

Commentary...

Am I ready? Facing death and grief

By Katy Yoder
Correspondent

This spring, I read Willa Cather's novel "Death Comes for the Archbishop." I first read it in college and loved her writing, but the subject matter and message didn't hit home the way it does now. When I chose that book many months ago, I had no idea how relevant the title would be in my life. I didn't make the connection until 3:33 a.m. in the morning, when I woke up and had to write about this often-avoided topic.

Willa Cather describes the lives of several characters, the blessings they gave and the pain they caused. Some of the suffering wasn't their fault, but most was due to their misguided actions that had consequences — for them and the people around them. As the characters aged, their pasts came into sharp focus and their decisions about how they'd like to live out their remaining years became incredibly important.

Death has been a regular visitor lately. And once again, it's coming. As I take part in the imminent transition of a loved one, I'm reminded of the fact that we all make the journey. The question is am I prepared for it? And in this case are my loved ones prepared for it? Even if the thought of talking about death brings a pain in the chest and tightening of the throat, that panic must be overcome and

put in its place. Otherwise, opportunities will be missed and the pain of regret will linger long after death has taken its quarry.

When our animals are nearing the end, it's up to us to take over and ease them into final rest. For most people, that's not an option. There's planning to be done, regardless of age or our current health. There's advanced directives and for Oregonians, death with dignity which, if started in time, allows a terminally ill person the option to shorten their suffering and end their life. The key is to make these plans long before an illness takes hold. Death has its own timetable and it's easy to be caught off-guard and unprepared for important questions about how we'd like our death to go.

When I woke, so early that morning, I heard these words: "Hope for the best, prepare for the worst, and then let it go. In the end, we're not in charge anyway." But there are things we can do to prepare for the final journey. Most of us take more time planning for a trip than preparing for death.

We've got to "pack" for this one too. Hopefully, preparation begins long before it's an emergency. Considerations abound, not just what we need to do with our possessions, money and logistics. There's even more important questions to be answered like have we forgiven ourselves for past mistakes? And have we

forgiven those we feel have wronged us? Is there anything important we've wanted to do and have been putting off? Regrets will be there in the end, no matter what, but for those we can heal now, why wait?

Looking back over my life, I'm asking where I see a need for healing; for myself and others. A big one for me right now is, am I fulfilling my life's purpose? What blessings have I been given that are meant to be shared with others? How can I best share those gifts? The saying, "If not now, when?" Comes to mind often. And as I witness the passing of a life well-lived, I wonder if I would be at peace, or if I would lay there wishing I'd done those things I meant to do.

I teach a class on death and grief to high school students with women much more qualified than myself. The main reason I'm there is because I have lived through cancer. Fellow teacher Diane Goble has written books on dying and her own near-death-experience. Her book, "Beyond the Veil, Our Journey Home," is a handbook for those who choose to get prepared for the journey we will all take. It covers important topics like the steps we can take to ensure our wishes are known and followed when we are making our transition out of our physical body and back into the spiritual realm.

Her book also asks

important questions for lives still in progress. To face these questions is to face our mortality, and that is hard to do. For some it's close to impossible, and they will wait until it's too late. Ignoring death will not hasten its coming, but eventually the day for our departure will arrive. The question is will we be ready to go when it does?

It's not my intention to be a downer and depressing. I'm no expert but I've noticed that there's a sense of peace that comes with facing uncomfortable topics. At first it's scary, but once the door has been opened most people feel relieved when it's been addressed. Taking the time to write down your advanced directive eases anxiety for loved ones and removes doubt about what's the best course of action. It's an act of love and a gift for those who will guide and care for you until you begin the next great adventure. Until then, let's all laugh, love, give often and take full advantage of the blessings we've been given.

Officer shoots dog at Rainbow festival

CANYON CITY, Ore. (AP) — A U.S. Forest Service officer shot and killed a pit bull at the Rainbow Family gathering in Eastern Oregon.

The Forest Service says the officer was counting cars in a parking lot Tuesday when he saw two unleashed dogs. One of the dogs charged and was shot once. The dog died at an animal hospital in Canyon City.

An independent investigator will investigate the incident that sparked an angry reaction from the dog's owners and other attendees.

The counter-culture peace gathering began in 1972 and occurs each year in a different national forest.

As many as 20,000 people are expected for this year's festival in the Malheur National Forest.



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