

HEAVEN FORBID, ASSISTED LIVING!

A popular fixture in the community, Marion Blake and her daughter Mary, the retired director of Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District, share their Seaside home. Marion will be 100 years old this year and a big celebration is planned.

"Marion Blake was an avid golfer, before age caught up with her," Chelsea Gorrow wrote in a 2014 Daily Astorian profile. "She now uses a cane with four feet to get around. But that's the only visible sign that she's 96 years old. The petite and fit woman wears glittery nail polish, stylish white-framed glasses, pink lipstick and gold jewelry, including a beautiful bangle bracelet and fashionable rings. Her daughter shared that Marion Blake weighs the same as she did in college."

Four years later, all still holds true. We caught up with the Blakes at their Seaside home, alongside canine friends Ruby and Sunshine.



COLIN MURPHEY/EO MEDIA GROUP

Marion Blake, right, recounts stories from her past about life in Seaside along with her daughter Mary.

SEEN FROM SEASIDE

R.J. MARX



I'm still playing bridge four days a week. I play duplicate. I play at the Astoria Country Club, at the Bob Chisholm Community Center once a week and twice a week in Astoria at the senior center.

It's fun, but it's very competitive. I have good partners.

I watch a lot of TV.

Q: What do you like?

Marion: I watch Stephen Colbert. I am a night owl. I get in the sack and I watch until 1 a.m.

Q: And you wake up when?

Marion: I wake up at six and at seven. I don't waste a lot of time sleeping too much.

Mary: She does her stretches when she gets up. She's very flexible. She was a swimmer and swings on the swings higher than anybody else.

Marion: I'm a big sports fan.

Q: What's your favorite sport?

Marion: Football.

Q: Pro or college?

Marion: Pro.

Q: What's your favorite team?

Marion: Well, the Seahawks.

Mary: And also the Denver Broncos. We were big fans when John Elway was the quarterback.

Q: Who's your favorite president?

Marion: Oh, the one now! (rolls eyes.)

Mary: When Hillary was there it was really quite a moment to be able to vote for a woman president. She (Marion) follows that really closely.

Marion: I like Rachel Maddow. I like her coverage.

Q: Are there others in town who are your age?

Marion: I'm always the oldest one in the crowd.

Q: Any regrets?



COLIN MURPHEY/EO MEDIA GROUP

One of Marion Blake's pets sits obediently at her feet at her home in Seaside.

Marion: No regrets over the years. Accent the positive.

Q: What do you have planned for your birthday?

Mary: We are going to do a party out at the club. We did a big party for her on the 90th with a slide presentation, so we were able to pull up some of the terrific pictures.

Q: Any goals for the new year?

Marion: Just play more bridge and kick butt.

Q: Whose butt are you going to kick? The other bridge players?

Marion: Oh yes, the opponents!

Mary: I always knew she was going to be 100, so I asked her, "When are you thinking about passing?" She said: "Oh, I think I'm going to live forever."

I said, "Well, that's very spiritual but what does that mean?" She said, "114, 117 — that would be OK."

She's a real inspiration. Whenever anything comes up, she's always eager to get into the car, go for a walk with Ruby — it's amazing.

And she didn't want to go to assisted living. She said: "You know there are a lot of old people there."

Marion: Heaven forbid assisted living! The way I feel now, I have a lot of time ahead of me on this planet.

Mary: She says: "I don't mind a routine, but I hate a rut."

The tsunami that wasn't

Last week I woke up at my usual 7-something to learn I'd narrowly escaped death by sleeping through a tsunami, sort of. An earthquake in the waters off Alaska, created a tsunami threat affecting the entire west coast. Mr. Sax, who had been up for hours, delivered this news as I started the coffee.

"I guess we slept through the alarm," I said. "And that's weird because we're both light sleepers."

A short while later, I stopped at By The Way in Gearhart, a coffee shop I frequent. There's a Stammtisch table there too; gathered around it, everyone was talking about the tsunami that wasn't. I detected an air of excitement. So little happens in Gearhart that wasn't, is big news, at least for a couple of hours.

"I slept through it," I said.

Later that day, Gearhart's Mayor Matty Brown posted on his Facebook page a message from the city government regarding the tsunami alert that wasn't. The message reiterated that while emergency protocols were enacted and call lists readied, it was determined there was no credible threat to the area. Seaside and Gearhart's warning sirens are connected; Seaside emergency managers after determining there was no danger, decided not to sound the alarms.

A local novelist I know IRL (that's techno-speak for "in real life") posted on her Facebook page that the national warning advisory awakened her at 2 a.m. to say a tsunami was coming. Her thread was crammed with comments from far-flung friends and fans saying they were worried. I saw, when I finally looked at my phone, I had a few messages. It felt lame to respond to these heartfelt entreaties of concern saying, "I slept through it."

So what would it be like if there was a tsunami warning alarm and we slept through it, I asked my spouse. He shrugged and said, "I guess we'd be dead."

I was strangely satisfied by this answer. Truth be told, I'm less concerned about surviving a tsunami than I am the aftermath. I thought about bolting the house in driving rain, possibly clad in pajamas, which I would have to wear for days or weeks. I imagined navigating mudslides, huge logs, thousands of pounds of debris, wondering where I'd go to the bathroom, no lattes. I hate camping. Deprived of hot water for even 24 hours turns me into a witch.

If the alarm goes off in the middle of the night, I said to my spouse, I might just stay in bed.

VIEW FROM THE PORCH
EVE MARX



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Hopes, fears greet conversation about death and dying

Participants asked what they hope for when death approaches

By Nancy McCarthy
For Seaside Signal

CANNON BEACH — Twenty-two friends and strangers gathered recently to have one of the most important conversations of their lives. The topic: death.

The guided discussion gave participants a way to express their feelings about the concept of dying, remember the death of someone they loved and talk about what they hoped for their loved ones and themselves at the time of their own deaths.

"This discussion isn't to solve any problems," said Jenny Sasser, an educational gerontologist who led the 90-minute exchange on Jan. 18.

"We're trying to have a conversation about what matters most to us when we reach our end."

Held at the Cannon Beach History Center and Museum, the program, "Talking About Dying," was sponsored by Oregon Humanities through the Oregon Community Foundation.

Although the conversation started somewhat easily when Sasser asked the participants to give a word or phrase that came to them when they thought about dying, the responses turned more difficult after they broke into small groups to talk about their experiences and hopes.

The words the participants used to describe their thoughts about dying ranged from fear to inevitability.

"Wow!" said one member of the group. "Yikes!" said another.

"Comfort, control, choice," added a third person, and her neighbor added, "compassion."

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Jenny Sasser
educational gerontologist

"It's a fact of life," someone else said.

As they turned to their small groups, Sasser asked them to recall someone in their lives who had already died. How did they live toward their dying? "Not just how did they die, but how did they prepare for it?" Sasser asked. And then, she directed them to discuss their own experiences during their loved ones' deaths.

The consensus of one group's members was that "none of us wanted to go to a nursing home," and they didn't want to suffer.

"How a loved one dies but

also where they die is consequential," Sasser said.

While one person noted that "not having control (over how death should occur) can create fear and anger," another person asked, "Can you really control yourself at the time?"

Observing how a loved one dies "shapes our attitudes about our own dying," Sasser said.

"How we approach our dying can be a gift to others," she added. "Dying is not disconnected from living. At some point there is an end, and if we live fully to the end, it is a gift for others."

After the group went into their small groups for a second

time, Sasser said she could hear laughter. The groups' assignment was to discuss their hopes for their own deaths.

"Notice I didn't say your fears," Sasser said. Talking about fears sets a different tone for the conversation, she added.

The participants talked about the desire to control the way they die. They discussed the need to talk to their families or friends early about medical preferences during the final days. One of the participants also discussed the need for family members to be willing to let go.

Those who don't have families or close friends to discuss their dying wishes with could turn to a "death doula," noted history center director Elaine Trucke, who participated in the conversation.

Like a birth doula, who coaches a pregnant woman through the delivery of her baby, a death doula provides emotional support and acts an advocate for the person who is dying.

Sasser suggested preparing an advance directive that states treatment preferences. In addition, she said, it might be helpful to prepare a playlist that can be played at the end of life.

"What would you like to hear even as you're going out?" asked Sasser.

Pets must also be considered when making end-of-life preparations, she said.

"Our web of relationships includes nonhuman beings," Sasser added.

Some plans that must be made — like what will happen to pets — may be pragmatic, but those plans are based on feelings, on what the person wants, Sasser said.

She urged the participants to continue thinking about what they hoped for at the time of their deaths.

"Ask what that means, what is doable and what still needs to be put into place, and what conversation you still must have," she said.

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