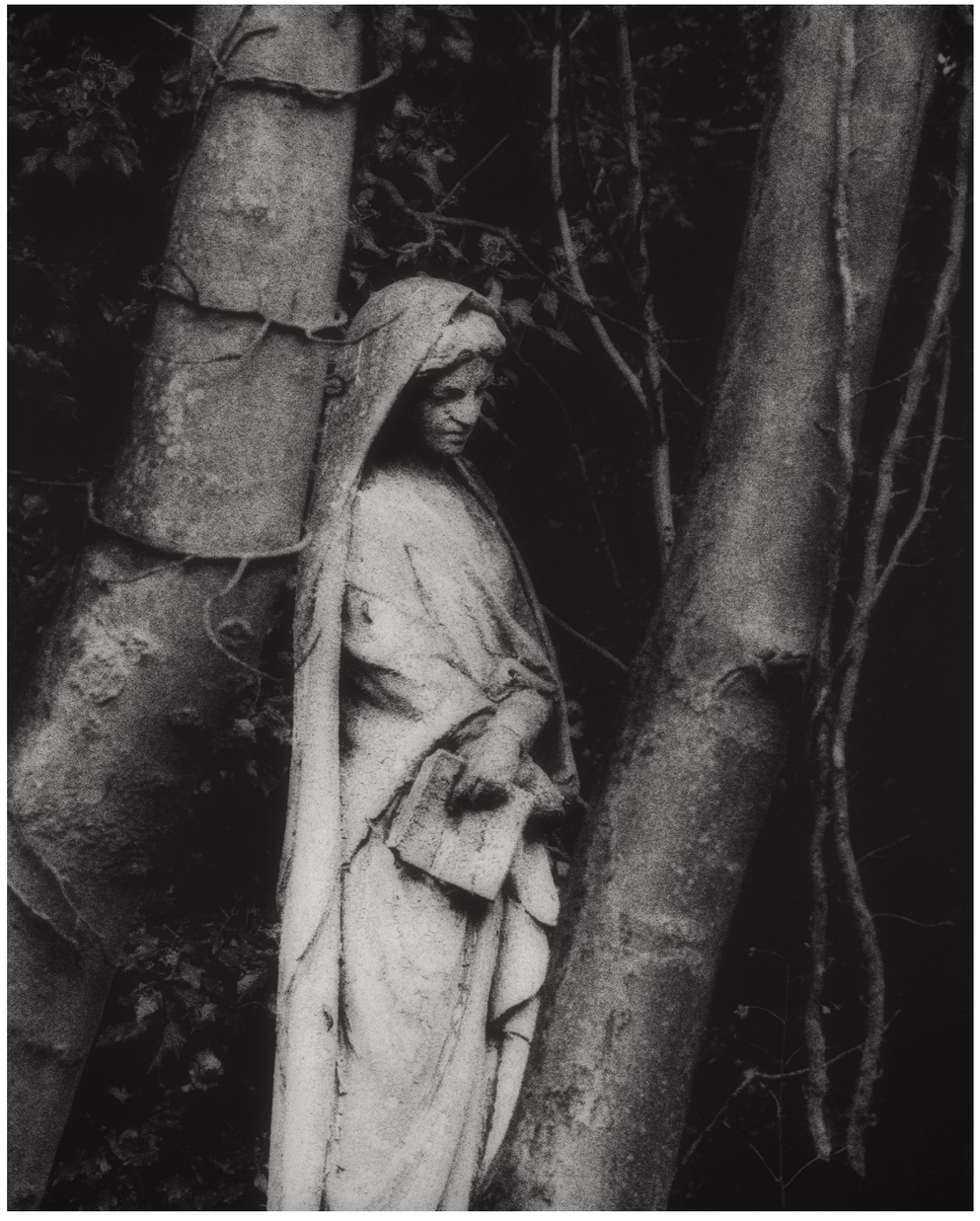
LONDON CEMETERIES V

LONDON CEMETERIES VI



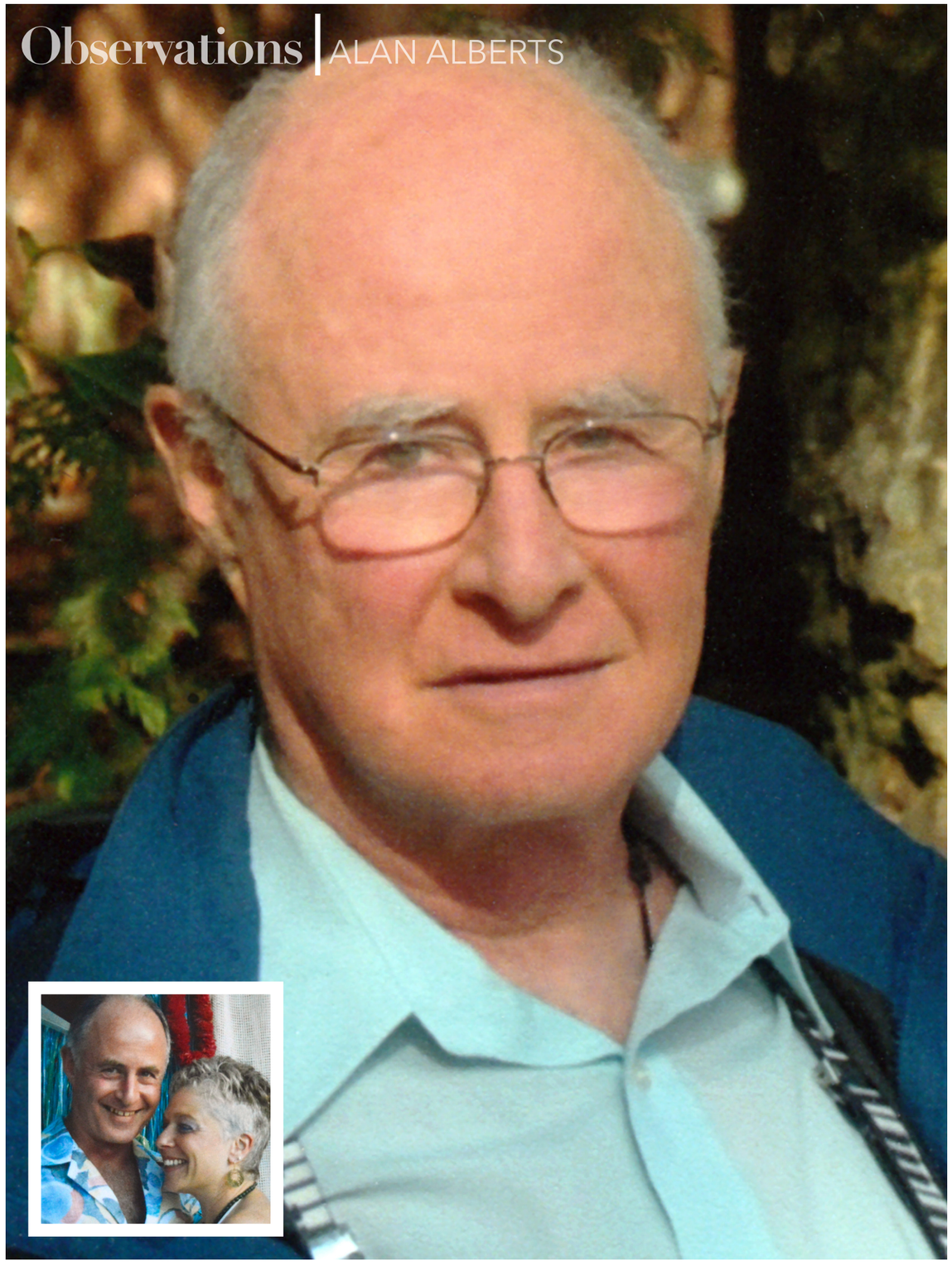
LONDON CEMETERIES VII

LONDON CEMETERIES VIII



LONDON CEMETERIES IX

LONDON CEMETERIES X



Alan Alberts is a harbinger of our culture's changing relationship with death and dying. He chose elective death through Voluntarily Stopping Eating and Drinking (VSED) rather than suffering the disassociated life of Alzheimer's. His wife, Phyllis Shacter, intimately participated in Alan's death. Together, they embody the emerging paradigm of couples, families and friends embracing individual death as a shared experience through which all, the living and the dead, are united in a heightened awareness of life, love and one another.

In this first of two articles, Phyllis tells Alan's story through conversations they held until Alzheimer's silenced his voice. In our next volume, we will continue with Phyllis' assimilation of her experience; and her emergence from grief as a renowned advocate for VSED.

> All beliefs are limiting. If you change your beliefs, you can change your life. This is a story about how I fundamentally changed my beliefs to heal the fear of dying. Love is the meaning of life.
>
> **ALAN ALBERTS**

***Phyllis:** After the diagnosis, Alan and I went into Alzheimer's denial. We didn't talk about it. When Alzheimer's became unmistakably evident, We held one another and cried for a week. Soon after, we began our conversation about dying. Alan's mother died after suffering Alzheimer's for ten years. He did not want to die in self-oblivion. We thought very seriously about using the Death with Dignity prescription[1] but doing so for Alzheimer's would have made me an accomplice to murder. Alan had the Death With Dignity prescription from a previous bout with cancer. The notion of Alan being here and then being gone in ten minutes was horrifying. I couldn't imagine being able to withstand that kind of shock. I needed support. I contacted End of Life Washington. A counselor introduced me to VSED.*

I downloaded and printed an article on VSED by Thaddeus Pope and Lindsay Anderson.[2] After reading the article Alan said, "I've decided this is what I am going to do. I am going to VSED." This was six months before his death.

I told Alan on two occasions that I regretted we could not use the Death with Dignity prescription. Both times he said, "I want to have an organic, conscious death." He wanted his body to break down as it happens during a normal death, as opposed to a sudden death.

I asked Alan almost daily, "Are you sure this is what you want to do?" I had to make certain that the choice was his and that he wasn't doing this for me. And he would always say, "Yes, this is what I want to do." Finally, one day he looked at me and said, "I've made up my mind. This is what I am going to do. Please, don't ask anymore." I never asked him again.

On the afternoon that Alan set the final date, he was crying. He said, "I'm feeling a little sad."

Every step of the way there was a great deal of integration-- for Alan to make his decision and for me to be a conscious advocate who had the inner strength to move forward with it. If it weren't for our partnership, nothing would have happened. Alan would be in a facility today and probably still alive. That's why advocacy is so important.

Alan: Knowing I will die soon is okay. I have no idea why I am so accepting now. It just is. I wasn't always this way.

I don't think I am sad because I'm sick. My tears are because I am grateful.

I'm not afraid of dying. I've lived a good life. I want everyone to know about VSED

I know that I am going to die soon. There is no fear. In fact, I am kind of looking forward to it. I'm very curious. I'm sure there are other planes of existence. I'm curious as to what they are, how they are.

This may be the best time of my life. I have no worries. I have nothing that I have to do. I have no practical concerns. I'm not trying to accomplish anything. I have no cares. All this brings me peace.

I'm losing my brain to Alzheimer's and I realize that I'm okay, just the way I am. I know inner peace that I've never had before. I've learned to accept myself for what I am and not for what I'm supposed to do.

Meditation has helped me not get caught up in the insanity that surrounds us. I think that anyone on a spiritual path has a tiny bit of the truth and is trying to figure it out. But the truth is huge and no one can grasp it. Everyone experiences their own truth.

As what I can do with my mind decreases, there is less and less stuff that is important to me. Only love and appreciation matter now.

I am comfortable and at ease with everything. I just feel great all the time, even when I am tired. I am present all the time. I am happy all the time. I didn't feel this way most of my life. I'd love to help people reduce their suffering. I don't know how to do that. People notice how happy I look. I think that's important because I'm really at the end of this life. I'm sure it goes on. I was burdened by all the things that I thought I should be doing. And I'm not anymore. I'm not sure how to share this with other people. Phyllis, it's up to you to do that.

P: This was Alan's evolution in consciousness. The peace he was feeling is not typical of Alzheimer's. There was an interweaving of two strands of living- one strand of beingness, consciousness, awareness; and the strand of Alzheimer's. They did overlap and weave together, but Alan's peace was not occurring because of Alzheimer's.

> As a result of being witness to and partnering with Alan's death, I feel a deep peacefulness surrounding my own death. That is the most beautiful part of his legacy to me.
>
> **PHYLLIS SHACTER**

> This may be the best time of my life. I have no worries. I have nothing that I have to do...All this brings me peace.
>
> **ALAN ALBERTS**

A: If I get an acute illness and I cannot decide for myself, then let me die. If I can't have this kind of discussion about whether or not I should be treated, then let me die.

P: Alan was in the middle stages of Alzheimer's when he died. He was still mentally competent. He could not have followed through with not eating and drinking without mental competence.

Alan said that he was beginning to look forward to what comes next. Six weeks before dying he said, as he fell to sleep, that people who had passed over were waiting for him. It was a living, moving picture. He saw family-- mother, father, aunts, uncles. He spoke about this with soft relaxed tones, with absolutely no fear. The experience was real. I asked Alan if this meant he would be waiting for me when I died. He said, "Yes."

A: I am peace. I am love. I am loved.

P: As time went on, we were communicating on a deeper level...we were communicating beyond words. Nothing needed to be said. My husband wasn't attached to anything by the time he started this process. Including me.

A: The show is going to start...time to go. I need to get the milk. The people are at the party.

I love you...

P: Alan was in a coma. The doctor left the house saying that he would live one to three days. It was as if a force was taking me into his bedroom. I closed the door. I had no phone. There were no distractions. I was completely present. I began to give him a pep talk.

I said 'I know you're really not here now. You can let go. We've partnered together for 26 years. This is the last time we will partner together like this. It's okay for you to leave your body.. You're only holding on with a few strands of your body now. You can let go of any suffering and be free. It's time for you to let go. There's nothing holding you back. Be free of any suffering. Let yourself go. I am going to be alright. I am going to help usher you home. It's okay to let go. Be free. Be free."

A minute or two later, my head turned up toward the ceiling. I said, "Alan, you're not here anymore. You're watching this whole thing. You are free and I am going to midwife you home." Alan took two gentle slow breaths and left his body.

As a result of being witness to and partnering with Alan's death, I feel a deep peacefulness surrounding my own death. That is the most beautiful part of his legacy to me.

From a conversation with John Wadsworth

[1] Death with Dignity, or medical aid-in-dying, statutes allow certain terminally ill adults to request and obtain a prescription for medication to end their lives in a peaceful manner. The acts outline the process of obtaining such medication, including safeguards to protect both patients and physicians.

[2] Link to Voluntarily Stopping Eating and Drinking: A Legal Treatment Option at the End of Life by Thaddeus Pope and Lindsey Anderson: **https://ssrn.com/abstract=1689049**

Observations | PHYLLIS SHACTER

"I made contact with a publishing house about six months before Alan died. We both wanted our experience to benefit others. I held *Choosing To Die*'s book release celebration on April 9, 2017, exactly four years after Alan had his last food and liquid.

Completing *Choosing To Die* closed the most significant chapter of my life – 26 years of being married to Alan, and 4 years of grieving and healing. I was ready to move into another chapter of living and loving. The book has been part of my journey toward inner freedom. It has been about learning to live and love in new ways. It has been about overcoming my own fear of death. And it has been about serving countless others, most of whom I will never meet.

For the first two years after Alan's death, I spent most of my time alone. The only places I went were places where I felt safe and people knew me. For the first year, several times a day, I was on the floor doubled over in pain, sobbing. Grief, fear and anxiety were my dominant emotions. I don't think that it's possible to measure grief and how it plays out because it's so much about the baggage that we carry from our whole life into the experience.

I allowed myself to be in free fall after Alan died. As a result, my energy in relation to everything around me transformed. I'm living my life differently than I ever have before. I know this work is not about me. I don't care if people know my name. I just want others to have this information. It began when Alan, two weeks before he died, said that he wanted everyone to know about VSED. I told him that he would have to trust that I would be his vehicle. I still feel his co-creation with me.

I feel that Alan and I are doing the most important work of our relationship now. The work is about more than VSED. I'm an advocate for expanding end of life choices. I'm an advocate for conscious dying. I'm an advocate for preparing to die. I'm allowing the energy of this message to unfold with grace. I can't imagine not doing this work because it is making such a difference for so many people.

A couple contacted me as the husband was getting closer to making his final decision about VSED. He was 90 years old with vascular dementia. It took him eight days to die. The day after he died his wife sent me an email and said, "We used your book like a manual."

The work that I'm doing, is organic, starting with the TEDx talk I gave seven months after he died. The

> I'm an advocate for living into our dying, being aware of what is happening to us when it's happening and not denying it.

In Art of Dying's first volume, we featured the story of Alan Albert's decision to VSED (Voluntarily Stopping Eating and Drinking) rather than live through the final stages of Alzheimer's. His wife, Phyllis Schacter, shares how she continues to support Alan through her advocacy of elective death.

JEFF ASPNES

work is a way for me to stay connected to Alan, but not Alan the body. It's Alan the energy.

Most people do not consider that they have a choice regarding many areas of their life. Certainly not in relation to death. I've had my audiences break down in tears. A woman approached me after I spoke and said, "There's a lot of dementia in my family. I have been terrified that I will go mad and be out of control. I never knew there was anything I could do about it. Now I know I have a choice."

I'm an advocate for living into our dying, being aware of what is happening to us when it's happening and not denying it. That's part of conscious dying. We don't have conscious dying without conscious living. They're one and the same.

Let's educate ourselves about all of our choices. There's a doctor who's advocating going into high schools to educate students about death and dying. I'm for it. I hope I do some of that with young people. The younger people, the people in their twenties I know, get it. They totally get it.

I'm part of a growing death positive movement. There's a group of us who are saying, "Come on now, let's stop this nonsense. Let's stop this stupidity of going on, another cure, another medication, another day in the hospital, another invasive surgery at the end of life. Let's stop it." But to stop it,everyone, including doctors, have to acknowledge that they're going to die. That's the core of it. The lack of acknowledgment that we are mortal beings.

I hope I don't have to VSED. I want to die the way my mother died. She just got old. Her heart began to wear out.

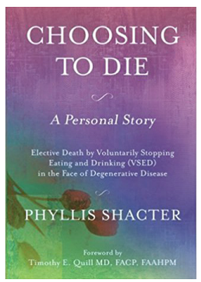
The night before she began her departure I was sitting on the edge of my mom's bed and kissing her good night. She looked like an angel. There was a light that I've never seen come out of someone's body before. She was glowing and smiling from ear to ear. And she looked at me and said, "You know I'm never going to die."

She caught me off guard. I said, "Mom, you mean you're never going to die?" She broke into hysterical laughter and said, "Well certainly not tonight." The next morning she was in a mild coma. During the next four days, I called the whole family together. She took her last breath with all of us around her bed.

My work is about preparing to die well. I'm preparing to die. I think about it every day, consciously and unconsciously. I'm okay, I'm really okay if I die tomorrow. And at the same time, I'd really love to become this really old, ripe, wise woman.

From a conversation with John Wadsworth

PHYLLIS SHACTER is an advocate in end-of-life choices, especially the little-known option of Voluntarily Stopping Eating and Drinking (VSED) for people with degenerative disease. She is the author of *Choosing to Die,* a memoir and thorough guidebook about her husband's gentle, elective death from VSED after he was diagnosed with Alzheimer's. Her website is the authoritative site on VSED, and features her TEDx Talk, "Not Here By Choice." Phyllis frequently speaks at conferences, including the Seattle University-sponsored first National Conference on VSED which she helped organize.
WWW.PHYLLISSHACTER.COM



AVAILABLE ON AMAZON

In this world,
through which we wander in a sleeping condition,
we are living together with the so-called dead.
The dead are always present.
They move and have their being in a supersensible world.
We are not separated from them by our real being
but only by our condition of consciousness.
We 'sleep' among the dead even while we are awake,
just as we do not perceive the physical objects around us when we sleep.
Thus we do not live separated from the world
where the forces of the dead prevail;
we are together with the dead in one common world.

RUDOLPH STEINER

A Care Home With A Difference

STORY BY WENDY GLASS • PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF HUMANITAS
REPRODUCED BY PERMISSION OF *THE PEOPLE'S FRIEND* MAGAZINE • THEPEOPLESFRIEND.CO.UK

150 residents aged between 79 and 104 live at Humanitas Home for the Elderly in Holland – and six young students.

"The connection between the two generations has made Humanitas a better place," says Gea Sijpkes, director of Humanitas Home for the Elderly, which is in Deventer, east of Amsterdam.

Gea explains that the six students live at Humanitas rent free, in exchange for spending 30 hours a month with their older neighbours. "Thanks to the students who now live at Humanitas, our elderly residents have more to do, they can enjoy the company of young people without having to go anywhere and they have so many things to talk about," says Gea.

"There are only so many topics of conversation in an elderly care home but at Humanitas, they love gossiping about the students and what they get up to, such as whether one of the boys has a new girlfriend and if she stayed the night!

"As well as a free apartment, the young people who live at Humanitas learn caring skills, they gain valuable life skills and they become good neighbours. During their time with us, we watch these young people become beautiful adults."

The first student moved into Humanitas Home for the Elderly in December 2012, soon after Gea was appointed Director. "When I started in this new role, I decided we're in the Happiness Business rather than the elderly care business," explains Gea.

"I wanted to inject life into our elderly care home. We cannot solve all the troubles that come with aging but we can give a smile a day instead of, or as well as, a pill a day. We can provide joy as well as safety. And my way of adding life, smiles and joy? Asking young students to move in."

However, when Gea suggested this idea to the board members who are in overall charge of the care home, they were shocked. "For them, students represented 'sex, drugs and rock and roll." They didn't see how student life could possibly be compatible with a home for the elderly."

But Gea was determined and, as the elderly residents were very positive about the idea, the board finally agreed to one student living at Humanitas for a short trial period.

Onno, a 23-year-old spiky-haired party-loving social work student, was given a warm welcome by everyone at Humanitas and the trial was an instant success. "Right from the start, our residents liked the idea of young people hanging around and spending time with them," says Gea.

"Over the next few months, five more students moved into apartments at Humanitas – and as they moved in, the atmosphere of the house changed. It became lighter. There were more positive moments, more laughter, more smiles."

"The students sometimes say they can 'earn a smile' because that's their reward for spending time with the older residents – a smile of appreciation."

At the moment, three male and three female students live at Humanitas. Gea explains that the students move out when they graduate and find a job but there's no shortage of young volunteers waiting to snap up any vacant apartments. "At the moment, the students who live here are studying communication and urban design," explains Gea.

"We avoid students who are studying nursing or other 'caring' subjects as our young residents aren't here to provide care for our elderly residents. They're simply here to be good neighbours."

Gea explains that the only rule at Humanitas is 'no trouble.' "That's the rule for everyone," she stresses. "And because many of our elderly residents are deaf, they're rarely

> When I started in this new role, I decided we're in the Happiness Business rather than the elderly care business.
>
> **GEA SIJPKES,**
> **DIRECTOR OF HUMANITAS HOME FOR THE ELDERLY**

Anneloes, one of the students and a few of the residents of Humanitas enjoy a day out.

Gea Sijpkes, director of Humanitas Home for the Elderly

Sores and his friend and neighbour, Marty.

disturbed by the students playing loud music or coming in late. Although a few of the students have complained about their neighbour's televisions being too loud!

"I don't want the students to tip toe around the older people – I want them to live as they would normally."

So there are no curfews, no noise restrictions and no bans on overnight guests – for either age group! Even races between mobility scooter in the corridors are allowed!

"Living here always changes our students' general view of 'old people'," laughs Gea. "They soon realise they're all individuals with their own stories. I overheard one of our students looking at a picture of his elderly neighbour when she was in her twenties and saying to his friend: 'Man, she was hot!'

The residents, young and old alike, meet up in Humanitas' public rooms, the terrace, the garden, the gym and the billiards room. "No-one needs to be lonely at Humanitas," says Gea, who adds that there is a waiting list for Humanitas' apartments for the elderly, as well as the student apartments.

Every night, Gea organizes an evening meal in the home's restaurant. "At least one of the students comes along and joins in with the chat, adding a few jokes, stories from college or whatever," says Gea.

"Everyone mixes at Humanitas – and that's helped considerably by the students being here. Football matches are watched together, pizzas are ordered for last-minute suppers, there are informal computer and Facebook tuition sessions, the girls polish the ladies' nails in disco colors... There's always something happening.

"Conversations constantly spring up between the generations when things are said without any boundaries – it's from the heart. Incredible conversations take place at Humanitas about what really matters to the elderly and to the young."

Gea explains that some of the older residents spend more time with the younger residents than others – and adds that the friendships that spring up between the generations vary from passing acquaintances to deep attachments.

"However, all of the older residents are very proud of 'their' students," says Gea. "This initiative has changed the lives of so many of our residents, of all ages."

'I see endless possibilities.'

"I really enjoy living here," says Sores, who is one of the six students who currently has an apartment at Humanitas. "It's such a warm and friendly place."

"Living here is a win-win situation for us students. There's a shortage of student accommodation in Holland and it's also often very expensive but as students live here rent-free in very nice apartments, I don't need to worry about my financial situation. And there's always someone to talk to."

"Living at Humanitas has changed how I look at older people. Before I moved here, I only thought of all the things older people couldn't do but now I'm here, I see endless possibilities. Elderly people are just like me and my friends, only older."

"Soon after I moved in, one of the members of staff asked if I would help a 91-year-old lady, Marty, with her iPad. Our iPad sessions soon developed into long conversations, where we chatted about our families, our friends and our backgrounds. Recently, Marty told me about her experiences in World War 2, which showed me just how much she went through when she was young."

"To me, my friendship with this lady highlights just how worthwhile it can be to spend time with people of an older generation and to talk to them about their lives and experiences. I look at my friend and neighbour now and no longer see a 91-year-old woman – I see my good friend who has so many different aspects to her life."

> **"Before I moved here, I only thought of all the things older people couldn't do but now I'm here, I see endless possibilities.**
>
> **SORES, RESIDENT AT HUMANITAS HOME FOR THE ELDERLY**

WENDY GLASS has been a magazine journalist since she left school, working first on the legendary teenage magazine Jackie and then working on a selection of magazines published by DC Thomson & Co Ltd, including *Annabel, Babycare & Pregnancy* and *My Weekly* before moving, 25 years ago, into the world of freelance journalism. Wendy is proud to be a regular contributor to, amongst others, *The Scots Magazine, My Weekly* and *The People's Friend*.

Wendy lives in Kirriemuir, Scotland, a small town at the foot of the Angus Glens, with her husband, teenage daughter and two dogs.

JOHN WADSWORTH

Through them we learn about how we want to live our lives.

Living in Humanitas over four years I've learned that if you say 'elderly' you're targeting a group. People here are not a group. They are individuals. Each resident's room is a world of different backgrounds and experiences. Everyone shares stories that impact me as a human being.

I think my neighbors are happier than they were before students started living here. All of us benefit from our mutual happiness. We can revive their youth. Through them we learn about how we want to live our lives.

When I was younger, I wasn't at ease with death. I thought it was a terrible thing, a loss. Living here has made a real difference. Now I know that when life is finished, you experience whatever you believe in. Most of the people here are really fine with dying. They think "Well, I had a great life. I put my children through school, they have a great life, and now I'm finished."

In a sense their life is finished because they start losing their identity the moment they move in here. People had lots of hobbies and items that related to their individual character. And when they come here, their family says "Okay, we will sell the lot. You don't need what doesn't fit in your room." It's like, "You're settled now. You're being cared for." But nobody really wants so much care because care is the same as losing your freedom. Your character starts falling away. Days become the same.

Some people have lived here sixteen years. I'm 23, so they moved here when I was in preschool. What they have done and what I've done in sixteen years is incomparable. They've done a couple of things, maybe knitting, or something like that. Why aren't they doing what they used to do?

We as students try to say, "What do you like to do? What are we going to do now?" The residents say "I used to ... I did this in the past…I had." Who they used to be is more alive than who they are. Their past defines them. There's no definition about who they are now.

It's not always good that we do things for them. We want to know what they can do for themselves. "Are you going to do something with your life, or not?" It's a shame that I'm 23 and ask that, but sometimes I have to.

> It's by living together, being around one another, that we are really slowly saying goodbye to each other.

We had a discussion one night about why they weren't going to the zoo or theater anymore; why they weren't interested in what they used to do. They said that it was because life keeps getting smaller, that in death your perspective shrinks. Why are they saying this? I don't get it.

I'm becoming increasingly rebellious. Living here has taught me the importance of doing what you want to do; not just doing things that are socially acceptable. I know that I am not going to do what everyone expects of me because of what I've seen here. Someone said that life is round. I think if you want to live the life you want, your character isn't round. Your character is more like a spearhead. But once it gets rounded, life gets dull. Then you cannot slash with it. It cannot penetrate anymore. Lots of people around here haven't lived like a spear. They have lived like a shield. They didn't do the things they truly wanted to do. Those people have the most regrets.

I have a friend twelve years older than I am. He was always partying with lots of girls. Then he got married and has a child, but he's not round. But his friends are becoming round. I went to his birthday party and they talked about the weather and other mindless things. I wanted to invite them to come to Humanitas, and learn from the residents that the way they're living is not right. I think the more dynamic you are when young, the better the end of your life. The more passive you are, the smaller your life and death will also be.

More than sixty residents have passed away since I've lived here. And they always go in clusters of three or six. It's never just one at a time. If one is dying, you can bet that at least two more will die within a week.

People die more often from mental than physical weariness. If you lived to be one thousand years old, you would be the most unhappy man or woman in the world because you would be mentally broken. It's hard to be the last of your friends to die. They say things like "I don't want this anymore." Life becomes agonizing because they are the last one, and they have gone to all those funerals.

I had a neighbor who was alone. For him, it was like "Yes death, come on and just do it." He had an experience that he was dying. He felt his spirit rising. He was looking down at his body. And then someone woke him up. He said he was actually angry because he felt that was his time, that he was finally going to be with his wife and friends.

Some people want to die privately without any social contact. Some dying people are surrounded by family with everybody talking and doing things around their bed. I've seen that sometimes when someone is lying on their death bed, with the family around, they aren't able to die. Eventually, when the family leaves or is even just getting a coffee, they are like "click", gone.

My next door neighbor was 105. I dropped by to say hello on my way to school. She took my hand and said, "Farewell, have a good life." I was caught totally by surprise. I could feel that she was dead when I arrived at school. When I came back she was already in a coffin.

Some people on their deathbed have so much to tell about themselves, so many stories. They feel pride in what they have accomplished, and the way that they have lived, and they are confident that they are going to do it at the next stage, and the next. I like that. That's what I want to do as well. I want to be on my deathbed and say, "I am Jurrien and these are my stories, and I've been there, and I've done that. It wasn't always good, and it wasn't always nice, but after all, this is who I am." It's ideal if we can do that. But perhaps it's just my youth talking.

When I first moved to Humanitas, the concept was that I would donate thirty hours a month, making superficial contact, doing small jobs and stuff. But I didn't expect that I would become close with so many residents. It's by living together, being around one another, that we are really slowly saying goodbye to each other. There's a feeling that these are their last days. Sometimes we just sit together, looking out the window watching birds flying above the trees. Sometimes they cannot remember my name. But that's fine with me.

From a conversation with John Wadsworth

JURRIËN MENTINK currently lives with his girlfriend in Zutphen, a town not far from Humanitas. He used to study Urban Design but is now studying business management.

Jurriën wants to be a consultant who can trigger and implement different kinds of innovations within healthcare organizations such as Humanitas. He has to learn how organizations work, their processes, and how to inspire staff members to improve.

Together with colleagues and elderly people, he hopes to create organizations where everyone has freedom to put their unique personalities into play as agents and recipients of enlightened healthcare.

I feel like I was destined to do this work. I was shaped to do this work. I'm a third generation metaphysical on my father's side.

In high school something connected to death and dying. I competed in a speech festival on persuasive public speaking. The topic was euthanasia. I won first place.

My dad's sister died at the age of 13. The family story is that she became a 'trail angel' to help people cross over to the other side. It's so weird now coming into this profession. I feel like I'm a trail angel on this side. I Googled 'trail angel.' A trail angel is someone who leaves surprise beers for hikers on the hiking trail–something different and, finally, not so different than my family's term.

I had a shared death experience in 2010 in my final quarter of grad school that inspired my life and hospice work. Most people are familiar with the concept of the term, "near-death experience" which is when someone dies and comes back to life. A shared-death experience is when a person who is not dying experiences the dying process of another. The term was coined by Raymond Moody. When my aunt Jerry was dying, I had a series of incredible experiences. I felt her physical pain; I received telepathic messages from her, and I witnessed pieces of her life review. My aunt was very special to me, but I told other family members, she didn't "choose" me. She was broadcasting

> I would say a good death is whatever the patient wants it to be. It's not my place to define someone else's definition of a good death.

CATHERINE MURRAY

14 WAYS HOSPICE PATIENTS HAVE SAID THEY'RE READY TO DIE

These are statements to me by hospice patients over the years indicating their readiness to die. I recognized there was a beauty in the variety of ways the patients chose to express their wishes.

1. "If something is going to happen, let it happen. Life is getting less interesting as the days go by."
2. "Sometimes I wonder why they've all gone and I'm still here."
3. "When I go to bed I always wonder if this will be the time I die."
4. "I've done it all I've seen it all. I could step out."
5. "I'm ready to get up and jump around."
6. "I'm 93 and anything can happen at any time. I have no qualms."
7. "I was put on this earth to die. Today is just as good as tomorrow. We're all going to die. I can't control it.
8. "Right now heavenly home is home. They tell me we'll see our loved ones and never have to say goodbye. That would be wonderful."
9. "Get me out of here."
10. "I'm waiting to ring the bell."
11. "I know we're not going to be here forever. Hereafter is another home. It ain't no temporary home. It's permanent and there are no utility bills. No taxes."
12. "I just want to go home."
13. "My goal is to wonder how I fill the days until my days are gone."
14. "I think it would be nice if every single person in the world had a button to push to say, 'okay I'm ready'."

and I somehow tuned in. Prior to this, I had never had any kind of psychic ability and I have not had anything as extraordinary happen since.

The hardest part about dying for families is that waiting period when they've intellectually accepted that this loved one is going to die and their dying lasts longer than what's comfortable. I try to acknowledge how difficult that waiting period is and explain to families that there's a lot going on in the dying person's head, even if they're not able to talk.

I call it 'the negotiation' as in the negotiation stage. That's based on something a hospice patient told me. He would actually have a conversation with someone I couldn't see, and then he would come out of it, and tell me what was going on. He actually used the word 'negotiating.'

We walked around the facility the day before he died. He told me that it felt like he was going to get into a spaceship. Then the night before he died, he tried to sneak out of the facility with tennis shoes on, his backpack over his shoulder.

This is what happens. The dying know they're going somewhere. It's as if waking life becomes a metaphorical dream to the dying. I've seen people in bed, apartment hunting the week that they die. They know they're going but they don't know where. I feel that their conscious mind doesn't know that they're dying. But their subconscious knows.

Another patient was in her nineties, with dementia. She ended up being in hospice for four years where I was a volunteer. She got to this point where she started to tell me things like, "We'll see each other again." "I wonder what we'll wear in heaven." I thought this was really cool. In her final week, her daughter told me she was dying. I went to see her. I wrote down, "God loves you." She read it, and then she looked up at me and said, "God loves you too, Elizabeth." My jaw dropped because I didn't know she knew my name. She said, "That is your name isn't it?" I was like, "Yes." I was crying.

If the patient expresses fear then they're close. I would say they're within a week. Prior to that fear death feels hypothetical. If I meet them for the first time and they're expressing fear then I feel that somehow they know that they're going. But 99% of the time their fear is settled before they go. You can see it on their face. I call it the "angry elevens." When they're sleeping they have this furrowed brow, and they look like they're talking to someone. Then their brow relaxes. Then you know, 'Okay they've been through that negotiation. They're finally accepting and letting go.'

One of my pet peeves is the obsession with 'regrets of the dying.' It hasn't been my experience that the dying dwell on the things they wished they had done.

By the time they're dying, people are focused on love and gratitude. A lot of gratitude expressed to their family. I try not to direct our conversation. I try to be present and be where they want to go. If they want to talk about the weather, then we talk about the weather. It's not helpful to force someone to be introspective if they never were before. People die as they lived. If they were introspective before, they will be as they die.

I think the caregivers, the loved ones, family members, and friends have a harder time than the patient. I've seen so many patients that just don't feel well. They're ready to go before their family is ready for them to die.

I would say a good death is whatever the patient wants it to be. It's not my place to define someone else's definition of a good death. A very simple example is how many people should be at the bedside. It's an entirely personal preference.

Then you know, 'Okay they've been through that negotiation. They're finally accepting and letting go.'

Some patients lived in the house where everyone went after school for cookies. You know the families where every holiday was a gathering of at least 20 people. If that's how they lived, that's how they're going to want to die. Sometimes staff members will say, "There's too much activity in that room." Well, that's their opinion. If that's what the patient is used to, then, yes, they can die with 15 people in the room. I don't want that many people around me but I respect that's how it is for some people.

We assume that family wants to be at the dying's bedside. I ask them, "Is it your hope or expectation that you'll be present at time of death?" Sometimes we assume that the patient doesn't want to be alone. Some patients choose to die when no one's in the room. My role is to know the patient as a person, and be an advocate for them and their wishes– whatever their wishes may be.

Too often people want to educate the patient and their family. Some patients and families don't want to know. They just want to take things as they come. They don't want to anticipate. Expectations cannot be imposed. You have to feel it out for yourself.

There's an in-between state. Sometimes patients see things with their eyes open. I actually mean literally their eyes are open and they're seeing things. They don't always share what they see. There's a reason for the veil between the living and the dead. The dying can see through the veil, but this is a knowing that they're not supposed to share. Once they are in that in-between state, they have an understanding of why we were not supposed to see too much here. Dying patients know that what is being communicated to them is, for the most part, just for them.

In the grand scheme of things patients experience deep realizations of peace, and understanding– realizations that they keep from us. It's all a part of the letting go.

There is a Buddhist expression, "In death we are all beginners." Before I started working in hospice, I thought I knew death from all the losses I had experienced. My hospice work has helped me to realize how little I know. Every patient is unique, every death is different. There are similarities for sure, but the more you work in hospice, the more you appreciate the surprises and the mysteries of life and death.

From a conversation with John Wadsworth

LIZZY MILES, MA, MSW, LSW is a hospice social worker in Columbus, Ohio and an editor and writer for Pallimed.org. Lizzy authored a book of happy hospice stories: Somewhere In Between: The Hokey Pokey, Chocolate Cake, and the Shared Death Experience. Lizzy is best known for bringing the Death Cafe concept to the United States. TWITTER @LIZZYMILES_MSW.

“When you’re from outside looking in, you see things that the family doesn't notice.

My father passed away under hospice care. I was living out of state at the time. Its uncomfortable when you can't be with someone when they're dying. I felt it would be a little bit of a payback if I sat with people in hospice when their family members couldn’t be there.

My experience in hospice started out with just simple visits, social calls in the facilities. It grew into my going to people's homes to sit with them so the caregivers could take a break. From there it morphed into where I would go to someone's home every week and get to know the dying person more deeply.

As I was spending more time with the same folks, I started to sense how they were feeling as they were dying. When you’re from outside looking in, you see things that the family doesn't notice. It's an emotionally draining time when somebody in your family or a loved one is dying. You're thinking of everything from renting medical equipment to keeping doctor appointments to funeral arrangements and calling Cousin So-and-So to urge him to visit. You get so wrapped up in all of that, that you start to lose sight of the fact that this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to just sit with this person and help them transition. I found myself filling that role.

As I saw how families were so unprepared to work with a dying person, I started taking more upon myself. Death doula certification came next. There's a broad range of definitions for a doula. In the hospice world, it is defined as someone who comes in the last 24 hours when people often have a difficult time being alone.

A death doula working independently from hospice has more freedom to expand into different territories, like religious support and memorial planning. When you're associated with hospice, you have to follow their plan. Hospice does a very good job while obeying a lot of federal, Medicare and Medicaid guidelines that are very strict on what volunteers can and cannot do, whether they're a doula or not. The ideal situation is that your friends and family learn of your wishes early on and be there as active transition team members.

JOHN WADSWORTH

In both the facility and in people's homes, the TV is constantly on. The Golden Girls and the news are favorites. I'm thinking to myself, 'You know, they may only have a few days left here. Is this really what you feel is the most important thing for them to be listening to as they end their physical journey?' Sometimes I'll talk to the family and ask, "Would it be okay if I played some music?" Once they've seen some of the things that I do and see the difference in the person, they welcome it. When I'm alone with them I can do Reiki if they wish. I can share affirmations. I find that much more appealing than just asking, "Would you like some juice?"

I try to relax the person. With their permission, I gently rub the bottom of their feet or their hands and put them in a mood where they can stop thinking about all the stuff around them and just focus on their journey. I tell them that they have total control, that they can separate from their physical body when it no longer serves them. That they can move on. I assure them that they've done a wonderful job in their life, that they have an amazing family that loves them, that does not want them to be in pain.

Several months before my mom died I hung a sign in her bedroom that just said, "Love." It would be the last thing she saw when she went to sleep. I know that "Love" was the last thing she saw when she went into her final rest. We didn't share the same religious beliefs, but love is something everyone can relate to. Simple acts like that can make a big difference.

It's very important to recognize that people, even if not aware, hear everything that's going on. I've talked to several people who have come out from comas who said they could hear everything. People don't realize the star of the show is laying within ear shot and will say "I hope my sister gets here soon because I've got to be out of here by four o'clock and it's her turn to take over the shift." Would you want to hear that when you're dying? People are on edge and make stupid jokes, not because they're bad people, but because their nerves get to them and they're uncomfortable. I gently guide them out of the room and suggest, "Can we talk about this out here?"

We should plan how to make the dying as comfortable as possible in advance, when they're still communicating. "Where would you like the bed to be?" Would you like to be in here so you can look out the window at the mountains?" Would you rather be back in the bedroom where it's quieter?" If your loved one can't communicate well, lay in their bed and see what the view is. Will recessed lights shine in their eyes? Will they look into a bathroom door with people walking in and out? Can they see the mountains?

Dying is the event for the remaining family and friends. For the dying person, their evolutionary path is the event –crossing the bridge into another dimension.

It's fuzzy what's going to happen to us after we die. The important thing is to give someone the best possible chance to have the best landing. It's like they're shooting off in a rocket. Let's help them land in the best possible way on the path that's right for them. That path may be Buddhist, it may be Catholic, it may be scientific. But everybody wants to be loved. Everyone wants to be safe and at peace. Everyone wants to be in control, especially when you're sick, and everybody's been controlling you for the past couple of months. To assure someone they are in control, that they can leave their physical body when it no longer serves them, is helpful for everyone, no matter what they believe.

I've found that as the physical body declines, the spiritual activity increases. Consciousness is still in the body, but they're starting to have out-of-body experiences. They talk with deceased loved ones. I let them know they're in a safe space. They'll smile and say, "I just saw my husband." I'll ask, "How did that make you feel? Are you looking forward to being with him again?" Others often dismiss them as drug-induced hallucinations. I don't question them.

I want to die a good death when I can still communicate, take care of my business, show gratitude, forgive people that need to be forgiven, and be physically comfortable to focus on my spiritual journey. I will have said my good-byes, so people don't have to say, "Good-bye," to me. No crying, no tears, no regrets. I don't want anyone hanging all over me and I don't want 10 people sitting around the room waiting and checking their watches. I want to simply say, "Good-bye," and go quietly into a room with a loved one to transition. And that will be it.

From a conversation with John Wadsworth

> “I’ve found that as the physical body declines, the spiritual activity increases.

SUSAN BUHLMAN is an experienced hospice caregiver. As a certified end-of-life doula, it is her passion and her soul's purpose to provide comfort to those who are actively dying. As a companion to those in the final hours or days of life, she offers a calming, compassionate presence and, if the patient is open to it, Susan guides him or her through a transitional preparation process.

Guided visualizations, positive affirmations, Hemi-Sync® and energy healing are a few of the tools that are used to ease the emotional pain and fear of the dying process.

During bereavement workshops, she uses spiritual principles to lessen the burden of loss, leading the way toward a peaceful appreciation of the next conscious steps in our soul's journey. She has co-authored a book *Higher Self Now!* with her husband, William Buhlman. Together, they lead workshops to assist others in their quest to develop their personal spiritual transition.

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I cannot help but love someone who's dying. Their vulnerable openness and sincerity inevitably help me to meet them there.

Anyone can midwife the dying. You're holding the space for somebody to transition from one state to another, and the only skill that's required is a deep ability to listen and be present, to accept and receive. Midwifery is an incredible tool for self-development, an art of dying. And this art can apply that to any other area of your life–your work, personal relationships, anything.

Inviting a midwife to come in and help steady the ground so that a family can exhale into the death experience is very helpful. Almost always there is nothing to say to the dying. By the time I'm called, they have had their conversations within themselves. It's mostly the families who have questions to explore and discuss. The one who is transitioning is usually doing okay.

I cannot help but love someone who's dying. Their vulnerable openness and sincerity inevitably help me to meet them there. I find my own life becomes more vulnerably open and sincere. That's why I recommend that everyone midwife at least two or three people through this process, to spiritually prepare themselves for their own death.

KATE MCCALLUM

It is an unbelievable shock that you're going to say goodbye to every little thing, everything,–the sunrise, the sunset, your family, your friends, your hopes, your dreams, to everything. It's like, "What? After all that? What was it all about then after all that effort and it's all just gone?" The bewildered mind will fight with it, bargain with it, and try to make it go away until it's not true. This resistance takes you away from your dying process, which can actually be very sublime. Your last few weeks and months can be experienced in complete and utter surrender to what is, arms outstretched, chest to the sky, mouth wide open going, "Ah." This is a sublime feeling that you rarely, if ever, experienced in your waking productive life. And now you get to. But, unfortunately, few people get there. I don't see it very often.

Being present with the dead is different from being present with someone who is dying. It's different being with the dead body, when it's washed and bathed and laid out naturally. It looks beautiful. This is an illuminating facet of the experience, when two days later you've had a real opportunity to get used to the idea and relax, when you're not in a state of shock or trauma anymore. The body is still there and life feels new. By the third day, 'you can wear it', is what I say, you can wear this awareness like a cape and your life is forever changed.

At first, people can't imagine it. It all seems spooky and weird and way beyond their realm of comfort. But after experiencing this, everyone has said, "I can't imagine doing this any other way. Oh, my God. Thank you so much. I can't imagine her being in a refrigerator somewhere," and, "How would I have slept at night?" and, "Before this I was afraid to sleep in the same room, in the same house as the dead body."All of that goes away, for they now understand how natural and normal and beautiful it is after a lifetime of being told the opposite.

Older people say, "So let me get this straight. When I die my body is going to stay right here, and my husband will be able to see me, right?" And I say, "Yes." "Well, that feels comforting. Yes. I like that idea. Okay. And how long am I going to be here?" And I say, "You'll be here for two or three days," and they go, "I can probably see myself, can't I, after I'm dead?" And I say, "Probably. I don't know for sure. But, I believe so." And this smile comes on their face. They've got a little bit more control now. They know what's going to happen because they know that they're still going to be hovering around their beloved home, instead of looking at their body in a refrigerator somewhere. They'll see their body looking beautiful and they'll be able to come up close and say, "Wow. My body is dead." (laughs). And, "There's my husband." And, "I can put my arm around him."

My biggest teacher last year was a man who did chemotherapy. He drank a spoonful of chemotherapy the day that he died. He was in his late 40s, and the most incredibly conscious man. He was at home with his wife and two kids. He said, "Olivia, if the doctor presents me with this possibility of chemotherapy, even though I can feel every day my body is declining, and I'm probably going to die, who am I to say no thank you to that? If that's crossing my field, I'm just going to say thank you. I don't bank on it working. I don't even hope that it works."

To say no to it didn't feel right to him. But he never leaned upon hope. This man held recovery as a possibility, as just as strong a possibility as he was going to die, neither one had more weight. He didn't say, "Oh, I hope this is going to work. Oh, my God. I hope this is going to work." He wasn't attached to it working or not because he was just as willing to hold the possibility that he was dying. It really didn't matter to him one way or the other.

He had promised his 11 year-old son, "I'm going to do everything possible to stay here with you." And that was important to him. And I think that actually helped him to say yes to the possibility factor of the chemotherapy because it validated to his son, "I'll do anything. I promise you that. I can't promise you it'll work. I can't promise you that I'll live." And I think that was a gift to his son. His son then knew there was no blame.

It could never be, "Oh, my dad gave up. He didn't try. He was going through this new age stuff." His father did everything he could, as he promised, with a smile on his face and acute consciousness.

He was such a powerful teacher to me. They all are.

> Every person is completely different in the way they approach death. We are like snowflakes.

Every person is completely different in the way they approach death. We are like snowflakes. We can't come up with a cookie cutter "this is the way to sit with the dying" because everybody is different, everybody's needs are different. The ability to be able to move and change and ride with them is really a skill beyond judgment, without opinion. It's being able to feel it all, to take it all in, and just be present.

The universal theme is the difficulty, the profound difficulty, in accepting that you're going to say goodbye to everything that you've invested everything in. And to not knowing and being profoundly okay with not knowing. This is very painful to accept unless you have worked at it almost daily throughout your life.

What you thought you were or had dies in the process of the physical body dying–everything. This includes all of the notions, all of the beliefs, all of the opinions about what death is– everything that seemed important or meaningful in any way dissolves. But the ensuing freedom and profound ability to stand in the 'Wow of Existence' is completely beyond anything we've ever imagined.

Rather than becoming a master of dying, I'm left with a sense of "I have died" in the process of exploring this. Limiting definitions of the world have died. It was a bit wobbly for quite a while, but now I've gotten used to being in this state, and it's delicious. The Art of Dying is a complete and profound acceptance of anything and everything. What if I end up on life support for a year? What if I could profoundly accept that too, and lay there with a feeling of arms outstretched, heart wide open, machine breathing for me? I've reached a point where I can. It's fascinating. I never thought I would get there.

Our dying process is fascinating. We enter what is called liminal space, that space between worlds, that space between states of being,. We have not quite let go of our familiar state and we are not quite in the next. The boundaries of reality start to bend and dissolve, and the caregiver who's sitting with that liminal space, unbeknownst to them, is profoundly affected. No matter how strong their own thoughts and opinions, they are being affected. They can't help but be.

I feel like I'm the living dead. I think this is what was meant in the Bible when it says we can have heaven on earth, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." This is how 'it' is done in heaven, this feeling of complete and utter acceptance and love for everything no matter what. That's heaven. We have to do that on earth now. And the only way to do that is to breathe into this awareness while we're still here. Most people spend their whole life asleep, and then they wake up a few days before they're about to die. Death's core inspiration is the spiritual work of letting go of everything now, before our dying process.

From a conversation with John Wadsworth

REV. OLIVIA BAREHAM is a certified Death Midwife, Home Funeral Guide, and Celebrant. She holds degrees in Education and Natural Theology and Sacred Healing. Olivia is the founder of Sacred Crossings–The Institute for *Conscious Dying and Home Funerals* in Los Angeles. For over 12 years, Olivia has guided families in the art of conscious dying and home-based after death care. She recently launched the nation's first alternative funeral home, owned and operated by death midwives, offering natural, sacred alternatives to traditional funeral home practices. Olivia's certificate training program, 'The Art of Death Midwifery', is now offered to students worldwide.

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If society would look at death as a natural experience instead of a punishment, there would be a lot less push back.

I was at a death-friendly party thrown by an author who has written about death. I didn't feel self-conscious about saying what I do for a living. I was sitting across from a couple in their 40's. They asked, "What do you do?" I said, "Well, I run an unconventional advanced planning company called Good To Go. I guide people through their advanced planning paperwork." They were fascinated and kept asking me questions, but the husband would say things like, "So, you do that for people in hospices and senior citizen centers?" I said, "Yes, I've had clients who have been in hospice or clients who know they have a terminal diagnosis, but I mainly target people like yourselves."

"For example, do you have a will? Do you have a living will? If something happened to both of you, who has keys to your place? Who knows to talk to the landlord and sort it all out? Those little things that someone has to know after you die." He was like, "Yeah, but I mean nobody I know is going to have to know that until later." I said, "Oh, well, let me get my pen, so I can write down when you know that date's going to be." His wife kept nudging him with her elbow and rolling her eyes.

He just would not come around to the fact that none of us are guaranteed a tomorrow. We never know when death's going to happen, so why not be prepared now, even if it happens 20 years down the line? But he was convinced that he wasn't going to die. I asked him. "Do you have an earthquake preparedness kit?" He said, "Yeah." I said, "So an earthquake may or not happen to the extent that you would need that kit, but you have it, and yet death is definitely 100% going to happen, and yet you have nothing prepared."

Needless to say, they didn't spend too much time talking to me after that…

JOHN CHAPPLE

My mom died out of the blue. It was completely unexpected. I'd never experienced death on that level before. I'd had grandparents who died when I was very young, but we weren't really that close. Death was new to me. The only experience I'd had with death was from movies or TV.

What they don't ever portray are the death duties – the millions of details that someone has to attend to. I was really close with my mom, so that task fell to me. I didn't know what to do. When I called one of my mom's best friends to let her know that my mom had passed away, she asked, “Do you know if your mom had a will?” I didn't even think of that. Here I am just trying to figure out how to sort through the intensity of my best friend and mom leaving the planet. I was like, "Oh, a will? Oh, gosh. I don't know."

When I flew to Chicago where my mom had died, I walked into her condo, and I thought, ‘Okay. first of all I have to look for a will. Second of all, I have to figure out what bills need paying. What is the name of the electric company in Chicago? I had to be a detective to figure it all out. Luckily mom and I hypothetically talked about dying, “Do you want to be cremated or buried? Like many people, our conversation was almost a joke. She said, "Oh, just cremate me and put me in a mayonnaise jar and set me out for trash day." It's a funny thing, but then you actually have to figure out what's going to happen when her body is cremated. You’ve got to find the best crematorium and know what services they provide. And where’s a mayonnaise jar?

There was no book or guide to help me. I thought, "Am I the only one that has been blindsided by all of these death duties?" I talked to other people. They were like, "Yep. I went through that with my mom," or, "I went through that with my dad," and I thought ‘I need to create a one-stop shopping booklet. Not just the logistics such as the listings of bills, landlord information, insurance policies, and wills. It’s important to create a history of our joys. I love doing mom’s favorite things, whether it's watching her favorite movie or going to her favorite café. Because of my mom, I created Good To Go.

With the Good To Go paperwork, I encourage people to talk to their loved ones about important ‘What If’s.’ What if you died suddenly? What if you had a stroke? What would you want to happen? Things like that. A lot of people have a plan like, "Well, if I have a stroke, and I can't do x, y, or z, take me out in the woods and shoot me.” That's not a plan. That's actually a crime. You need specifics.

A lot of people think that they need to be rich in order to have a will. Death preparedness is for everybody. I'm not rich. I'm single. I don't have a husband, and I don't have kids. But if something happened to me, somebody's got to come into my apartment and figure shit out, you know? I love my friends so much. I’ve addressed everything. Even if it’s “I don’t care what you do with any of my furniture,” that can relieve them of so much death-work and the worry over if they’re doing what I wanted or not.

To most people, thinking about death is morbid. I feel a lot of this aversion comes down to our society that doesn't talk about death as being a transition, just as birth is a transition. If society would look at death as a natural experience instead of a punishment, there would be a lot less pushback. You can have a positive attitude around death, but it doesn't take away the devastation of loss.

> I wasn't thinking it actually gives the dying the peace to let go.

It's ironic that I was one of the first people to benefit from Good To Go. My dad attended one of the early Good To Go parties and filled out all of the information. The next day I went over to his place. We put on 50's music. We ordered pizza. And we went through all of the details. He even wrote his own obituary. He didn't want me to go through what I went through with my mom. The next year he was hospitalized with pneumonia and died.

Before I visited my dad in his hospital room, I went straight to the nurses’ desk and presented his end-of-life paperwork. The doctors and nurses looked at me wide-eyed. They were so grateful. They said, "No one ever does this. It's always up to us to have this conversation."

In the Good To Go video I say, "It'll give you the peace that you don't know you're going to need." I was thinking of the survivors. I wasn't thinking it also gives the dying the peace to let go. I witnessed firsthand that Good To Go helped my dad die peacefully.

With each Good To Go printing, I add client suggestions, so it's expanded to cover pretty much everything. For example, at the onset, I had space to list only doctors. One of my clients said, "You should include dentists because, God forbid, if there's some kind of of tragedy, they may have to identify you by your dental records.”

Pets are given attention in the Good To Go paperwork. Who do you want to take your pet, and have you talked to that person? What if they can't find the pet? What are their hiding places? What are their allergies?

The Good To Go paperwork goes into the everyday details that you're not going to put in a will. You're not going to put your gmail password in a will. You might write it down on a scrap of paper and put it somewhere safe, but again, you’re making your loved ones have to look for it. Good To Go covers everything that a will wouldn't cover.

You learn so much about your friends and family at a Good to Go Party. Even though the subject matter is serious, we don't take ourselves seriously. Nobody leaves a party feeling depressed or gloomy. I would say the overriding feeling is euphoria because they're not dying. They're alive. They're overwhelmed at the amount of information that their loved ones would need. They know they have taken a significant step toward freeing their friends and family to grieve in a positive, healthy way.

From a conversation with John Wadsworth

LAURA HUTCHENS

AMY PICKARD made her living as a freelance TV producer and broadcaster and has written for the Austin American Statesman, London’s Daily Mail on Sunday, BUST and REAL SIMPLE magazine. After her mom’s sudden death in 2012, she experienced a tectonic spiritual transformation and discovered her cosmic calling by creating an unconventional advance planning company called *Good To Go!*. Her mission is to change the cultural narrative on how we view death preparedness, dying and the aftermath…by having a party! She recently drove across America giving Good To Go! pop up parties and experiencing rock and roll epiphanies along the way. She is currently working on a podcast called “Here, There and Everywhere,” interviewing artists about grief, loss and the cosmos. Amy is on a mission to spread the death preparedness message to the mainstream through popular culture and she envisions facilitating G2G! workshops for corporate retreats, creating Virgin Nursing Homes with Richard Branson and getting all of her favorite musicians *Good To Go*!

GOODTOGOPEACE.ORG

Death and Dying in Digital Times

BY JACK CURRY

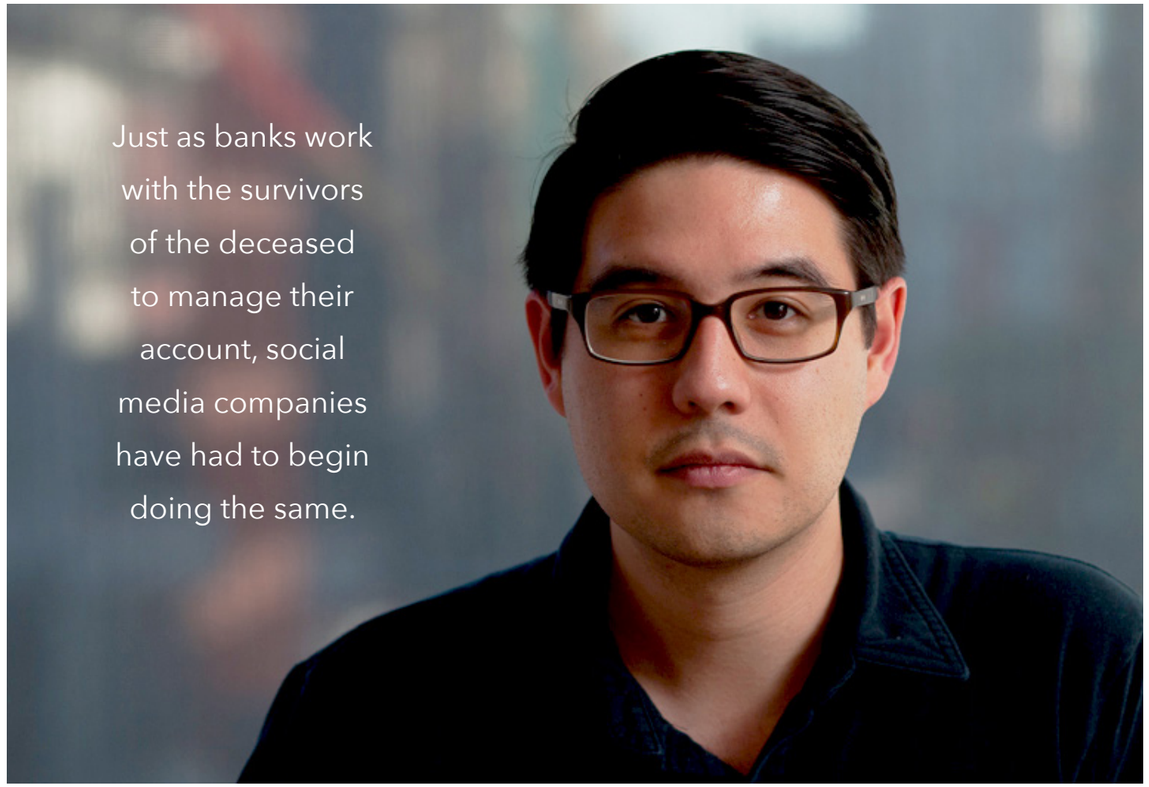
I don't think I'm ever going to die. It's not that I'm unaware intellectually that it'll happen someday, but it's just that I can never picture it happening to myself—*other* people are in the wrong place at the wrong time, *other* people are involved in random freak occurrences. But people forget to look both ways before crossing the street, hammers fall from rooftop worksites, weather patterns converge on towns and cities. It happens every day. What will my moment be?

We tend to be opposed to thinking about our death on a visceral level, and it makes sense—setting aside the spiritual bits, no one wants to dive into the morbid exercise of imagining the moment of their passing and what the world will be like when they're gone. As a result, we tend to think of death as a singular event: one moment, you're here; the next, gone. However, no matter how sudden the event itself may actually be, the process of dying starts far earlier: from deciding what we want to pass on to our loved ones to contemplating what our legacy will be, death isn't a singular event unto itself but rather a series of decisions made long before the inevitable moment.

The end-of-life basics in the Western world—life insurance policies, advance directives, the last will and testament, open or closed casket, burial or cremation—are discrete waypoints that focus on the event of your passing. However, they tell nothing of the process and the thinking that one must go through to arrive at those pieces of paper. And so I wanted to know: what is the experience of confronting your own mortality? What are the decisions that you must make along the way? What are the choices, procedures, and people that you must face? And what are the emerging products, services, and experiences of today that could serve to guide me? I set out to find answers to these questions. Along the way, I discovered how "digital" estates are starting to be managed, that the making of a last will and testament is swiftly being made into an app, and a couple of interesting—some might argue "creepy"—ways in which both the deceased and their survivors send messages across the divide.

MANAGING YOUR LEGACY

The last will and testament is a standby that we're all familiar with, but in a time of digital personage, we've been forced to confront a wider range of "assets," as it were. Services like Cake ask you to consider, among other things, what will become of your social presence and how to set up a designated contact that will be given access to your digital life should the worst occur.



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Just as banks work with the survivors of the deceased to manage their account, social media companies have had to begin doing the same. For instance, Facebook allows you to specify a "Legacy Contact" to administer your account after your passing, while some service providers like Google provide a digital deadman's switch which will notify pre-specified "Trusted Contacts" should your account lay dormant for a specified amount of time.

IF TAXES CAN BE DIGITAL, THEN WHY NOT THE OTHER INEVITABILITY?

Just because more of our assets are becoming digital isn't to say that you shouldn't still have a will, and services that facilitate this and related documents are beginning to emerge. The aforementioned Cake provides links and information for those seeking to start the process, while a service called Willing—whose goal, according to co-founder Eliam Medina, is to make "end of life planning easier, more affordable, and approachable"—will generate your last will and testament based on a simple questionnaire. With an easy and straightforward interface, Willing takes you through several screens where it asks you about your preferences related to your burial, memorial service, individuals to whom you wish to leave your property, and who you'd like to designate as executor of your will. In 10 minutes, I had a fully legal and executable will, albeit a very basic one; more involved measures such as end-of-life directives or granting power of attorney to someone require a paid upgrade.

The easy way out would be to opt for the automated message, but I thought about the recipient and the message that they might someday be on the business end of: would I want it to be dry tech boilerplate, or a true message from me to them?

COMMUNICATING ACROSS THE VOID

While a final will and testament is meant to be a last word, sending messages to loved ones after the fact is also an area that's being explored in both Western and Eastern cultures.

In Otsuchi, a town in northeastern Japan, following the death of a cousin, 70-year old Itaru Sasaki set up a space in his backyard overlooking the Pacific Ocean that would afford him a way to cope. Consisting of an empty phone booth—complete with a phone connected to nothing—it allowed Itaru the space in which to communicate with his cousin over the waves of the wind, hence its name: Kaze no Denwa (The Wind Phone). After the devastation of the 2011 tsunami, others heard about his phone booth and began to make the trek to Otsuchi in order to similarly communicate with relatives that had been lost in the disaster. The Kaze no Denwa was the subject of an NHK documentary in early 2016, the footage of which was recently featured in a full episode of This American Life.

While the Kaze no Denwa gives survivors an avenue to communicate with those that have passed, SafeBeyond is attempting to do something similar in reverse. The service allows its users to save messages and upload messages to SafeBeyond's servers, which can then be sent to their loved ones in a variety of ways, whether it be during special occasions (such as weddings), when they are in a specific geographic location, or on predetermined dates. In addition, the service can manage a user's digital estate, storing things like social media accounts, email addresses, passwords, and digital media files to be passed on after one's death.

WHAT SHOULD WE BE THINKING ABOUT?

Having gone through the process of setting up Google and Facebook's legacy contacts, as well as the questionnaires for Cake, Willing, and other services, I was struck by a few things:

Your circle is smaller than you might think.

We all likely speak and interact with our co-workers and friends on a regular basis, but when questions such as "who will receive your property?" or "to whom should all of your emails and passwords be given?" arise, you might find that the circle of people that you truly trust gets very small, very fast.

Services like online will-builders expect consumers to have an answer at the ready for a question they might never have considered. Instead of asking "who" when it comes to these types of questions, might it actually be more beneficial for these services to ask "why"?

Nothing is too trivial.

Each and every response to a questionnaire or form requires thought and consideration. For instance, when setting up a "Trusted Contact" for my Google account, I was given the option of writing a personal note or simply having an automated message. The easy way out would be to opt for the automated message, but I thought about the recipient and the message that they might someday be on the business end of: would I want it to be dry tech boilerplate, or a true message from me to them? And if the latter, what should it say? Should it be reassuring and comforting; factual and to the point; something in between? When a message has the potential of carrying so much weight, you scrutinize every single character.

While we all are going to know our loved ones best, this can nonetheless be a very difficult topic for people to approach. How can companies that offer these services be sure they're striking an appropriate balance between factual and emotional tones?

Communication is a requirement.

We live in a world where increasingly the most common form of communication is an instant message, and where inference or "saying something without saying something" is how many tend to prefer to speak with one another. But that just doesn't work here: conversations need to be had, wishes need to be made known, and hard and explicit choices need to be made and codified. Technology can help, but in the end it's important to remember that we're dealing with a very human issue. And while services like SafeBeyond afford the opportunity to send selective missives, I'd argue there's no substitute for having these conversations while one is still around; in the end, live is always better than Memorex.

Technology has given us the fantastic ability to communicate with a large social circle—the new frontier might very well be how technology can also begin to help in facilitating some of these more sensitive and intimate conversations.

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I'll be honest in saying that this exercise brought me no closer to feeling at ease with the fact that one day I will cease to exist. I wish I could say that the experience of investigating all of these services has given me more peace of mind, and in some ways it has, but the moment where my life will end is still as incomprehensible to me as it was before; the entire experience was frightening, emotional, and fraught with many decisions that I'd rather not have to confront. However, whereas in the past one was forced into having these difficult discussions over the kitchen table or in the confines of an estate lawyer's office, newer services and ideas—whether digital or in-person—allow for a different space in which to formulate plans, learn about one's options, and find ways to talk with our loved ones about the process of eventually leaving them.

JACK CURRY is a multi-disiplinary designer living in New York City. Working mainly in brand and typeface design, his work often lies at the intersection of observation, culture, and the signified. And while he loves New York City, he's not quite sure if he wants to die there.

We should let dead people look like dead people.

Eloise Woods Community Natural Burial Park is different from a conventional cemetery – everything has to be readily biodegradable. Bodies are not embalmed. We don't use any plastic or metal containers, and there are no concrete grave liners in the soil. Our graves are shallow, and we don't use any upright headstones or allow any plastic or artificial decorations. Everyone has a flat, natural field stone. It doesn't look like a cemetery. It's more like a nature preserve.

Back when everybody was pretty much on the same page, all families had the same idea of how they would show their respect to someone that they loved who had died. It was usually an ostentatious spending of a lot of money buying the most expensive casket for an embalmed body and huge displays of flowers–how much you loved this person was reflected by how much you spent. Now people are realizing that spending a lot of money and hurting the environment is not the best way to honor somebody.

I had never heard of green burial until I saw an episode of Six Feet Under where they portrayed someone having what I considered a beautiful burial ceremony that I wanted for myself and I couldn't get at the time. I immediately knew that this was something I wanted to do. I bought the land specifically for this purpose and plunged ahead, learning everything along the way. Eloise Woods has grown considerably. Funeral directors are getting more requests for green burials and are starting to come on board.

I buried several animals before burying my first person. We've had many people buried with their pets. Sometimes the person is here first and their pet is buried on top of them. If the pet dies first, the person is buried beside their pet's grave.

There aren't any laws about burying animals. For a person, if you're in what they call an impermeable casket, something plastic or metal, you only need to be a foot and a half below the soil. But if you're in something they call permeable, like a shroud, a basket, or anything that water can soak through, then you need only two feet of soil above you.

Wild animals can't smell any further than 18 inches beneath the soil. Someone did a survey asking all the natural burial parks if they'd ever had any animal

JOHN WADSWORTH

disturbances. 100% of the answers were no.

For the last 150 years, it's all been about obscuring the fact that this person has really died. We're not going to let you see that there's a hole in the ground; we're going to cover it with AstroTurf with a big skirt around an automated lowering device. Then we'll cover everything with flowers and wait until everyone leaves to put the dead person into the ground like it's a shameful thing to do. In Eloise Woods we don't see anything negative about dirt. Actually lowering your loved one's body into the ground, seeing what's happening every step of the way, makes it easier to heal.

We should let dead people look like dead people. After sitting with a dead person for a day or so, you can see the changes. You are genuinely convinced that that soul, that personality, is not there anymore. It makes it a lot easier to tuck that person into the earth and say goodbye. I think it's harder to bury somebody embalmed to look like they're alive.

In Texas, families are allowed to care for their own dead. If your person is on hospice care, then that death is considered "anticipated" by the state. It's not a medical examiner case. No autopsy is required. You don't have to call the police. Your first call is to your hospice nurse, who comes over and pronounces the death. Then you're on your own schedule. You don't have to have strange people rushing into your house and zipping your loved one into a black plastic bag and taking them away to who knows where.

They can stay in the bed that they died in. You can wash and care for them. You can have a vigil for as long as you want. People can come by and sit with the body. Sometimes the death can be sudden and traumatic, and you're not ready to hand that person off and never see them again. You can pause and see the person at peace. After a vigil of a day or two, most people are ready to bury the body. Then the family can transport the remains to the burial park themselves. Several families have come to the park with the casket or the shrouded body in the back of their pickup truck or van. They can dig the grave and bury the body themselves. This is very therapeutic, but it takes a team of people, and it's not easy.

It encompasses everything that I love to do—I can be outside all day, I can have my hands in the earth, I can help people with death.

I love seeing and learning about different burial practices. We've buried more Jewish people than any other faith. They've always had green burials. From the beginning, Jewish families assume the responsibility of their own. We've had Wiccan and Native American burials. One of my favorites was a Bahá'í Faith chalk ceremony. A woman was buried in a white shroud. They carried her white shrouded body and placed it on the ground. Then they threw crushed colored chalk all over the shrouded body and each other. Everybody was covered in beautiful colors. It looked like a modern art project.

Some people spend the day sitting around the grave in camp chairs, sharing stories and memories. Others have a quick graveside service and hold a memorial or a celebration of life somewhere else. We let people do whatever they wish, as long as they don't burn the woods down.

I've met several people who are facing their imminent mortality who wanted to explore Eloise Woods and pick their spot. Sometimes they laid down underneath the trees, and looked up to see what their view will be.

I'm so honored to be helping them through this process, because a lot of times their own families don't want to talk to them about it. It's too painful. I'm safe because I'm not an emotional family member. I can actually listen to their fears and how they want to be treated after death.

I make sure people understand that I do not tend the graves. I'm very Darwinian and let nature take its course. If it grows there, it can stay. Some people love all the growth over the graves and some people want no plants. They're welcome to tend the grave themselves. I'm not going to do it because I want it to look like a natural burial park. I'm hoping that in a hundred years Eloise Woods will look like native woodlands.

I have a PhD in neuroscience but I've always been interested in end-of-life issues. I've been working on this project 24/7 for 10 years, and I haven't gotten tired of it yet. It encompasses everything that I love to do–I can be outside all day, I can have my hands in the earth, I can help people with death. I've been hugged by almost every customer and called an angel, so I know I must be on the right path.

From a conversation with John Wadsworth

ELLEN MACDONALD Ellen Macdonald established Eloise Woods Community Natural Burial Park near Austin, TX in 2010. She earned a PhD in Neuroscience from the University of California at San Diego in 1989 and did post-doctoral research at Stanford University on the neurochemical mechanisms of sleep and circadian rhythms from 1989-1995. Ellen now mulches trails, clears brush and buries people and pets. She is also an active volunteer for Hospice Austin, Meals on Wheels and the Funeral Consumer Alliance of Central Texas.

You don't necessarily need everyone else to understand every little meaning behind a photo you make as long as you know what it means for you.

My fiancé, Drew, died when I was 29. We had been together 3 years that week. He died in a helicopter crash, so it was unexpected, sudden. When I looked back, and I've heard many people say this, it feels like a part of us knew. Subconsciously we had a feeling of having a short amount of time together. The way we lived was very spur of the moment, carefree. We just didn't let things get to us. We had every adventure that we wanted to have. There were no regrets. There were no things that we didn't get to do or any of that stuff. It was strange looking back and thinking, 'Wow, we really made use of that time.' I had a lot of regrets about my dad's passing, so to lose my life with Drew and not have any regrets was an odd but incredible blessing.

The trauma of Drew's death ripped everything away. I fortunately had a huge support system that helped give me the space to breathe. For three years I lived with Drew's family and healed. They gave me the chance to figure out what I was going to do and how I was going to rebuild. I had the luxury of not having to worry about paying my bills, which was a huge help.

Creating things was all I had left, all I cared about, all I wanted to do. I couldn't believe that I was still capable of feeling the joy creating brought to me. It was a survival joy. I say survival because after Drew died, I was literally afraid I was not going to survive. I wasn't suicidal or anything like that, but I was afraid that my soul had been so broken that it would never recover and I would just be this shell of a person. About a month after his death I started writing a blog recording memories of him and sharing what I was going through. It was a way to honor him, to keep his presence alive.

My writing ended up tumbling into the portrait series. I had been taking selfies on my phone when I visited Drew at the cemetery. This became a new way to connect with myself. This was a way to acknowledge some of those emotions that I

SARAH TREANOR

Death is an incredibly valuable teacher, an incredibly valuable part of my life.

didn't necessarily want to share through writing. I was taking pictures of what I was feeling.

I was certain that other people who were going through these things would want to share my experience. I started posting a portrait every week, sharing the emotion that inspired the photo.

People resonated with my portraits. Although I'm a writer, it's hard to put everything into words. Sometimes you can say much more with an image. You don't necessarily need everyone else to understand every little meaning behind a photo you make as long as you know what it means for you. Others can interpret it how they want. Opening myself felt so healing. I knew I had to keep pouring it out and letting other people be a part of it. It helped a little bit, a little bit, a little bit at a time.

My mother died when I was 9. That was very hard. My whole life changed. Fortunately certain things like my school stayed the same. That really helped. My dad suffered from alcoholism and had not been very present in raising me. After my mom died, he had to raise me. It was only then that I started to have a relationship with him. Thank God he somehow managed to gather himself enough to quit drinking and start going to AA meetings. It was just the two of us. I was very aware of not having a normal family. I didn't know any other kids who had lost a parent, had divorced or anything. I had a lot of fear around being different.

I was hyper aware of people dying after that. Death was always on my mind. I remember feeling like this couldn't be normal. My dad was also handicapped, so I worried that something would happen to him. I'm often a nervous person. It's taken me a while to realize that the nervousness I have about change and instability comes from that place. I think that I've always had an acute awareness that people you love are going to die. It still affects how I am with people.

There were strong instances, especially the first year and a half, when I felt an especially deep connection with Drew. I was hearing him; I could feel him around me. There were all kinds of experiences that had never happened to me before, not when my parents died, never. I would hear Drew telling me things when I felt really, really stuck. It could just be a simple, "What do I do now?" He would tell me, "Go eat something." It would be very basic. "Just take care of yourself, you don't have to solve it today." My body would get hot with a specific kind of heat. A calm would come over me and I would know Drew was around.

I've had several psychics describe the helicopter crash. They would say, "I'm seeing a rotation of something." I would confirm, "Yes, that's a helicopter." You can't make that up. I was already having my own experiences but to have other people confirm that for me was even more incredible. It almost feels like a secret that you're walking around with. But that's not true. There's this other connection that we, most days, don't know and don't see and don't pay attention to. There are signs all day long, every day, if you're looking for them. It wasn't hard figuring out what those signs are and what our language is. Now I know where to find him. Now I know when he's sending me signs.

Death is what we make of it. Time doesn't heal all wounds, but the choices that we make with that time can transform our experience with death. To me, death is an incredibly valuable teacher, an incredibly valuable part of my life. I wouldn't be the person that I am without death touching my life and challenging me to make creative choices about how to live, and how to create meaning for myself in the midst of it. Our modern society dissects dying from living, death from life. Life doesn't work that way. Life's much richer because of death.

From a conversation with John Wadsworth

SARAH TREANOR has a passion for the meaning behind art. Through her personal work and facilitating others, she encourages the telling of vulnerable stories as ways to heal and connect. Since losing both parents and her fiance, Sarah has evolved her concepts of grief and life through creativity.

For Sarah, creating is about capturing moments of our realities in a way that honors us both as individuals and as part of the whole framework of humanity... "Putting your experiences - good or bad - into something creative gives them new meaning, a voice that has the potential to connect to someone else who has felt the same thing. That's the best moment for me, when something I create taps into someone else's private story and, for a moment, they see themselves within it".

Still, Life

**PHOTOGRAPHY AND
TEXT BY
SARAH TREANOR**

The Gateway

I can't count the times since my fiancé died that I have imagined a place like this… a gateway that could somehow reach across the realms. A place where I could pass into his world, even if just for a moment. How beautiful it will be to share of my life on earth when I return to the ones I love on the other side."

Begin Again

The day he died everything was stripped from me. Nothing has ever made me feel so fully exposed as his death. Even physical nudity does not compare to how naked I felt then.

Unity

I've been shaped by death nearly all my life. Death has challenged me to look at everything differently, of being created from and dissolving back into a unified soul space.

Bleeding the Darkness

This image is about seeing yourself still standing, even though you do not feel like you are there. This is a part of me that is beaten and broken, the part that is in such pain that it's bleeding out darkness from my pores. This is me. This is what my darkness looks like. And I will not apologize for it or hide it away. I will be me, where I am, how I am, as I am.

Surrender

In the journey of grief, to lay in our pain is to lay also within our love. In the raging waters of life, in the pain of a broken heart, there is still a space of peace to be found. I need only be still, and open my broken heart, and love will come through.

Frozen

My idea was to capture the feeling of being trapped, frozen just on the other side of where life exists so lush. Even in the hardest winters of your life – when you cannot feel a thing for how cold you have become and you feel as close to dead inside as possible – you are still alive. Life is always waiting just above the surface. Keep your eyes open and your heart fearless… your spring will come.

Hope

Hope is an incredibly small thing when you are in a very broken place in your life. Hope isn't always easy to see or find amidst the debris of a broken world. I always keep a part of myself reserved – assigned to the job of looking only for hope wherever it can be found. The rest of me can wallow and cry and scream – all 98%… but that other 2% of me must always be looking for hope. No matter how small, no matter where. Find it.

Between Two Worlds

With each wave of new people and experiences, I am left trying to figure out how to balance it all into this one human being that I am. And at times it can feel like the pull of both my new life and my old life are too much to bear all at once. It leaves me right here… right at this image… tied between two worlds.

Death doesn't generalize. Every death experience is different.

JENNIFER SZYMASZEK PHOTOGRAPHY

ELLEN FEIN, LCSW, CTY AND E-RYT500

Ellen works with individuals and groups drawing on both mind-body tools and yoga therapy. She is a Senior Faculty member at the Center for Mind-Body Medicine and Faculty at American Viniyoga Institute. Ellen runs workshops & retreats, and mentors professionals. Her areas of expertise include chronic and life-threatening conditions as well as pain management and end-of-life care.

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After an eight month journey with cancer, the death of my husband Michael at forty-nine along with my own experience with leukemia inspired my deep relationship with death and dying. Death wasn't active in my awareness before these two events.

I identified myself as a cultural Jew, but I never believed in God or anything religious. But when Michael was sick, something awakened within me. I felt a sureness that things would work out the way they were supposed to. I had this very strong image that I was going to lean back into the clouds of the universe and they were going to catch me. And I was going to be held. Where did that image come from? I have no idea.

People offered unexpected support. Some were beloved friends, but many were people we didn't know. People just showed up and knew the right things to do. My new appreciation of community and my awakened spirituality changed me forever.

Michael clearly considered his cancer diagnosis as an assignment, a job; and his job was to live well. It became easy to choose what mattered; to give up the garbage, both between us and in our relationships with others. All the irritating patterns of behavior in our relationship were gone, just gone. When he went into hospice, Michael shared his heartbreak about not watching our daughter grow up. There wasn't much conversation about where he was going or what was next for him. I felt very strongly that I was helping him to leave, that I was his guide.

Towards the end, when Michael was in that pre-death state that often alters consciousness, he had funny dreams. He told me there was a soup kitchen where he was going and my grandmother worked there. She was a classic Jewish "feed you" kind of person. It was perfect that she was there for him.

Three years after Michael's death, I was diagnosed with leukemia.

Part of my treatment was stem cell transplant. The transplant center offered yoga classes. Yoga had helped me through my traumatic grieving process, but this wasn't like any yoga I knew. I was feeling horrible; I was on steroids; and my mind was agitated. But during that class hour, I settled into a quiet place. It was remarkable. Nothing else, including drugs, could make that happen for me. I didn't know what this yoga was but I thought, 'If I live through this, I am going to find out.'

The class was called Viniyoga. I made arrangements to spend five consecutive days studying with Gary Kraftsow, the Director of the American Viniyoga Institute in Santa Monica. He spent those five days getting to know me in what I now understand is a typical yoga therapy assessment. He wanted to know about my external and internal structure, my physiology, my philosophy of life, and how I used my mind. I went home with a practice unlike anything I had expected. That was my first exposure to yoga therapy. I was already offering cancer coaching services and wanted to add Viniyoga to my cancer coaching repertoire so I took every course Gary offered and became a certified yoga therapist. Yoga therapy is designed to instill balance on every level-physiological, mental, emotional and spiritual.

I've seen people change over the course of their dying process. And I've seen people hold onto fearful attitudes until the end. One patient was an accomplished artist. Her belief was when you die there's nothing left– you just go into the ground. The idea of that terrified her and she fought and fought to stay alive. I also worked with a judge who felt he had committed a terrible sin and converted to Catholicism. Although a priest gave him final rights, he was afraid he was going to hell. The artist was afraid she was going to nothing. Death doesn't generalize. Every death experience is different.

I work with what people can relate to. I don't impose how one should think about death. I work with how they think about death. I teach meditations that reveal to each patient their own way within. I tell the dying that they have a new mantra: "This is not my problem." I tell them that now their only job is just to let go, to find as much peace as they can and just let go. Stop thinking about worldly things that no longer matter.

As we talk, we realize that perhaps death isn't the negative thing we have been conditioned to think it is. Death brings the beauty of life into sharp relief. Death empowers us to live consciously and from the heart. Death brings us together and inspires conversations that help us put fear aside as we support each other.

I am so grateful to be of service and receive so much from students and clients. The complete mutuality of this work is truly remarkable. I could never have imagined work where I am giving and simultaneously fed. I am not here to fix anything, but rather to hold space with an open heart; to be a mirror for those I work with, to offer what helps from my toolbox of knowledge.

I feel if I dropped dead today, I'm ready. There's nothing unsaid. There's nothing undone. Yes, I'm ready.

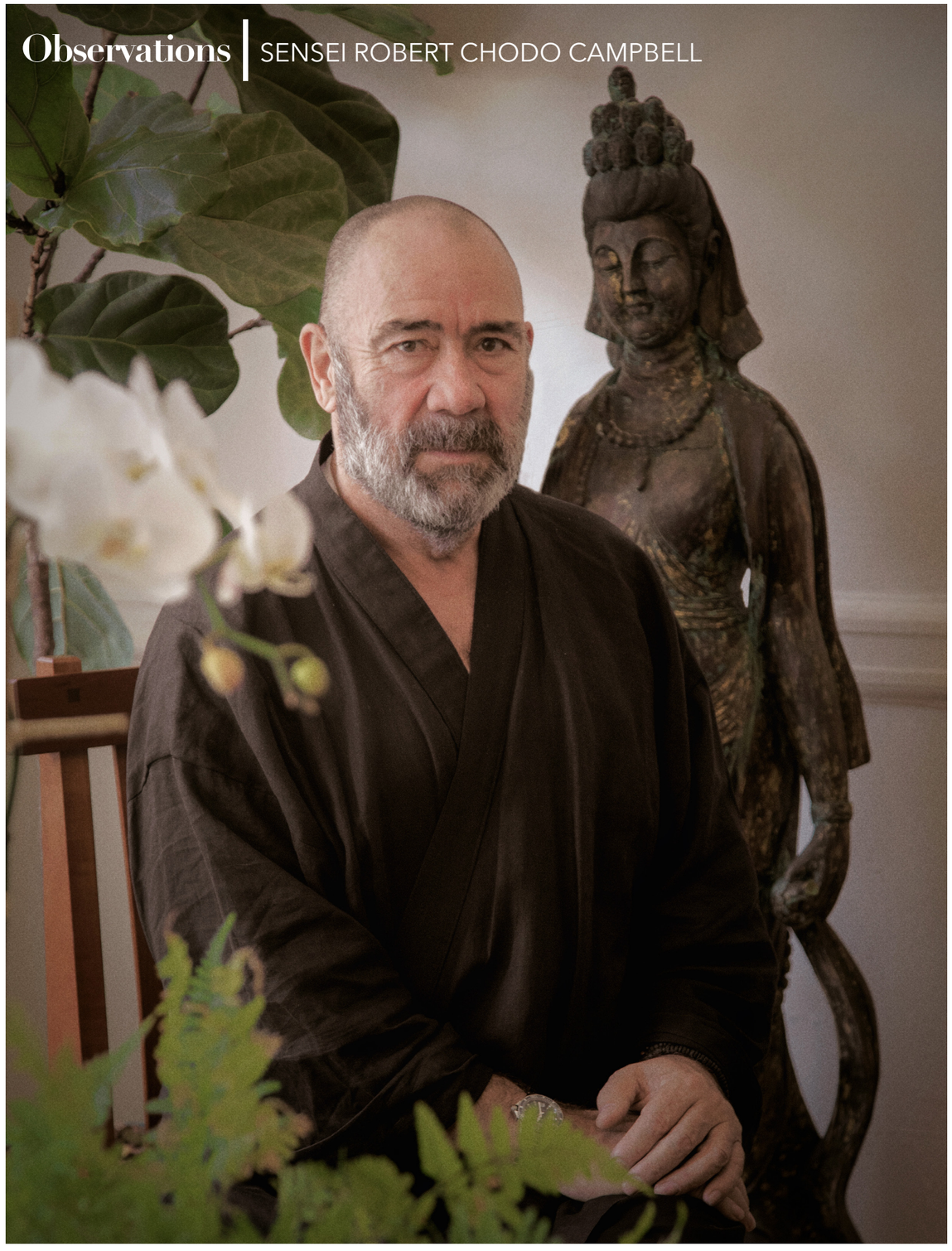
From a conversation with John Wadsworth

A QUOTE FROM ONDIS, A PATIENT:

I feel that my yoga practice with Ellen is a practice for dying. The idea of meeting your death in as calm a way as possible. It's consciously embracing death and what is beyond. Practice for dying is not allowing yourself to be overcome by panic or negative thoughts when you go. but going elegantly, in peace. Yoga reminds you that life is not just about this physical body, that your spirit goes beyond this porous body. I encourage older people to take up yoga. Yoga is not exclusive to people who have physical attributes that allow them to twist themselves like a pretzel. Yoga can be what you personally need.

"Pretend for a moment that you are a child,
and I am trying to undertake the particular chore
of explaining to you
what your most developed adult self will be like -
and in my explanation,
I say that this adult self is to some extent part of you,
an outgrowth, or projection of what you are.
And the child says
"But what will happen to me?
Must I die to become this other self?
I do not want to change.
How can I ever be this adult self,
when it is not what I am now,
without dying as what I am."

SETH



JOHN WADSWORTH

When we can see death as ordinary, as a natural occurrence, then we see the extraordinary.

I've been working in the field of caregiving for over 30 years, as a volunteer for suicide and AIDS hotlines and with the Manhattan Center for Living where I worked with folks who were HIV infected. I've been working professionally with those who are suffering, ill, or transitioning towards death for 17 years.

Palliative care, when applying its full potential, includes someone from a spiritual background. More and more palliative care departments are hiring chaplains. It depends on the funding. Most heads of palliative services acknowledge the presence of a chaplain or other spiritual caregiver to be very, very important.

To become a chaplain requires 1,600 hours of clinical and academic study. Part of the training is that you don't bring your agenda. Chaplains are meant to be interdenominational. You're there to serve everyone. This can be a self-transforming career path. My path was to become a Zen priest.

My Zen practice enhances my chaplain training, but I don't enter a room as a Zen priest. I enter without an agenda. Folks see this big guy dressed in black, with this big Irish face, and often think I'm a priest. They see me and are like, "Well, hello."

One has to spend, if possible, many hours with a patient over the course of days and weeks, in order to establish a close connection. Palliative care clinicians have a lot to cover, whereas a chaplain or priest has the luxury of spending more time with patients. That's not to say that hospice workers and nurses don't have the same empathy and compassion. Again, it's the luxury of time, particularly in a hospital.

A difference between myself and a nurse being with a dying person is that I'm looking at the whole person, their whole history. I can see more than an 87 year old woman who's dying. I can see her as a baby, a little girl, a young woman. When I feel that sense of the whole person, from birth to death, there's such an opportunity for an opening into the person's soul, a shared experience much greater than that of just being present during their last days.

Most of what is significant to these relationships is shared in silence. You don't try to translate it into words. You just know it's there. And it's different every time. It could be through the slightest touch

of your hand that they feel you're with them, that you care. That you care enough to touch them; that you care enough to look into their eyes and maintain contact– because that's something most of us don't do. I try to do that all the time. To look into their eyes, their face. Maybe their breath smells and their mouth is dry or any of the other stuff that can happen when someone's dying. Maybe they don't look so pretty, but to me, they're beautiful.

It's not just the person in the bed who needs attention. It's the whole family. They're bearing witness to this life that's fading, and they're going to have their own feelings and their own heartbreaks and whatever other emotions come up. How do we work with a 360 degree awareness of what's happening in the room? Who's crying? Who's next to the bed? Who's by the door and doesn't want to come into the room? Who is out of the room and not present to anything? How do we look at the whole constellation?

Sometimes I'll say, "Why don't you come close to the bed and hold your dad's hand? It'd be really great for both of you." They may say, "I don't want to touch him." Okay. Everyone has their limits, but often times, people don't realize that it's okay to touch the dying person. You can hold them, you can stroke their hair. It's beautiful. Touching is one of the most meaningful gifts you can offer the dying.

One of the most important things that I impart to my students is that death is very ordinary. When we can see death as ordinary, as a natural occurrence, then we see the extraordinary. We can't see the extraordinary until we acknowledge the ordinary.

Through this deep connection, the dying person and I share a knowing that something sacred, something otherworldly is occurring, particularly when the dying person has conversations with someone who's not in the room.

SEAN KERNAN

Death's one universal thread is its mystery.

When one of my oldest friends, John, was dying, he had a conversation with someone I could not see. I said, "Who are you talking to, John?" He said, "I'm talking to my mom." I said, "Alice?" He said, "No, my mom." I said, "Alice was your mom." He said, "No, Alice was my stepmom. My mom died in childbirth. She's telling me that she's waiting for me."

Who's to say that John's conversation was not real? I would never for a moment think that it was an illusion. One can call it dementia. One can call it a hallucination. But this experience transcends medical terms. It's something very sacred and mysterious.

In Buddhism, from the day we're born we're preparing to die. Suzuki Roshi said that in his meditation practice of following the breath, he spent an extra moment on the out breath. That was his preparation for death. We will all die on the out breath.

Death's one universal thread is its mystery. Whether we believe there's an afterlife, whether we don't believe there is an afterlife; I have a theology, I don't have a theology; I'm Buddhist, I'm Christian– however we do it, it's still a mystery in that moment.

I hope that after all the work I do in meditation and witnessing beautiful peaceful deaths that a beautiful, peaceful death will be my experience. But it may not be. I've seen people who die very angry or die in pain. That could be my karma. I like to think that I will be unafraid. Who knows?

From a conversation with John Wadsworth

SENSEI ROBERT CHODO CAMPBELL co-founded the New York Zen Center for Contemplative Care, which delivers contemplative approaches to care through education, direct service, and meditation practice. He is part of the core faculty for the Buddhist Track in the Master in Pastoral Care and Counseling at NYZCCC's education partner, New York Theological Seminary, and teaches in the University of Arizona Medical School's Center for Integrative Medicine's Integrative Medicine Fellowship. His passion lies in bereavement counseling and advocating for change in the way our healthcare institutions work with the dying; his public programs have introduced thousands to the practices of mindful and compassionate care of the living and dying.
WWW.ZENCARE.ORG

> To have a beloved you have to imagine the beloved.

Alex: We are two artists collaborating in love. Our collaboration is the Third Force, a creative angel that manifests something greater than either of us could accomplish on our own.

You can't think of Laurel without Hardy, Gilbert without Sullivan.

William Blake's wife, Katherine, was his beloved. They were twin flames.

The monumental sculptor, Christo, collaborated throughout his career with his wife, Jean-Claude, who said, "I don't draw. We work together on everything else."

Memorable collaborations are actually rare. Ours is more than gender balance. Our consciousness expands and cooperation is valued over competition.

Every work of art reflects the artist's values and character. All artists that are most remembered, Michaelangelo, DiVinci, Van Gogh – leave profound traces that keep their souls alive in us.

The imagination is the bridge that unites you with transcendental Divinity, a connection with the beloved beyond the body. To have a beloved you have to imagine the beloved. You become enchanted by your imagining of this person.

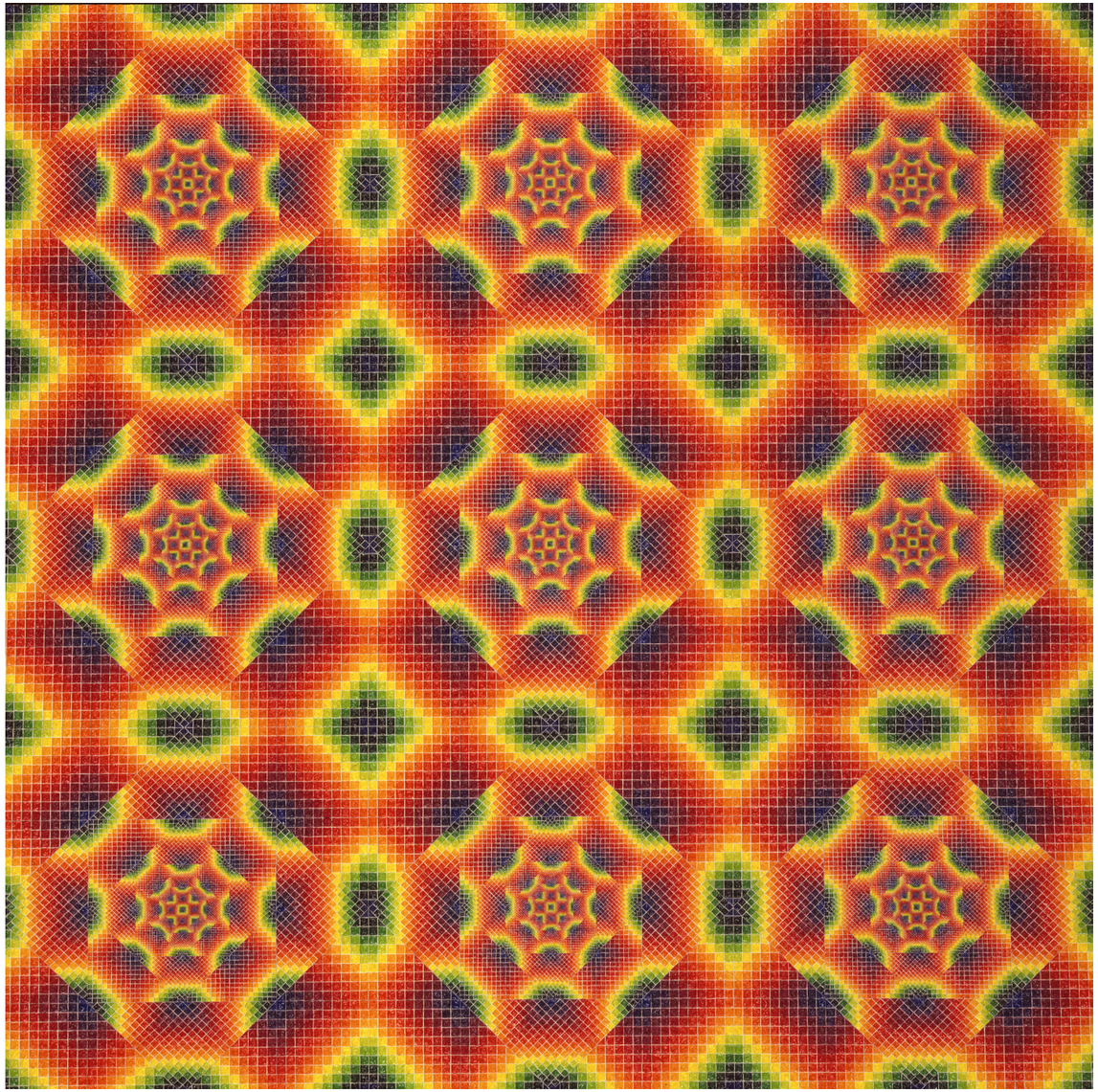
JOHN OHIA

You don't have to be Visionary to hold the power of love sacred, but, to have love you have to have imagination.

Anyone can meditate and imagine a transcendental ground of being as emptiness, a vast expanse of voidness. The origin of the transcendental realm beyond form is a mystical insight throughout world religions. As that field opens, it also embodies qualities of wisdom, compassion and completeness. There is a way to access oneness through the ground of every manifest thing. A student attained instant enlightenment when he witnessed Buddha lift a flower.

You don't have to be Visionary to hold the power of love sacred, but, to have love you have to have imagination.

Ocean of Love Bliss by Alex Grey ▸



Swedenborg believed there is an afterlife very much like our own where spirits live in cities you can visit if you are sensitive to that alternate reality. Communication is possible. Receptive, creative people commune with spirits. I had to be willing to hang out with suffering spirits to open up to Divine possibility, to imagine and conceive continuity beyond the body.

Through Visuddhimagga, the Path of Purification, Allyson and I learned about the power of sky burials and meditating on rotting corpses. We were inspired by the exquisite depictions of the Nature of Mind in Tibetan Buddhist thangka paintings.

Allyson: *Meditation on Mortality*, our 1980 performance, ritualized our wedding. I was covered in white grease paint, Alex in black. We embodied Yin and Yang. Through deep embrace, body upon body, we symbolized our ability to connect beyond duality, to transcend whiteness and blackness, light and darkness, life and death. We became Grey.

For the first ten years of our relationship I lost sleep with anxiety over our separation by death. One night, lying on our bed together with our eyes closed, neither talking nor touching, we took a therapeutic dose of MDMA and all of that anxiety went away. We simultaneously shared the same psychedelic vision: an experience of the "Universal Mind Lattice." Our shared consciousness no longer identified with nor was limited by our physical bodies: We each felt this state to be our purified essence. "I" was one particular point in the vast network, aware of "my" unique relationship with all points in the field.

We both realized our vital connection with all beings and things in the visible and invisible Universe, with God. We felt that death was not to be feared because the Light was our spiritual core and we would eventually return to the profoundly transcendent bliss of this lattice realm. I knew I was alright, I knew Alex was alright and I knew that HE knew that I was alright. I thought, 'Whoever survives should repeat this experience.' Psychedelics and MDMA help relieve all sorts of suffering, often permanently after only one journey.

"We both realized our vital connection with all beings..."

◂ Jewel Net of Indra by Allyson Grey

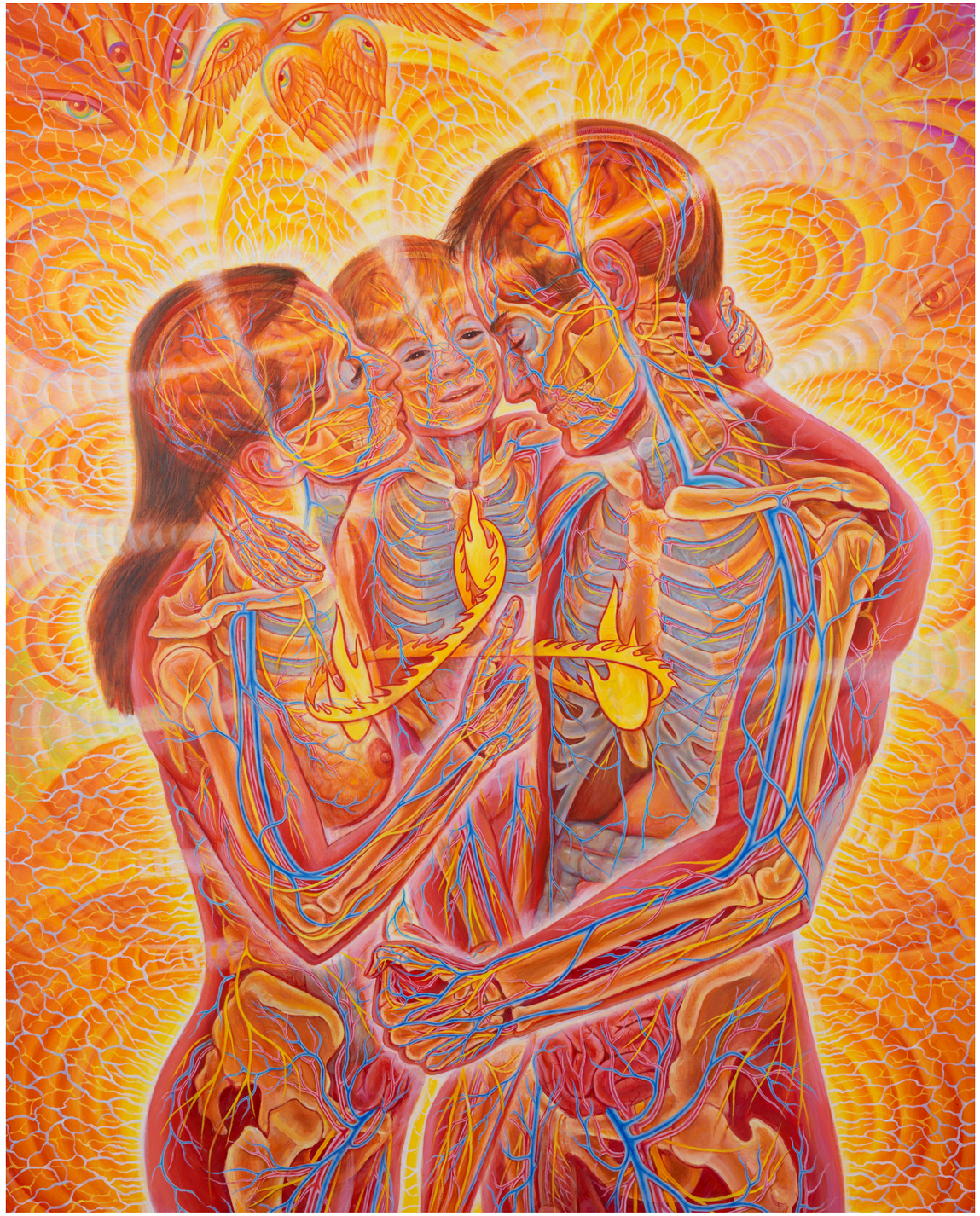
> Love is deathless, a continuous interplay of journeys.

Alex: The Universal Mind Lattice is our shared experience of the ground of ultimate love. We were each an individual node in a vast love network with access to multiple lifetimes, able to savor each one like works of art, a thread through the beads of lifetimes. Love is deathless, a continuous interplay of journeys.

Allyson: Our awakening happened when we first independently saw God.

Recognition of having Found the One happened when we shared our experiences of God contact. Our Universal Mind Lattice experience affirmed our ability to be in the same mind space in an alternate reality.

Universal Mind Lattice by Alex Grey ▸



Love Circuit by Alex Grey

Death is the end of our job, a journey from this to the next plane of existence. How fortunate Alex and I have been. Our love is eternal. Holding on is to suffer. When and what will happen next is God's secret. Death is the precipice over which we cannot see, until we die.

I have experienced a past life in which Alex was not a part. I died of starvation as a poor small child. In this life, I was given the chance of a life in joy and abundance.

A young couple asked Buddha, "We are so sad when we think that someday one of us will die and leave the other." Buddha told them that if they lived their lives together following the same path, there was a chance they'd be reborn as one person."

Alex: When death comes I will probably be surprised. I don't look forward to death because we have so much work to do together in this dimension.

As dark as I get now, I would be way darker if I were the one left on earth.

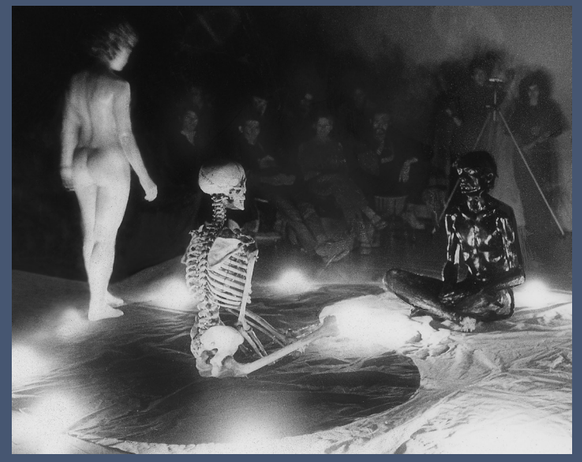
Separated by death, I'd be lonely without my beloved and would try to communicate with her beyond the grave.

I wish we could continue our journey together in a constant braid of souls, particularly with our daughter and many of the people closest to us. Socrates hastened his death because he was curious. He had an open mind and was ready to check it out.

Allyson and Alex: We take what God wants to give. We are grateful to have had the perspective of the Universal Mind Lattice to guide us. At our best, we live in the light of that experience.

From a conversation with John Wadsworth

Holding on is to suffer.



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ALLYSON AND ALEX GREY The mystic paintings of Alex Grey articulate realms of psychedelic visionary consciousness, revealing interwoven energies of body and soul, love and spirit, illuminating the anatomical core of each being. Alex's visual meditations on the nature of life and consciousness, the subject of his art, have reached millions through his five books including three monographs, the exhibition and extensive reproduction of his artwork, speaking appearances including a popular TED talk, stage sets for major rock bands, video animation, and Grammy award-winning album art.

Allyson Grey is a painter and social sculptor. She has been Alex's creative collaborator, life-partner and studio mate since meeting in art school in 1975. Allyson's paintings represent chaos, order and secret writing, an essentialized world view symbolizing the material world, the interconnected realm of energy and light and the sacred language of creative expression. With an MFA from Tufts University, Allyson has long been an art educator, art events organizer and a muse to artists worldwide. allysongrey.com

Together, the Greys co-founded the Chapel of Sacred Mirrors, (CoSM; cosm.org), a spiritual creative retreat center outside of New York City. On the forefront of a movement in which painters join musicians on stage, the Greys have painted together live before tens of thousands of dancing young people at New York Broadway theaters, at sold-out festivals and arenas in dozens of cities across five continents. As long-time advocates of "cognitive liberty," a growing international "sacramental culture" has embraced the Greys as important mapmakers and spokespersons for the visionary realm. The Greys, with their team, are currently building Entheon, a Visionary Art sanctuary in the Hudson Valley of New York.

NSTAGRAM: @ALEXGREYCOSM // @ALLYSONGREYCOSM // @CHAPELOFSACREDMIRRORS
FACEBOOK: @ALEXGREYCOSM // @ALLYSONGREYART // @SACREDMIRRORS

A Death Meditation

PAINTINGS AND TEXT BY ALEX GREY

Go within Noble Soul.
Find that God is in your heart
Open the eyes of your heart
And see that I AM.
I AM with you always.
You can never be lost.

◂ "CARING"

I rest in the throne of your chest

Until time to depart the body.

Then I rest in the throne of Heaven.

Can you hear me?

"DYING" ▸

Friend, recognize you are already home,
Already you have taken your seat
Among the elect.
You elect yourself to the Glory seat
By becoming God Conscious Now.
Godself sits on the throne
On earth as in Heaven.
The Garden is Heaven on earth.
Wake up and see,
You are already in the Garden

"THE SOUL FINDS ITS WAY"

Art of Dying®

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