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The not-so-scary fallout of bringing death out of hiding

Donna Schaper | Aug. 7, 2013 Eco Catholic

The environment would be safer from us if we could bring death out of hiding. Consider three realities about change and shift, leading to farewell, which leads to hello.

Beaches and barriers aren?t naturally permanent. They are naturally shifting. The parents at their favorite beach vacation may want to remember the beach they saw as children but their children don?t.

I was just on the Outer Cape for a splendid vacation, replete with large multigenerational tables in every restaurant. Watching the grandmothers stare at the grandchildren, as though they were saving sun for winter, made me happy. Hearing the children listen patiently about how many Wellfleet oysters there used to be made me happy, too. At least they had manners. They had respect for other people?s experiences. They were ?pre-grief? about their own childhood, a truly wonder-filled place to be.

Maybe the natural ebb and flow of things we love doesn?t convince you that death needs to come out of the closet, into the open, so we can appreciate beaches more. Imagine highways and bridges instead.

Most of the infrastructure we have now came as the nation prepared for industrial growth, grand shipping and great ?interstates.? Now many of these economic props are in disrepair. Should we repair them, bring them back to what they were? Or do they, like beaches and barriers, want to change and shift and become different? Do we really need infrastructure for a growing economy or for a shrinking one or for a different one?

If the natural and the made in their comings and goings don?t convince you that nothing lasts, then visit with me my body. It used to do things it can?t do anymore.

My shoulders used to be higher, now they are lower. A certain sag has replaced its sizzle. Not all of its sizzle! But enough of it to feel kindly toward the person who asks, gently, if I am old enough to deserve the senior discount.

When we unhide death, we do so on behalf of the great movement of all things and its great making-the-way for the next and the new. We are both conservative and progressive at the same time. The greatest conservation is for the 7th generation. The greatest progressivism is to get out of their way.

I am not suggesting we don?t fiercely love the old beaches or the old economy or the young girl. I am suggesting that frau and fraulein, senora and senorita, Miss and Ms. and Mrs. are one. They are part of the flow of life toward death, which is a part of life, not its enemy. They are each life flowing toward itself, which unhides death and makes its part of the day by day.

When we unhide death, we can still remember with fondness. I think of the way stickum displaced paper clips. Or the time before each piece of fruit had a sticker on it. I remember when I wanted to travel on the old roads and the new roads and ?go places,? the time before I just wanted to make sure there was a reliable Internet connection wherever I go.

If Robert Bellah is right in his elegant definition of religion [1] -- that it is simply the awareness of another reality -- then unhiding death will allow for more multiple realities to emerge. That kind of religion will be good for us and for the planet.

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[1] http://www.religiondispatches.org/archive/atheologies/7229/how_robert_bellah__1927_2013__changed_the_study_of_r