



Closer to the Great Mystery

As I come closer to the Great Mystery, knowing falls away and something like faith emerges. I believe that you die as you have lived. Why should the end be any different? I'm comforted by having had symbolic glimpses of the unity of life, offering me more trust in the final passage.

In my high-school yearbook, I described myself as a *dilet-tante*. 400 days in a war zone fixed that. Now I lean into my current practices; free-form dance, writing poems, drumming for vision, meditation, and cultivating an inner smile.

I find myself drawing threads tighter between disparate parts of myself to anchor my chemo-brain fog.

Once before cell phones, I was lost alone at sea while fishing in pea-soup fog. Misjudging a tidal current caused me to head for Portugal. Reaching no land, I pivoted due West in search of my island, seemingly the size of a postal stamp on my mind map.

I revisit this memory because two medical options were recently nixed by a neuro-oncologist. He said that I would become lost in a dementia-like fog. The absence of finding home holds little appeal. I prefer a clearer quality of awareness for my time left, and a deeper connection with those whom I love.

My major life do-overs often coincided with wake-up calls. While I've been portrayed by others as a risk taker, inside it felt more like following my intuition. Admittedly, there were periods when I fell asleep to



myself by not choosing to leap, or just not listening well-enough. Volunteering with the Living/Dying Project helped me to listen more attentively and with compassion. I felt aliveness with the realization that we are living and dying at the same time.

I like to believe that I'm approaching my death with curiosity and an adventurous spirit. It's quite different to die at 80 than as a 23 year-old hearing the scream of an incoming rocket with my name on it.

A delay fuse saved me then, and now I wish for more delay

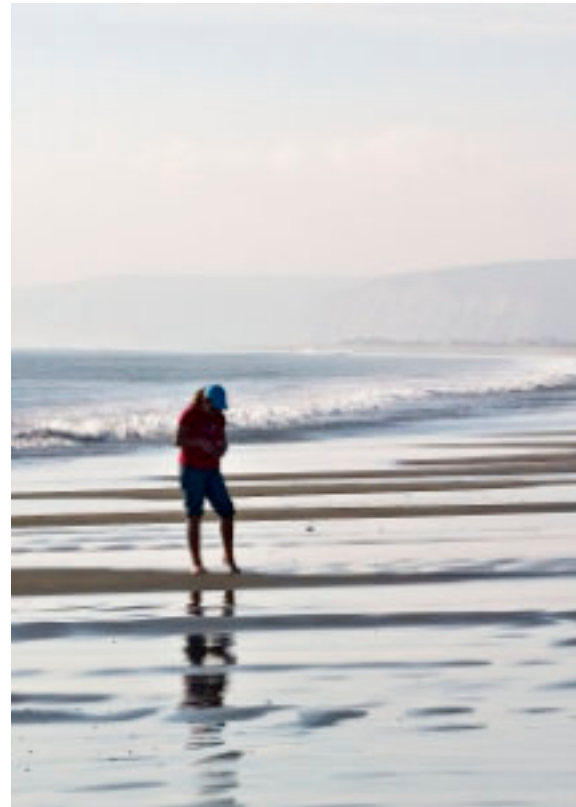
as cancer has entered my spinal fluid and central nervous system.

I take solace from Crazy Horse who whooped at Little Big Horn: *It's a good day to die, because all the things that I love are present.*

His radical acceptance is comforting. *It's not over until it's over*, used to sound to me like a bad diagnosis. Now it reminds me how precious are the extra in-nings that exceed my prognosis. There's joy and gratitude to behold, while life lingers sweet with my family and close friends.

— Sandy Scull

*A friend of the Living/Dying Project
and one of our earliest volunteer*



Limantour Beach

Winter Solstice

*At water's edge, Limantour Beach is radiant.
Poised Curlews listen for sand crabs.
Bird tracks crisscross smoothen sand.
I walk in my wife's footprints, before waves
wash them away—I wonder what trace I'll leave.*

*Her stride equals mine, though my foot is longer.
The sand has some firmness down here,
yet cushions what joins my barefoot bones.
She makes a good pace before pausing,
turns around and walks backwards.
I drink in her happy smile.*

*I turn around, continue in her backward prints,
until walking rearward feels contrived,
though it counters habit, and lets me sense
pulling away from where we've been.*

*I miss seeing the gap close between us,
but now she lingers, looking beyond her
towards the mouth of Drake's Estero.
As the sun readies to set before five,
I prefer face-to-face connection and fancy
we are more than the sum of us.*

Sandy Scull

*But do not ask me where I am going
as I travel in this limitless world
where every step I take is my home.*

Dogen

*I believe that the world was created and
approved by love, that it subsists, coheres,
and endures by love, and that, insofar as it is
redeemable, it can be redeemed only by love.*

Wendell Berry

Sandy is a dear friend of mine and of the Living/Dying Project. He was a volunteer for clients with life-threatening illnesses when the Project returned from New Mexico to the Bay Area in the mid-1980's. Sandy served as a Marine in Vietnam and for many years counseled returning soldiers traumatized by their experience. Probably his exposure to agent orange contributed to the lung cancer that has metastasized to his brain and central nervous system. Sandy's poetry and reflections on his work with clients have appeared frequently in these pages. He is much loved. — RamDev Dale Borglum

Our Work



*What we once enjoyed and deeply
loved we can never lose, for all that
we love deeply becomes a part of us.*

Helen Keller

Dear Precious One Aurora,

I just completed the call that Jon and I share each week and wish to share some insights and awarenesses. It seems to me that our coming together is a sacred example of the saying 'a match made in heaven.'

Each week is a most precious opportunity to dive deeper into our wondrous humanity. The healing, beauty, magic, mystery, compassion, caring, kindness... seem to be bottomless.

It feels important to let you, Dale and the many others in the Living Dying Project family know that what you are all so committed and devoted to makes an extraordinarily profound and meaningful difference in the lives of those of us being served. It deeply touches, heals and reminds us that we matter and are not alone.

These sentiments are a result of my direct experiences over the months I've been blessed to receive the treasures constantly offered: *loving compassion in action* which is clearly the purpose and mission of The Living Dying Project.

With An Open and Accessible Heart,
Tom

Grief dares us to love once more.

Terry Tempest Williams

*You have to keep breaking your
heart until it opens.*

Rumi

It's too late to be ready.

Dogen

Hello dear Aurora,

Quite unexpectedly, I got the message this evening that my Living/Dying Project client Jim, passed away yesterday morning.

Last week he wasn't able to speak very well and asked me to send some voice messages, which I did.

He didn't respond anymore because his health rapidly changed. His brother sent me a message that he didn't have pain when he passed away and I know from speaking with Jim that he knew that all was well.

Jim was a dear friend, who felt like the real brother I never had. He has made his transition. May he be well, may he be happy and may he find his way to the light. I know he will.

In my contact with Jim I always felt that he was God in human form. We all are... but being with him it was so obvious. Such wisdom, such radiance and such a loving presence... that was deepening over the last year as we spoke almost weekly.

When I have time and fewer tears in my eyes, I will make another video to honor Jim and will share it with you as part of my work as a volunteer.

It would be great if you can light a candle for Jim as soon as you have read my email.

Thank you Aurora!

Much love to you and Dale and all the others who make this precious work possible.

Warmly,
Ruben

Dying Into Love

It was an exquisite death. Will would have said that. His dying was truly extraordinary to witness. The field of love and celebration that was created to support his soul's transition was beyond elevated. It didn't begin this way.

Like most people, Will, his wife Muse and mother Anna were not ready to let go. No matter how long of an illness, no matter how critical, a newlywed 45 year old man and his family, hold on tight to life. There's just too much to live for



me I already had one and began calling me "Christ-in." We became dear friends, helping each other to keep our hearts open, to see the blessing in everything, to remember the wondrous perfection of our soul's expansion into love. A spiritual companion. We kept each other on track.

I went to the wedding in England last fall. I stayed with him and Muse at his mother's home near Cambridge. We spent a joyful week celebrating life and love and experiencing rich interactions and deep connection.

Hope was still the prevailing sentiment. The future still seemed possible.

A month later physical symptoms worsened. This began a six-month decline that was more easily detected in retrospect. He had come back from worse. Or so it seemed.

His world slowly began to shrink. In our last real conversation he told me he was ready. He knew it was his time. He was grateful for the depth of love he experienced with Muse. He was grateful for his extraordinary life. He worried only for her. He knew he was entering into his next becoming. He knew he would be exalted into love. And then the first door closed. He lost speech. He began to communicate non-verbally. He slept more. He still enjoyed fruit and some food. Swallowing became harder. It became more obvious he was dying. His eyes were more often closed than open. He was straddling the worlds. Neither here nor there. He was in the bardo before death. The physical body dropping away. The soul being birthed from the limited form into the limitless expanse.

Grieving kicked in, as it so often does before the soul has left. Sorrow descending like a thick cloud. It was here that Muse made a conscious choice to

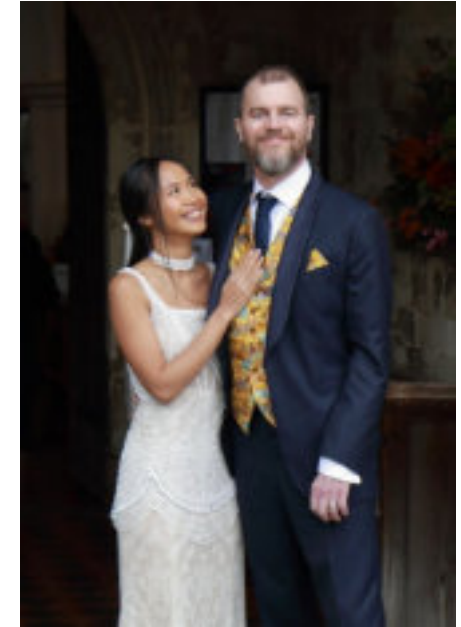
make Will's final time a celebration. Everyday a party. A favorite food. A favorite song. She guided him in meditations to their favorite memories. She met him in the garden of her heart. There was nothing left unsaid, so she rested with him and sang him songs and offered him prayers. She did this all with joy. She knew there would be time for her tears. She allowed the sacred time of the bardo before death to glow in light.

One by one, all the sense doors closed. The breath became labored. Muse told Will she would be ok. She told him she was ready. That she would take their love with her. She set him free. He left his body shortly after that. Muse continued the celebration with chanting and dancing and music. Drenching his release in exuberance.

It was a beautiful death. She kept his body with her for over 24 hours. Sleeping with his peaceful form. Savoring every precious moment. An eternity in each one.

Pema Chodrin says, "how we live, is how we die." Will lived and died with love, faith and joy. He was delivered from his body into his next becoming surrounded by beauty and light. I feel exceptionally blessed to have been a part of his story and his journey. I will miss you my dear friend, you changed me for good.

— Kristin Singer
Living/Dying Project Volunteer



Every life is a love story, but few of us know what love is until the story is nearly over.

Karen Maezen Miller

*Will Pye was an author and spiritual teacher. He wrote, **Blessed with a Brain Tumor and The Gratitude Prescription**, sharing his diagnosis, as an opportunity to deepen his spiritual practice of receiving everything as a gift and living from a place of gratitude. I supported Will during his last year as a friend and a Living/Dying Project volunteer. We met weekly and moved through the deep work of making peace with the past and the ever shrinking future. I supported Muse through Will's dying, guiding her to practices that not only bolstered him but her as well. It was profound to be able to offer this gift and to see it realized so beautifully. My spiritual practice deepened as a result. The Living/Dying Project offers a unique experience that supports all involved in charting a path through the eternal mystery.*

Project News

We offer free-of-charge, volunteer-based spiritual support services for persons with illness, for their caregivers and for the grieving. Our services are offered in-person as well as virtually; available to all regardless of location. If you or anyone you know could benefit from this support, please email us or call the our office at **415-456-3915**. In addition to our one-to-one support for clients we now also have support groups for illness, grief and caregiving, led by dedicated Board members. These groups meet regularly on Sundays via Zoom. Check out our website [Calendar](#) for upcoming dates.

Our website is being completely updated. If this new version is not up and running by the time you read this, it will be soon, hopefully by the end of this year. Thank you Hari. The new site will be much easier to navigate, making it easier to find what you are looking for. It remains the place on the internet with the most information about conscious dying, grieving and caregiving.

Our social media; podcasts through the [Be Here Now](#) network; groups and [Guest Speaker Series](#) are all thriving. One of my recent Instagram posts had 1.2 million hits. Here are links to our social media accounts you can check out: [Facebook](#) | [Instagram](#) | [YouTube](#) | [TikTok](#)

We have a large, yet intimate [Spiritual Support Group](#) that meets every-other Saturday on Zoom at 9-11 AM Pacific Time. Email the Project if you would like to be added to the roster.

I will be facilitating weekend workshops/volunteer training programs via Zoom and in person January, February and March of 2025. California CEUs are available for LCSW, LMFT, RN, LAc & Psychologist. Please see the following page of this newsletter for details or go to the [Calendar](#) on our website.

By The Numbers

- We have clients and volunteers throughout the U.S., Canada, Europe, South America, India, Australia, and New Zealand
- We have served over 10,000 **Open Circle Program** clients and their families and caregivers
- We currently have 130 active volunteers
- Over 2,300 volunteer hours have been contributed during the past year
- Over 12,000 have taken RamDev's **Healing at the Edge: Conscious Living/Conscious Dying** trainings
- During the past year our support staff and trained volunteers offered free-of-charge emotional and spiritual support to 3,220 persons; over 1.5 million received educational services through social media, newsletters and podcasts; and, 3403 attended live and online training workshops, courses and lectures.
- During the last fiscal year, our total expenses were \$233,363. Programs revenue was \$85,091 and donations were \$333,893. Without a generous \$204,397 one-time bequest from the estate of Patricia Slomski, expenses would have exceeded income by \$18,776. We are judiciously using this one-time windfall for long-neglected yet necessary projects and finally paying our staff a living wage. We need your donations now more than ever to continue our recent growth in providing services and education at this critical time.

*Enlightenment is
intimacy with all things.*
Dogen



HEALING AT THE EDGE CONSCIOUS LIVING / CONSCIOUS DYING

A TRAINING WORKSHOP FOR CAREGIVERS, THERAPISTS, NURSES, ACUPUNCTURISTS AND ANYONE WANTING TO DEEPLY EXPLORE HEALING



Sponsored by the **Community Institute for Psychotherapy**, this workshop is offered by the **Living/Dying Project**. Participants from California seeking continuing education as Psychologist, LCSW, LMFT or LPCC will receive C.E.U.s from the **Community Institute for Psychotherapy**. The **Living/Dying Project** offers C.E.U.s for nurses and licensed acupuncturists. A flyer for the workshop may be found at the **Living/Dying Project** website at livingdying.org/2025workshop.

Physical healing, emotional healing, spiritual healing, collective healing – the journey to wholeness takes many forms and has many starting points. Each of us is at a particular point on our healing path, confronting our next challenge, often without clearly knowing whether attitudes or practices we have been using to facilitate growth in ourselves or in our clients are becoming stale, without knowing which direction we should turn to create meaningful transformation.

In this workshop we will draw upon the wisdom of Buddhism, the diagnostic message coming from the connection between stages of early childhood development and energetic patterns in the adult body, as well as the softening and the passion of an open heart. Having explored these wisdom traditions during 45 years of being a guide to the dying, a clear and practical paradigm for the healing path has become apparent to me. Healing occurs through direct contact with the Sacred, through realization of our true nature. There are no shortcuts, but certainly neither taking unnecessary detours nor spending time spinning our wheels can inspire us along what is often a difficult journey to a life consciously lived.

During this workshop we will explore together a clear, concise and usable model of the healing process that can specifically diagnose and identify the next step that is transformational for each of us, even during crisis. Short, intensive guided meditations and other practices will be presented to create a healing experience that will lead to a life consciously and compassionately lived and eventually to a conscious death. We're all caregivers and all seekers of healing. These deeply uncertain times are an incredible opportunity.

San Francisco one-day workshop will be held **January 18, 2025**
San Anselmo two-day workshop will be held **February 1 and 2, 2025**
Santa Rosa one-day workshop will be held **March 1, 2025**
Online workshops: March 15 and 16, 2025

For information about locations and registration please visit the Living/Dying Project website.



Workshops will be conducted by Dale Borglum, Ph.D., who, with Stephen Levine and Ram Dass, established the Hanuman Foundation Dying Center in Santa Fe, New Mexico, the first center supporting conscious dying in the U.S. Dale directed the center until moving to the San Francisco Bay Area. He is founder and Executive Director of the Living/Dying Project and co-author of **Journey of Awakening: A Meditator's Guidebook** (Bantam Books).

Imagine facing death without fear. Imagine using a life-threatening illness as an opportunity for spiritual awakening. Imagine approaching the unknown with an open heart. We often resist change as a natural part of life. Strength and healing can be found in life's most difficult situations.



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Mission Statement

The Living/Dying Project offers conscious and compassionate support in the spirit of mutual exploration to those facing life-threatening illness and their caregivers. We also offer education and training in the practices of spiritual healing to those confronting life's most difficult situations and to anyone committed to spiritual transformation.

Supporting Us

Dear Beloved Supporters of the Living/Dying Project,

As we reflect on this past year, we are moved by the deep connections and profound growth within our community. We've welcomed 143 new donors, 42 new volunteers, and provided compassionate spiritual care to over 63 new clients navigating the mysteries of life, death, illness, and grief. We expanded our dedicated team with 2 new contracted staff members, and our social media has grown significantly with over 35,000 followers on Instagram and about 7,000 on TikTok. Finally we launched a new website to better capture the Project's spirit and help those discovering us for the first time.

Every conversation we have about living and dying consciously, every person we support in their darkest moments, every moment we hold sacred—this is the essence of our mission. Together, we are shifting the narrative around life and death, helping individuals meet it with grace, with acceptance.

As the year draws to a close, we ask you to reflect on the impact the Living/Dying Project has had on your life and the lives of others. Consider how you can continue to support this important work. Your generosity fuels our ability to guide people through the most profound transitions of life, opening doors to healing, peace and spiritual awakening.

Ways to Support:

- **Donate Online:** Visit www.LivingDying.org and click [Donate Now](#) at the top of the page. Every donation, large or small, is an offering toward creating a world where death is met with openness and love.
- **Enroll in Our Online Courses:** Our courses provide a sacred framework for understanding life and death through a spiritual lens, empowering you to be a force of compassion in the world.
- **Make a Bequest:** A bequest is a gift that lives on, ensuring that our work continues for future generations. You can make a bequest through your will, trust, life insurance policy, or IRA. It's a way to leave a legacy of kindness and consciousness while potentially receiving tax benefits. Please reach out to us if you'd like more information.

Your support is not just a donation; it's an investment in a future where we live and die with greater awareness, connectedness and peace.

With deep gratitude and love,
Aurora Leonard
Associate Director

*I slept and dreamt that life was joy. I
awoke and saw that life was service.
I acted and behold, service was joy.*

Rabindranath Tagore



Credits

Layout and design of this newsletter was done by Curtis Grindahl, a long-time volunteer with the Project. The photo of Sandy on page one was taken by his wife. The photo of **Limantour Beach** on page two was taken by Curtis. The photo of Will on page 4 is from his website. The photo of Will and Muse at their wedding was taken by Julie Janes..

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