

Virus death: ‘Get vaccinated if you can. Just don’t let this get too far’

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vaccine outside of emergency authorizations — would have swayed him. More, it seemed he didn’t think the virus would affect him.

His youngest daughter, Sierra Hodges, didn’t learn he was unvaccinated until after he was hospitalized.

She asked him why.

“He said he’d never thought it would get him,” she said.

Mother and daughter say they have to resist playing “what if” scenarios now — for their own sakes — as they figure out how to grieve.

Still, Hodges said, “I’m almost hurt, like why wouldn’t you take that opportunity to help yourself? I can’t help but think if he’d gotten (the vaccine), he wouldn’t be dead. ... If he’d gotten it, maybe he could be here with us.”

She hopes people who hear about her father will take the pandemic seriously. She took it seriously from the beginning, she said, wearing masks before they were required, but she knows others did not.

“Take care of yourself,” she said. “When they say quarantine, quarantine. Get vaccinated if you can. Just don’t let this get too far. Watch your symptoms and get help if you need it.”

“I don’t want anyone else to suffer through this,” she added. “It’s an ugly thing, a painful and ugly thing.”

Julie Stallsworth said she knows of more than a dozen people who decided to get vaccinated after learning of her husband’s death and hearing what the family had endured.

One of Stallsworth’s doctors in Portland urged Julie: You have to keep telling that story.

It’s not a role she really wants to play.

“But,” she said, “if people want to talk to me about Ted, I’ll talk all day about Ted.”

‘He understood that we were better together than on our own and isolated’

Raised in Medford, Stallsworth had a difficult childhood and struggled with drug and alcohol addictions as an adult. He got clean in the mid-1990s and settled in Seaside and, later, Warrenton.

He started Pro-Fresh Carpet Care and, with Julie, raised four children. He served as a reserve officer with the Warrenton Police Department for seven years. He loved to fish and hunt. He rarely took a break. Personal space was for other people, family and friends say. He’d talk and talk and talk, but he’d also listen.

“He understood that we were better together than on our own and isolated,” said Jerry Gaidos, a police chaplain.

Warrenton Police Chief Mathew Workman called Stallsworth “extremely dedicated.”

Stallsworth put in “hundreds of hours on patrol and at community events and was



Photos by Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian
ABOVE: Nearly 200 people attended Ted Stallsworth’s memorial service. **LEFT:** Brandon Stallsworth speaks about his father, Ted, at a memorial service. He carried an oxygen tank with him due to contracting COVID-19 and pneumonia.

ried, but she thought about how a high percentage of virus patients with mild cases get better after 10 days. If anyone needed to take 10 days off and relax, it was her dad, she thought.

But Stallsworth’s condition worsened. He was hospitalized at Columbia Memorial Hospital in Astoria and then had to be flown to Portland for care, according to family members. He was on a ventilator and other life-sustaining measures.

Goodbye

On Aug. 16, one of Stallsworth’s doctors called Julie. You need to bring your family together, the doctor told her. Ted wasn’t likely to last the week.

On Aug. 19, the family prepared to say goodbye. Under visitor policies at Legacy Emanuel Medical Center, only two people at a time could go into Stallsworth’s room. Hodges knew she wanted to be there when the machines were turned off. Through her work as a caregiver, she has been with several people when they died, so she knew she would be able to handle it.

She also knew if she left her father’s hospital room and he was still breathing, his heart still beating, her brain might accept his death, she said, but “my heart would have told me he was still alive.”

Stallsworth’s room looked like any standard hospital room. There was a bed and a bunch of machines. Hodges hadn’t seen her father in three

weeks and she wasn’t prepared for what he looked like. He had been heavily sedated for a long time. He was pale, bloated. His muscle mass was gone. He was covered in tubes and wires, difficult to reach, especially for someone short like Julie. Looking at him, Hodges realized her mom wouldn’t be able to kiss him while he was still alive.

THE VIRUS THAT KILLED STALLSWORTH HAS KILLED MORE THAN 600,000 PEOPLE IN THE UNITED STATES TO DATE — 13 IN CLATSOP COUNTY AS OF EARLY MONDAY.

She went into “nurse mode” — a reaction to her fear, she says now. She asked the nurses to adjust Stallsworth’s bed, lower the railing on one side, move some of the wiring and cords.

When they turned off the respiratory machines, Hodges watched the heart monitor with the nurse. She saw the little bumps marking Ted’s heart beat become smaller and smaller — the

heart beat getting flatter and flatter — until there was only a flat line. It had barely been two minutes.

She laid her head on her dad’s chest.

Stallsworth’s mother killed herself when Ted’s third child was very young, but Barber said her death marked him for the rest of his life. He couldn’t seem to accept it.

“He carried it right on his chest,” Barber said.

There was a lot of anger — anger she feels she’s inherited from him along with, she hopes, his charisma, his sense of humor, his genuine desire to help everyone, anyone. She never felt so safe as when she lived in her father’s house.

At Stallsworth’s memorial service, Brandon Stallsworth said it wasn’t until he was a teenager that he began to understand all the things his father was trying to overcome. Stallsworth, Brandon realized, was actively learning how to be a husband and a father, how to be a good man.

Stallsworth never did hard drugs again, but over the years, he still slid back into alcohol at times. It wasn’t always easy in the Stallsworth household. Ted’s anger could bubble up; he’d lash out verbally.

He got sober again in 2019. This time, it seemed like it was for good.

That sobriety comforts Hodges now. Her dad died, but he died sober. He achieved what he had pushed for and against for so long.

very respected by his fellow officers,” the police chief said.

Stallsworth had joined the U.S. Army at 17 years old and was honorably discharged three years later. He met Julie when they both worked at the same restaurant in Medford. She refused to date him at first because of his drug and alcohol addictions. He told her he’d change for her. The two eventually dated and had a child together, Ted’s second child, a son named Jacob. But Ted didn’t change, so Julie and Jacob left.

They reconnected several years later when Stallsworth was sober and ready to make a different kind of life for him-

self and his children. Besides Jacob, he had another son, Brandon, and two daughters, Ariel Barber and Hodges.

For the rest of his life, Stallsworth would seek out support from other recovering addicts and alcoholics and offer help in return.

With help from a former girlfriend, Stallsworth started the carpet-cleaning business. He worked a variety of jobs in addition to running the business. Some days, he would sleep for only a few hours between jobs. At 52, he was only just beginning to slow down.

When Hodges heard her dad was sick, she was wor-

Wiitala: Early chapters highlight encounters in the woods, footprints, noises

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— and no one can produce one, dead or alive.

Bigfoot believers maintain that part of the mainstream denial is wrapped in religious beliefs, with a commonly held viewpoint that anything not endorsed in scripture must be the devil’s work.

Wiitala said this philosophy dates back to Theodosius, who decreed that anything that is outside the state religion is suspect. The last emperor of a united Rome converted to Christianity in the year 391, banning all forms of pagan worship, including long-standing devotion to Zeus.

Wiitala rejects this narrow thinking. “I remember sitting in church and saying, ‘That’s not all the answers,’” he said.

He believes these creatures do exist and are an advanced species. “Human beings consider themselves the ‘superior’ race,” he said. “They are really full of

hubris. We aren’t. They are more evolved than us and they are ‘superior.’ They have the skills to outperform us out in the field, a collective higher intelligence.”

‘Metaphysical and telepathic’

An in-person interview inevitably seeks simple answers.

What do they look like? “They have hair on their back, they’re light tan colored like elk, with large rounded shoulders.”

What are they? “Sasquatch are very closely related to us, but that difference makes such a difference. They are metaphysical and telepathic.”

His book, however, delves way deeper.

In 170 pages, he describes his belief that these creatures can travel through portals located near electromagnetic vortex fields. He seeks to define and explain these concepts and his experiences with them, addressing heavy topics in a conversational style.

Early chapters highlight encounters in the woods, footprints, noises and definite feelings of “not being alone.” One describes ghostly hauntings at the Hannan Playhouse, until recently home of Willapa Players. Later there are descriptions of attempts at telepathy and UFO sightings.

There are also many detailed number mysteries, including his connection to 327, pi, Fibonacci sequences and Pythagoras. Other numbers refer to the angles of the great pyramids of Egypt studied by Carl Munck, a retired U.S. military man who studied numerical codes in ancient monuments. Inventor Nikola Tesla’s study of magnetic fields also comes under the spotlight.

All told, Wiitala concludes it comes down to Hamlet’s quote, “There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy.”

Chosen?

Wiitala said his life experiences have drawn

him to this quest. He lived in Portland and Grants Pass before moving to Astoria, where he graduated from high school in 1971 then served a stint in the U.S. Navy. When his father moved to Bay Center, he encouraged him to follow him into a career with the U.S. Postal Service. He retired after 27 years as a rural carrier.

His early life was characterized by difficulties that in recent times likely would have been diagnosed

as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. He confirms a touch of Asperger’s syndrome, a form of autism, in his makeup.

“I have known I was ‘different’ from the time I was born, but this is another level,” he said. “It was a curse growing up and now I consider it ‘my superpower,’” he added, earnestly. “I can see through a lot of flak. I surprised myself.”

Wiitala said the way he is wired adds to his

perceptiveness.

And, perhaps most controversially, he believes he has a role in helping sasquatches communicate with the unbelieving world.

There is a strong belief in cultures around the world that shamans are chosen by some life force or deity. They can interact with spirits and they possess metaphysical knowledge that others don’t.

“I was chosen,” Wiitala said. “My realization of that came slowly.”

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