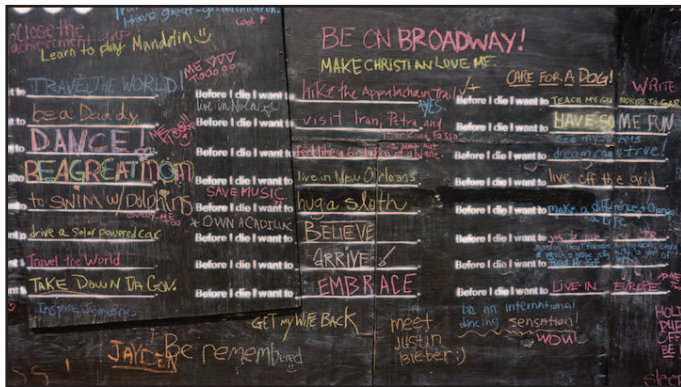


Living on a Lake in the Country: Before I die I want to...

By Gayle Rich-Boxman

Living out in the country has many rewards and I love living in it. It has inspired me to change careers, and live my passion, to be freer and happier. Living in the city also has rewards—like being able to see live performances of inspirational speakers in a jam-packed room, filled with other like-minded people. Living 90 minutes from the city affords less opportunity for that. However, with the internet, you can bring some of those inspirational speakers right to your dining room table for a one-on-one conversation.

That's how I found Candy Chang recently. She was a speaker for "Ted Talks, Ideas Worth Spreading", which are live/taped presentations on the internet that are less than six minutes long that are empowering, impactful and sometimes life-changing. The title of her presentation was "Before I die..." which immediately intrigued me. Candy is an artist who lives in New Orleans. Something that she has in common with those of us who live in



Vernonia, Birkenfeld and some of those outlying areas on or near the Nehalem River, is that she saw firsthand the devastation and aftermath of a flood in her city. She personally knows how it can change the face of a community forever. How it changed the face of many buildings in her city, leaving them to sit abandoned for years. How painful that can be to look at as a reminder of life and how fast it can change.

This brings me to Candy's simple and very inspirational idea. She took an abandoned building and by simply stenciling the phrase, "Before I die I want to _____" on the side of a building, along with making chalk available, it instantly became a giant chalkboard, allowing anyone to write

the rest of the sentence in their own words, sharing with their community their wishes, dreams, aspirations. It is a way to reach out to others who see it and maybe console, inspire or just make someone chuckle.

This experiment done on an abandoned building in her own neighborhood in the post-floods of New Orleans took off and is now done around the world from South Africa to Australia, Argentina, Chile, Germany, China and beyond. She and her colleagues now offer a simple and inexpensive tool kit for doing this along with easy-to-follow guidelines.

Here in the Vernonia area following our own devastating flood, we banded together as a community—as one collective—to save community and eventually bring it back to thrive, yet some of buildings are still damaged-looking... a constant reminder of what happened.

This gave me an idea of what I want to do before I die... have an impact on my community. That being said, I feel that having this "giant chalkboard" would be such an easy way to open up the lines of communication in our community of Vernonia for people of ANY age to take a moment to reflect on their lives and write down what they would like to do before they die. This is a way to look at LIVING by reflecting on dying. To live every day like it counts. AND to inspire those around us by sharing our dreams.

How shall I accomplish this? This is where you come in.

I am looking for a building that is in a prominent and accessible place. A location that will be seen by those who are coming and going through Vernonia who will have the opportunity to write their own wishes to share with neighbors as well as visitors to our town. To show the spirit of this community. To beautify, to



express. I was also thinking that it would be wonderful to have one of our community artists paint a mural on the building as well.

What are your thoughts about this idea? I would love to see if someone would be interested in allowing us to use the side of their abandoned building to "bring it back to life." Also, possibly put together a committee and choose an artist from those who would send us their idea of what they would do on the side of the building. Get the city planning people involved.

As Candy said, "Our public spaces can be powerful if we are given an opportunity to have a voice and share with one another."

As the world watched what happened to us and how well we have recovered, maybe we can show the world with our local voices how to inspire others who've also had this happen and how they, too can have a collective voice in their community's recovery!

Please contact Gayle Rich-Boxman at (503)755-2905 or e-mail me with your thoughts and ideas at: richbox@centurytel.net

If you would like to view artist and community activist, Candy Chang's talk about her "Before I die" experiment, you can go online to: http://www.ted.com/talks/candy_chang_before_i_die_i_want_to.html

How would YOU finish this sentence?

Before I die I want to _____

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