

# 'How is Amy?'



MATT HENRY

THE ROAD NOT TAKEN

Alzheimer's disease" (an attempt to state the obvious). "She's still alive, physically anyway" (an attempt to state that, no, the problem isn't that she's broken her leg). Unfortunately, the pain the question causes has made me a little more blunt in my answer: "How is my precious wife? She's dying a slow, brutal, uncompromising, horrifying death, taking all who love her down with it." Is that what you really want to hear — the truth?

The root of the problem for me lies in our habit of asking the question more as a throwaway part of a greeting. It's always a pertinent question to ask even if we waste it in the modicum of social propriety. I do this myself out of habit. "How are you, how's it going?" when all I really need say is hello. So the answer also becomes throwaway with the usual, but often false, response of "Good! Great!" and now we can move beyond the pleasantries. My wife's condition has come to reinforce this thought. So what's a viable alternative?

My friend on the river walk, Ellen, is a retired educator and that may have given her the skills to intuit that which remains unsaid. As she began to ask me the question, she barely got the "How's" out when she snapped her mouth shut. She paused before she spoke again, not with a question but a statement: "Matt, I walk with you and Amy in your pain. I'm always there when you need."

I was absolutely floored. At last, someone got it! She alone (thus far) has taken the road — my road — not taken. She intuited the pain her question would cause and redirected her kind intention through a statement instead of the inevitable, ubiquitous phrase that no one really cares about answering honestly. She said what she really, consciously wanted to express, friendship that joins me in my perpetual war against what Winston Churchill referred to as "the old black dog."

As many of Ellen's friends know her to be the gracious angel that she is, she remains my sole example to the alternative, normal, well-intentioned but cruel question — asking someone who may be in dire straits a throwaway but serious question as part of a casual greeting.

In closing, I would like to suggest a few things. First off, I'm trying to train myself into not asking how someone "is doing" when all I really want to say is exactly all I should say, "It's good to be in your company." Ellen remains my model in this regard and I think it's a good habit to cultivate, an opportunity to bless rather than curiously inquire. Make a statement as your greeting, not a question. Finally, try your best to intuit where someone might be in their journey before you ask a question that could cause them unnecessary pain and resentment.

Give thanks for educators and be as self-aware as possible. It will be a help to those who may, unbeknownst to you, be in a world of hurt.

*The Rev. Dr. Matt Henry is a retired American Baptist/United Methodist pastor, who pastored the Pendleton First United Church and now joyfully makes "hippie food" for the houseless at the Warming Station.*

While taking a recent stroll along the Umatilla River paved walk, I came upon a friend. We exchanged pleasantries for a minute, and then she began to ask me about my wife, a question I have come to dread. She began to ask a common, normal, well-intentioned, innocuous question: "How is Amy?"

My best friend, the closest human relationship I've ever had, truly my better half in every way, my wife of almost 42 years, is a victim of early onset Alzheimer's disease.

Symptoms began when she turned 52 and increased rapidly to the point that now, at age 63, she must reside in the memory lockdown unit at Juniper House where I attempt to get as close to her as possible through a COVID window. She, of course, continues to slowly degrade and disappear, both of us powerless to do anything about it.

I took care of her at home until her condition worsened to the point of requiring around-the-clock medical care. At that point, for her own safety, she left our bedside empty and cold after 41 years. That was the moment when my spirit died. My very best friend, my other, better half, has gone for good. It may seem a bit hyperbolic to say that my life ended that day, but ask any widow or widower who had a lengthy, close relationship with their spouse and they may tell you the same thing.

In short, while my body continues to carry on, life for me now is pretty much just going through the motions. It takes a great deal of effort just to get up and face the day, knowing that at some point the grief monster will get its pound of flesh out of me. As the psalmist says, tears are my daily bread.

I'm not asking for your pity here; our loved ones die. I'm requesting thoughtful self-awareness, an audacious thing to demand of anyone. Due to the intense grief, pain and loneliness that her condition causes me, I try my best to stay occupied and avoid it for as long as possible, that is, until someone who knows and genuinely cares about my wife asks the inevitable question: "How is Amy?" I try to restrain myself by giving a pat answer, but the very asking plummets me instantly into the whirlpool of grief. I try so hard to keep at bay from taking me under, and I find myself feeling peeved. What do they expect me to say? What do they expect to hear? "Miracle of miracles, she's talking again! She still knows my name!" Don't they know there's no coming back from this path?

"How is ..." I have come to realize is a horribly inappropriate question for someone facing down stage four renal cancer, a person whose house has just burned to the ground, or is well along the way on the "ride into the sunset." But the asking of the question — again, with the best of intentions — always stings and tends to make me a bit peevish in my response. I've tried a variety of them: "Well, she has

## OBITUARY

### Fe Forteza Edge-Uland

Hermiston  
January 22, 1939 — January 2, 2021

Fe Forteza Edge-Uland of Hermiston, Oregon, was born on January 22, 1939, in Samar, Philippines, to parents Ricardo and Julia Lubos Forteza. She died on January 2, 2021, in Kennewick, Washington, at the age of 81 years.

Fe was raised and attended schools in the Philippines. She married James Edge and later moved to Hermiston, Oregon, in 1983 and has lived here since. He died in 1986 and Fe later married George

Uland, who died in 1998.

She was a member of the Hermiston Seventh-day Adventist Church and the Fil-AM Hermiston Chapter. Fe enjoyed gardening, cooking, sewing and reading.

She is survived by her daughters Madeilynn (Michael) Edge-Ryan, Stockton, California, and Sherry (Mark) Hall, Pasco, Wash-

ington; brothers Abraham Forteza, Samuel Forteza, Julieta Pelaez and Elminda Ventura, all of Mindanao, Philippines; grandchildren Ashlee, Leeann, Julienne (Shane), Breanna and Elisabeth; great-grandchildren Olivia and Sloane; and numerous nieces, nephews and

cousins. Fe was preceded in death

by her husbands, her parents, and siblings Ricardo Jr., Artemio, Nelsa, Cesar, Esther, Helen and Nori.

A graveside service following state guidelines will be held on Sunday, January 10, 2021, at 1 p.m. at the Hermiston Cemetery, Hermiston, Oregon.

Please share memories of Fe with her family at [burnsmortuaryhermiston.com](http://burnsmortuaryhermiston.com).

Burns Mortuary of Hermiston, Oregon, is in care of arrangements.



Edge-Uland

## DEATH NOTICES

### Frances 'Jean' Calvert

Stanfield  
June 5, 1932 — Dec. 19, 2020

Frances "Jean" Calvert, 88, of Stanfield, died Saturday, Dec. 19, 2020, at her home. She was born June 5, 1932, in Brumley, Missouri. A family gathering was held. Burns Mortuary of Hermiston is in care of arrangements. Share memories with the family at [www.burnsmortuaryhermiston.com](http://www.burnsmortuaryhermiston.com).

### Reberiano G. 'Rebe' Ibarra Sr.

Stanfield  
Feb. 8, 1953 — Jan. 2, 2021

Reberiano G. "Rebe" Ibarra Sr., 67, of Stanfield, died Saturday, Jan. 2, 2021, in Hermiston. He was born Feb. 8, 1953, in Tullio, Zacatecas, Mexico. A private family rosary and funeral mass will be held, followed by a private family burial at the Hermiston Cemetery. Burns Mortuary of Hermiston is in care of arrangements. Share memories with the family at [www.burnsmortuaryhermiston.com](http://www.burnsmortuaryhermiston.com).

### Elsie C. Melton

Adams  
Dec. 22, 1937 — Dec. 30, 2020

Elsie C. Melton, 83, of Adams, died Wednesday, Dec. 30, 2020, in Kennewick, Washington. She was born Dec. 22, 1937, in Mandan, North Dakota. Burns Mortuary of Pendleton is in charge of the arrangements.

### Chauncey Edmund Rife

Illinois  
Nov. 27, 1979 — Dec. 31, 2020

Chauncey Edmund Rife, 41, of Illinois, died Thursday, Dec. 31, 2020, in a trucking accident. He was born Nov. 27, 1979. Arrangements are with Pendleton Pioneer Chapel, Folsom-Bishop.

### Verlyn Paul Schulz

Hermiston  
Dec. 13, 1940 — Jan. 1, 2021

Verlyn Paul Schulz, 80, of Hermiston, died Friday, Jan. 1, 2021, at his home. He was born Dec. 13, 1940, in Parsons, Kansas. A private family service will be held, with a private burial following at the Hermiston Cemetery. Burns Mortuary of Hermiston is in care of arrangements. Share memories with the family at [www.burnsmortuaryhermiston.com](http://www.burnsmortuaryhermiston.com).

### Kenneth Cosmo Zampelli Sr.

Milton-Freewater  
Nov. 25, 1945 — Jan. 3, 2021

Kenneth Cosmo Zampelli Sr., 75, of Milton-Freewater, died Sunday, Jan. 3, 2021, in Walla Walla, Washington. He was born Nov. 25, 1945. Munselle-Rhodes Funeral Home of Milton-Freewater is in charge of arrangements.

# Our elderly residents need support



ROD HARWOOD

FILLING YOUR DAY WITH MEANING

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES OF SUPPORT

- OHA Safe + Strong Helpline, 800-923-4357 (800-923-HELP) [Linesforlife.org](http://Linesforlife.org)
- Oregon Senior Peer Outreach, 833-736-4676
- Senior Loneliness Line, 503-200-1633

The past year has been challenging for all of us as we have adjusted and learned to cope with living our lives through this pandemic. It has been more than just a public health crisis.

This crisis has impacted us across the spectrum of our entire well-being — physically, mentally and spiritually. Many of the routines and activities we look to for support, such as attending our places of worship, connecting with those we care about through social and family gatherings and holiday traditions, have been disrupted.

It has been particularly devastating for our elders. Eight out of 10 COVID-19 deaths have been in adults 65 and older (CDC). In addition, we already know there is a connection between loneliness and increased risk of premature death, dementia, stroke, depression, anxiety and suicide. The social isolation needed to stay safe has heightened that impact even more. This has led to other challenges contributing to their suffering. Many of our elders say they feel a lack of a sense of meaning and purpose, along with no sense of joy in their day.

So, how do we fill our day with meaning?

I found it helpful to seek guidance from the very same elders we want to

support. Their life experiences have conveyed much wisdom for navigating life's difficulties while holding on to the best of us through them. One such person was Sister Columba, who I got to know while serving as a chaplain at St. Anthony Hospital in Pendleton.

She was a Franciscan sister, who had committed her entire life to the ministry of health care in Eastern Oregon. She taught me about commitment to care by showing up to help others even while struggling myself. I witnessed her working well into her 80s. I learned from her, and other seniors I worked with, that filling the day with meaning includes doing activities where you feel productive and valued.

They did this by finding a goal for each day — any size goal — and tackling it with intention. The goal could be outward facing and helping others in need, or it could be inward facing, like taking a small walk to stay active, or stretching for exercise while confined to a bed. Knowing we can set our minds on something and complete it helps our sense of productivity and meaning. It doesn't mean we need to focus on the big meaning of lofty questions, but rather engage in day-to-day activities. It is important to show up each day offering something

that is valued by others.

Our social isolation has also made us keenly aware what it means to be disconnected from what is most important, whether it is a person, place and role we play or activities of which we are a part. The times of loss of those relationships threaten our sense of meaning, and our joy is replaced with sorrow. This leads us to the second lesson I've learned from elders. They know how to adjust to changing conditions — letting go of what they lost and allowing their lives to be transformed into something new. For example, Sister Columba successfully navigated her life changes moving from Ireland to the United States.

Over the years, she transitioned from nurse to manager to patient visitor, letting go of old roles and finding a new sense of meaning and purpose in the next stage in life. Other elders I've known responded with similar flexibility to life's changing circumstances. That does not mean ignoring the emotional toll of those changes. On the contrary, the successful transition into our new connections greatly depends on our ability to acknowledge what we have lost, make room for the feelings that brings, then moving through them and adjusting to what new comes our way. That includes a

willingness to make new connections.

Each loss helps us put into practice our life lessons. Since elders have managed a lifetime of change, loss and triumphs, they have much to teach others about managing the difficulties of these times if we are wise enough to listen.

Finally, there are times when we feel isolated and alone, like our sense of loss is overwhelming. The dreams you had to keep you alive and motivated for living now may seem to have disappeared like last night's sleep. One way to help find light when it all seems dark is exercising the practice of gratitude. Each day, name three things you are thankful for. Include in that list the lives of those elders who are part of your life. Studies show this practice helps rewire our brain so we begin to see light where before we only saw darkness.

While our elders need our support, their life example and words of wisdom can help provide guidance as well as we navigate our journey together. If you are grateful to an elder for teaching you an important life lesson, let them know. You will both benefit from the conversation.

*Rod Harwood is an older adult behavior coordinator with Greater Oregon Behavioral Health, Inc. serving Eastern Oregon. He is one of 24 specialists supporting a statewide initiative providing behavioral health for older adults and people with disabilities in local and regional community mental health programs.*

## UPCOMING SERVICES

THURSDAY, JAN. 7

No services scheduled

FRIDAY, JAN. 8

**HOFFMAN, MARY** — Graveside service at 2 p.m. at Skyview Memorial Park, 70116 S. Highway 395, Pendleton.

**TOLAR, MICK** — Graveside service following state guidelines at 2:30 p.m. at the Echo Cemetery.

SATURDAY, JAN. 9

**WHITE, ALVERDA** — Services at 10 a.m. at Pendleton Pioneer Chapel, Folsom-Bishop, 131 S.E. Byers Ave., Pendleton.

## LOTTERY

Monday, Jan. 4, 2021

Megabucks

05-17-24-26-32-47

Estimated jackpot: \$6.6 million

Lucky Lines

02-07-11-13-18-22-27-31

Estimated jackpot: \$74,000

Win for Life

02-06-28-33

Pick 4

1 p.m.: 8-7-3-4

4 p.m.: 3-3-1-1

7 p.m.: 3-4-7-2

10 p.m.: 2-4-8-7

Tuesday, Jan. 5, 2021

Mega Millions

20-43-51-55-57

Mega Ball: 4

Megaplier: 2

Estimated jackpot: \$432 million

Lucky Lines

01-06-12-14-19-21-28-30

Estimated jackpot: \$75,000

Pick 4

1 p.m.: 6-5-1-4

4 p.m.: 5-3-6-8

7 p.m.: 2-5-4-1

10 p.m.: 7-6-6-1

Wednesday, Jan. 6, 2021

Pick 4

1 p.m.: 9-7-8-8