

Death and Dying

SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT
TO THE
GULF ISLANDS
DRIFTWOOD
JANUARY 25, 2006

Aiding the 'journey' of the terminally ill



CHECKING IT OUT: Health officials and a patient at Lady Minto Hospital check out the new palliative care suite, simulating a terminal situation for photographic purposes.

Photo by Derrick Lundy

Palliative suite ensures comfortable experience for patients and family

By SEAN MCINTYRE
Staff Writer

Sheila Johnson used to have some pretty deep-rooted ideas about death and dying, until a recent experience at the Lady Minto palliative care suite gave her a new perspective.

"I used to think the best way to die was overnight in your sleep — that way it's calm, quiet and there's little suffering," she said in a recent interview only months after her mother passed away in the suite last autumn.

"It was such a special time for both my mother and the family because we had time to talk about things, to laugh about things, to cry about things and to say our good-byes," she recalled.

Based in the desire to ease suffering for both patients and their loved ones, palliative care facilities are being expanded across the country and now Gulf Islands residents can access a dedicated suite here on Salt Spring Island.

Palliative care refers to a program for the terminally ill where care providers help relieve symptoms and facilitate a comfortable and dignified journey through to death.

The palliative care suite provides an intimate space where patients and their families can celebrate their final hours or days with one another in a homey and comfortable environment.

"You wouldn't even know you were in a care facility," said Johnson. "Everything is so well decorated, there is a

separate entrance and anything resembling hospital equipment is hidden from sight."

The room features a private garden, bathroom, galley kitchen and home-like décor. Overnight accommodation for family members is also available and the suite may be used for anywhere from a few hours to a full week.

When Johnson's father passed away in 1997, she said, hospital staff did all they could to ensure a comforting setting, but no amount of work could mask the distractions of day-to-day business at the hospital.

Though she and her sisters only spent four hours in the suite, she said, the experience with her mother's death was entirely different.

"I would say it was almost a rewarding feeling," she said, choosing her words carefully when describing those last hours at her mother's side. "In the end, it was just so peaceful and offered a completely different atmosphere of respectfully spending your time with your loved one."

Not only did Johnson appreciate access to 24-hour hospital resources during her mother's stay, she also appreciated the compassion shown after her mother passed away.

While acknowledging the advantages of spending those final hours at home, Johnson said, the security and peace of mind helped ease the transition.

"You never know how you are going to react to the situation," she said.

PALLIATIVE SUITE B2

INSIDE

There's lots to read in the Driftwood's second annual Death and Dying supplement, in addition to advertisers' offerings. In-depth coverage begins on the front page with a rites of passage story featuring voices of various islanders who deal with memorial services, along with an update on the palliative care suite opened at Lady Minto Hospital in the past year.

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Pre-planning recommended for services and celebrations

By EMMA YARDLEY
Driftwood Contributor

A rite of passage can be described as a ceremony that marks a person's movement from one phase of life to another, be it marriage, a bar mitzvah, or retirement.

Death and dying could be seen as the final rite of passage. Different cultures and social groups acknowledge the death of someone close to them in many ways, but grief is universal.

From the religious to

the secular, Salt Spring is fortunate to have so many compassionate individuals and established networks to help families through the death of someone close to them.

Liz Anderson specializes in the planning and facilitating of "Final Celebrations." She is a public notary who decided to provide a service which supported and informed families about their options. Tailoring each ceremony to the needs of the family and the wishes

of the deceased, Anderson can arrange all the particulars that may be just too overwhelming for those in mourning.

Anderson stresses the importance of pre-planning as something that should be thought about during estate planning, discussed with family members and filed for safe keeping. By making decisions on cremation or burial, location, type of ceremony and even the

RITE OF PASSAGE B3

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DEATH *and* DYING

Top-notch palliative care team enhances new Lady Minto suite

Much of the comfort experienced by islander Sheila Johnson when she spent time with her mother in the palliative care suite at Lady Minto Hospital came from the dedicated members of the palliative care team, she said.

Team members include physicians, home and acute care nurses, as well as counsellors.

Not only does the team try to meet patients' needs, but they also spend time helping loved ones cope with their loss well after death.

The team — which won the J.F. McCreary Interdisciplinary Health Care Award in 1997 — has prided itself on providing care and support to islanders in need since it was formed in the early 1990s.

Until the suite was set up last year, care providers often worked in people's homes. Today, patients and their families have a choice of where to stay.

According to Lady Minto Hospital Foundation board member Catherine Bennett, the suite is symbolic of the kind of care provided at a community-oriented hospital.

"What's important here is that you've got this team approach," she said.

"You've got doctors, nurses and administrative staff all working towards what is best for yourself and your family, and that's something I don't think you could get in the larger hospitals.

"You're walking that path alongside your loved one, but at the same time you have

the full support of the whole team."

In addition to government funding for the hospital's palliative care suite project, she said, the room represents the efforts of so many different segments of the community.

Thanks to the efforts of the hospital foundation, hospital auxiliary, Bessie Dane Foundation and Hospice, Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire, the Donna Vidalin Memorial Fund, Salt Spring Stitches and contributions from individual residents, the room has a personal feel.

The suite itself was created with funding from the hospital foundation, the Vancouver Island Health Authority and the Capital Health Region.

PALLIATIVE SUITE

From Page B1

it," she said. "If this had happened at home, we wouldn't have coped as well because we just wouldn't have known what to watch for and what was going to happen next."

The Bessie Dane Foundation and Hospice has been a long-time provider of home-based palliative care. Its director Kathleen Horsdal is happy to see the suite become available to islanders because it can offer families with a buffer between time spent with family and the hectic pace of daily life.

"As much as we idealize dying in one's home, it's sometimes just not possible for any

number of reasons," said Horsdal.

The idea behind the suite, she said, is to provide a comfortable setting from which to spend life's final moments, in much the same way we spend births, weddings or any other significant event in life.

"As we come in, so we go out," she said. "The suite creates a matching bookend that can be placed at that last part of life."

The suite was created with funding from the hospital foundation, the Vancouver Island Health Authority and the Capital Health Region.

Families empowered through personalized caring for loved ones

By EMMA YARDLEY
Driftwood Contributor

Elizabeth Lee refers to herself as an information centre to help people through the process of caring for their deceased loved one themselves.

And like many new services in a traditional world, hers is an alternative.

Lee cannot physically touch a body or fill out the official paperwork for you, since a licensed funeral director must do that, but she can stand beside you every step of the way to help you navigate through the legalities and regulations, from death certificates to Canada Pension Plan retention.

Lee, who has spent three years in the funeral industry, has never looked at her line of work as a job but rather a privilege to take care of the deceased and treat them with respect and dignity.

She feels that as a consultant she is empowering the family, almost returning to a more traditional way of handling the dead.

Since this can be a vulnerable time for people, Lee

wants to make the process as easy and honest as possible by offering families economical choices they might not otherwise have known were available to them.

While Lee informs families about the procedures needed to go through with a loved one's body, she also can help with any aspect of funeral, memorial service or celebration of life.

This is especially helpful for those cases where close family members are from off-island and want to know all the options available to them.

Lee discusses their choices, determines exactly what they are looking for and produces a cohesive package with all their options of churches, halls, ministers, flowers and catering.

This personalized way of caring for the dead is something that Lee holds very



Elizabeth Lee: offers help

dear to her heart as she went through the process twice last spring with the death of her elderly aunt and later her cousin.

She was with both of them when they died and as a family member was able to care for their bodies, building the caskets herself.

Lee says it was an intimate family process where "knowing that my hands were the last to touch them and they were with people that they loved" was very important.

She is well aware that this is not for everyone, but for her and her family it was a moving experience as their "final expression of love."

Lee believes that being able to care for your deceased loved one in the manner you want is important and that it is her calling to facilitate that process.

This way of caring for the dead is becoming increasingly popular back east.

"I'm probably way ahead of my time, but it has to start somewhere," she says.

Lee can be reached at 537-1023.

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Greenwoods Foundation

rites of passage

From Page B1

you wish to be played, you can alleviate some of the stress of decision making from those you leave behind.

Being secular, Anderson works outside traditional structures and can perform a ceremony at any location (within regulations) be it a boat, a hall or the family home. Involving family stories, poems, or any unique request, she can help to facilitate a memorable celebration of that person's life.

"These events are important because they provide some sort of closure . . . ultimately it is for those left behind," says Anderson.

As a lay minister for the Salt Spring Unitarian Fellowship, Melynda Okulitch is trained in many rites of passage, but she finds that a memorial service gives her the most satisfaction. Okulitch knows that while in the midst of grief it is hard to remember the joy. By creating a ceremony that allows the family and friends to recall good memories, "that person can be there again for just a moment . . . just long enough to say good-bye," she says.

When someone dies, Okulitch believes that there are two rites of passage taking place — one for the deceased and the other for those moving on in life without them.

"It can be hard to see the death of a loved one as a next step in life, but without taking the time to acknowledge their influence in your life, the grieving process can be stunted," says Okulitch.

She recalls one service she performed for a young man who was notorious for wearing blue jeans, so



Available to help with "rites of passage" are, from left, Pat Beattie, Liz Anderson and Melynda Okulitch.

Driftwood file photos

everyone wore jeans to honour and remember him as he was. It is moments like that which Okulitch says bring a "smile to the inner heart."

As a Unitarian she believes all beings are interdependent and equal, so it was fitting that she performed a ceremony for one man who requested his ashes be buried next to those of his beloved dog.

Ruth Cairns, minister at the Salt Spring Island United Church, believes that along with marriage and birth of children, death is another part of life. While the services she performs are within a religious context, Cairns is open to doing them for anyone who wishes it. For those who prefer a more intimate setting, there is a memorial garden on the United

church property where ashes may be scattered or Cairns can go directly to the chosen cemetery and provide a graveside service. She meets with the family of the deceased once or twice, involving them intimately in the planning process, "to make sure that their needs are met as grieving people."

Within her basic service structure of three hymns and a meditation, there is always a large space reserved for a eulogy to be given by a family member or a close friend, which Cairns says "is not simply a compilation of dates and achievements, but also personal stories from that relationship."

"It is this chance to express what they meant to them . . . [it] helps the grieving process to accept death as being a part of life," says Cairns.

as a consequence of original sin. "This is not necessarily a bad thing . . . in the eyes of faith it becomes a joy."

Goulet says that the church and faith can help with some of the personal fear and anxiety around death. "Knowing that the Lord is calling [us home] is a gift . . . the Lord doesn't want us to be lost," says Goulet.

Patrick Beattie, funeral director with Haywards Funeral Services, the only funeral home on Salt Spring, says that "every person involved with a death needs a chance to grieve in some sort of fashion."

He is not suggesting that everyone needs a traditional funeral; Beattie's ultimate goal "is to make sure that the deceased is handled with respect and that the family's wishes are carried out so that they are able to start the grieving process."

Elizabeth Lee, a funeral consultant on-island, believes that final services show respect for the one who has passed and are a necessary part of the grieving process for those left behind.

"There isn't a culture in the world that does not have a ceremony around death . . . we have shifted too far away from having this type of remembrance, which I believe is psychologically necessary in accepting that person's passing," says Lee.

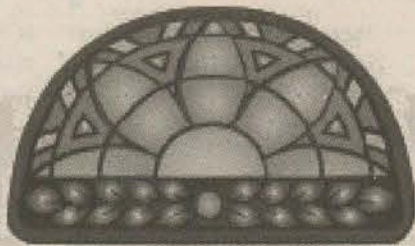
While everyone may have a different method of dealing with the death of a loved one, it is clear that acknowledging the loss of that person in their life and honouring them is a vital part in a rite of passage that affects everyone, no matter what their religious or spiritual tradition.

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If you would like more information, please contact Wendy Kaye at 537-8779 or by email at ssifoundation@saltspring.com.

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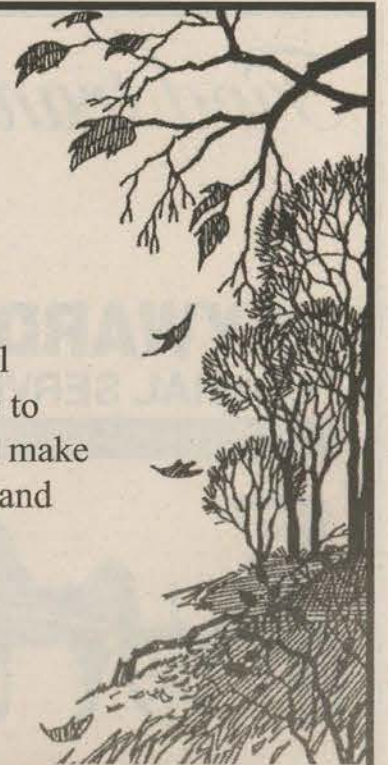
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DEATH *and* DYING

Funerals under BPCPA umbrella

Licensing and monitoring of funeral home operations has changed in the last year.

That responsibility now falls under the Business Practices and Consumer Protection Authority of B.C., which administers the Business Practices and Consumer Protection Act, the Cremation, Interment and Funeral Services Act and related regulations.

According to the BPCPA brochure, that body:

- licenses funeral homes, funeral directors, cemeteries, crematoria, embalmers (along with businesses in the other areas of its responsibility);

- inspects licensed businesses to ensure they are complying with the law;

- investigates alleged violations and follows

up with progressive enforcement action.

- responds to inquiries and complaints from B.C. consumers and businesses.

- educates and informs consumers and businesses about their rights and responsibilities.

- Funeral homes now pay a \$25 administrative fee on each death registered in B.C., which must be listed on contracts with clients.

Fees contribute to BPCPA operating costs and are not paid to the provincial government.

The BPCPA can be reached at P.O. Box 9244, Victoria, B.C. V8W 9J2; (604) 320-1667, or toll-free 1-888-564-9963.

Its website is www.bpcpa.ca.



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ANGEL EYES: This angel watches over a grave site in the cemetery behind Central Hall. Photo by Derrick Lundy

Exploring death teaches us how to live, says workshop facilitator

By CHRISTINE MAURO
Special to the Driftwood

"I don't mind dying. I just don't want to be around when it happens."

That's how Woody Allen expresses the way many people respond to the notion of death — a grudging acceptance of its existence along with a strong desire to have nothing to do with it. Ironically, it is this attitude that prevents a person from fully experiencing life.

A two-day workshop entitled Exploring Death and Opening the Heart aims to provide people with the opportunity to inves-

tigate and experience their own patterns, fears and wisdom surrounding death. The workshop takes place on Salt Spring at the Gatehouse at Stowell Lake Farm on January 28 and 29.

The workshop will be led by Seattle-based Rodney Smith, a hospice worker for almost 20 years in various roles, including social worker and executive director. He is also a senior teacher of Insight Meditation and author of the book *Lessons from the Dying*.

Smith does not see death awareness as a morbid preoccupation.

On the contrary, he believes

it encourages spontaneity, vitality and an interest in living.

"Death's message is one of hope and love, for it points the way to the very fulfillment of life, not to its diminishment," he said. "We study death in order to learn how to live."

The workshop is co-sponsored by the Bessie Dane Hospice and the Salt Spring Vipassana Community.

Cost of the workshop is \$60 to cover expenses, plus any voluntary contribution to support Smith in his teaching.

For more information go to ssvipassana.org or call Christine Mauro at 538-0173.

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DEATH *and* DYING

Planned giving an option

There's nothing mysterious about planned giving, says Lady Minto Hospital Foundation's development coordinator.

"Simply put, these are gifts given to a charity after careful thought," said Ruth Pepin.

Planned gifts can take many forms and are usually for larger amounts than might be considered when making a simple donation, said Pepin. Donations of cash or securities, gifts of life insurance, bequests in a will and gifts of property are all examples of planned gifts, which are eligible for charitable tax receipts.

Estate planning is an ideal time to consider leaving a charitable bequest of any size in one's will. Donors planning such a gift should first seek advice from a financial

advisor or a lawyer, says Pepin. Donors may also decide to speak to the charity about the potential gift to ensure that it is appropriate for that charity and that it can be put to good use.

"Charities are very grateful for the planned gifts they receive," notes Pepin. "These gifts help charities to achieve their objectives and often form the funding base for the purchase of new equipment, needed renovations, and client service. One great example of how planned giving has helped our community is the recent renovation to Lady Minto Hospital."

The Salt Spring Island Foundation (SSIF) has also benefitted greatly through planned giving.

"Through planned giving, the foundation has received

many remarkably generous bequests from islanders, who saw a gift to the Salt Spring Island Foundation as a wonderful way of giving back to their community and being remembered for it," said SSIF board member Judy Norget. "With the help of these bequests, the foundation is now able to give over \$80,000 in grants to community organizations every year."

Pepin points out that planned giving is also an excellent way to contribute to an endowment fund, as "a gift that keeps on giving."

"These are funds created by charities to hold gifts in perpetuity. Contributions to endowed funds are not spent. The income these funds generate is used on an ongoing basis to meet the needs of the charity."

Local cemeteries revamped

Two Salt Spring cemeteries have made physical and archival renovations in recent times.

Ben Martens, chairman of the Central Cemetery Committee, said he is presently waiting for the surveyors to conclude their study. With that information and along with extensive archival research and reconstruction, the committee will hire two local people to update the old map.

In the meantime, a serious clean-up is taking place, with an excavator at the cemetery

recently pushing back the ever-encroaching forest.

As there is not a lot of funding, the committee plans to do as much as it can to revamp the cemetery by fixing leaning markers, collapsed graves, cleaning headstones, and continuing landscaping work.

Anyone with a loved one in the area may want to pitch in.

Down at St. Paul's Catholic cemetery in Fulford, the year 2005 saw a major upgrade to make room for more plots.

"It's pretty nice up there

now," said spokesman Mac McCaffrey. "We cleaned it all up and we blocked off the older sections, so there's nobody going down in there. The new sections are going to hopefully be for the next 10 or 20 years."

Labour and equipment donations made it all possible.

"It's all been done by volunteers, which is another nice thing."

A future plan is to construct a big plaque listing all the names of pioneers buried at the St. Paul's cemetery.

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DEATH and DYING

Small will investment can pay off in spades

Modern families with spouses and multiple ex-spouses can make definitions very complicated

By MITCHELL SHERRIN
Staff Writer

If you're anything like me, you're way too busy living life to pause and consider writing a will.

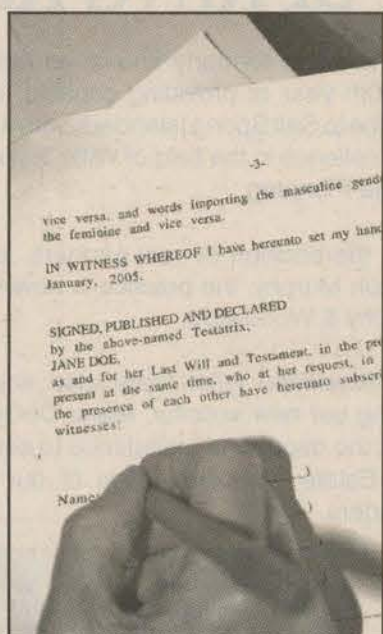
Moreover, you probably don't want to pay a lawyer to help you write one. I know I'm not alone on this.

But I also know we share another commonality. We're all going to die — but it doesn't hurt to be reminded sometimes; and we all know it's just plain foolish to leave your affairs dangling without some kind of a plan.

Heck, you've worked hard to amass whatever assets you've got and you've probably collected a few loved ones in your life too. In my case, I've put together a stunning flock of Frisbees, some beautiful library discards and an envious array of parlour games (Parcheesi anyone?), not to mention a happy nuclear family (with three kids, a dog, a cat, rabbits, a goat, sheep and a prized heritage apple tree).

I want my wife and kids to inherit the fruit of my labours when I roll doubles three times straight. But I've got a niggling feeling that without a will and some legal advice, everything could just go to chance.

So I called a lawyer to see just



SPENDING money on a will now can save funds later.

what type of person should get a will. After all, I'm still pretty young (humour me here), my net worth is modest and my family situation is straightforward.

"I guess the question would be when should a person think about doing a will," responded Ruth Magnusson, a lawyer who spoke on behalf of the Canadian Bar Association (CBA).

"When they don't have one, would be one reason," she laughed.

She also advises people to revisit a will if they've married (marriage revokes an existing will), divorced (divorce revokes certain appoint-

ments under a will) or if they've moved to a new jurisdiction (U.S. estate laws are different from Canadian laws, for example).

Wills should also be reviewed if executors are no longer appropriate or when children mature to become adults, she said.

As a positive note for mortality-challenged individuals like myself, Magnusson noted that the government has provided a degree of protection for estates without wills.

"A lot of people think that if they don't have a will, it will go to the government; that's not true."

The Estate Administration Act sets out how a deceased person's estate will be distributed: debts first; then the spouse receives the first \$65,000; and the excess is divided between spouse and children with differing formulas depending on the number of children.

But modern families with spouses and multiple ex-spouses can make definitions very complicated, she noted.

"Another thing to think about is the recent increase in real estate values."

Some of her elderly clients living under modest means are now sitting on houses valued over \$1 million.

She noted that a will is only one part of an estate plan and that clients might consider a "joint spousal trust" or an "alter ego trust."

"That way they can transfer their home or significant investments into the trust and save a lot of money on the probate fees."

She's seen some clients save as

much as \$60,000 in probate fees with a joint-spousal trust.

Similarly, mortals might like to consider incapacity planning with power of attorney and a representation agreement for health care.

"Incapacity planning is thinking about how your estate should be managed while you're still alive but should you become mentally incapacitated, which happens to a lot of elderly people."

Magnusson recommends people prepare for creating a will by collecting the full correct spellings of names and the addresses for everyone involved. Assessment notices, RRSP details and life insurance policy documents are also useful.

"It can be helpful for them to write it all down to get their thoughts clear."

She also recommends that people get advance permission from potential guardians and executors.

Wills and probates are surprisingly complex areas of the law, she said.

"One of the most common errors we've seen in homemade wills is how people deal with jointly held assets in the will," she said.

"People make the mistake of including a house in a will and it doesn't belong there. It really confuses the intent."

For example, a jointly held house shouldn't be included in a will because it passes outside the will. In other words, if I will part of my family home to my sister, my wife will still get the house because she's a joint owner.

My sister and my wife could then end up in a legal battle — a legacy anyone would want to avoid.

"Another typical mistake is that people give their bank account to so-and-so and their car to so-and-so and they don't deal with the residue."

When a will doesn't cover every part of the estate, "that leaves an intestacy as to the residue," which is pretty much the same as if someone didn't have a will for that part of the estate.

"It won't go the way they want it go."

People can get more information about will and estate planning through the CBA and Dial-a-Law (www.cba.org), but Magnusson strongly recommends against homemade will kits.

"Nobody is going to understand wills from a little reading. They may think that wills are simple, but they're not."

She's seen some homemade wills go through just fine, but she recalled a client who ended up spending \$16,000 in legal fees in an effort to resolve a homemade will that could have been drafted for \$200.

"We don't make a lot of money off preparing wills... the market has kept those prices quite low."

Legal fees are almost as unpopular a topic as the great inevitables — death and taxes.

"People hate to pay their lawyers," she laughed.

But while you can't cheat death, lawyers can probably help you take a nibble out of probate taxes.

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Exploring the culture of death

By TANYA LESTER
Driftwood Contributor

Although Dr. Marilyn Walker believes death is the door into the afterlife, she does not have the definitive answer as to the nature of that spiritual culture.

She compares each cultural interpretation to one aspect of a crystal through which shines a facet of the overall experience.

In a "Death and Dying from an Anthropological Perspective" course, the Mount Allison University professor will draw on her studies in countries as diverse from each other as Thailand and Siberia.

The course is being offered by the Salt Spring Island Society for Community Education (SSICE).

Throughout its four evening duration, Walker will facilitate participant discussion about death and dying. Her techniques will include storytelling about witnessing death and making lists of the most comforting words to use when consoling someone who is experiencing this loss.

"We don't get tutored very well (in white North American culture) in how to talk with the grieving," Walker said.

Canadian film footage that features people who are dying will be used.

"This is a way to bring the dead into the classroom on their own terms," she said.

One of Walker's early experiences as a medical anthropologist in Thailand opened her eyes to cultural differences towards death when she was invited to a funeral. Each guest was expected to contribute a huge multi-coloured floral wreath (in sharp contrast to the sombre black of North American services). She said the event was a festive celebration of the person's life and open to as many people as the family could invite.

People made memorial books in honour of the deceased, said Walker.

She pointed out that the presence of an altar brings the spiritual right into the Thai home. Tiny delicate cakes will be offered to ghosts because it is believed these will fit into their tiny mouths.

In the south-east Asian Hmong culture, a type of ladder next to the altar provides spirits with a way to occasionally leave for a holiday.

Walker said that perhaps our Western fear of death is connected with our fear of being alone and belief that being by ourselves is a negative thing. This is not the case in many other cultures.

What she does see is a strong connection between how we live and how we die in most cultures. If we live a good life, death is a good experience. She has also observed that forgiveness is very important.

"It's not over for the dead and it is not over for the liv-

ing," Walker said.

For example, before her brother died, he told her that he was going to miss her — the implication being that he realized he was going to continue his existence in some other form and place.

In many indigenous societies, said Walker, the shaman is the intermediary between the living and the dead. If a spirit cannot "let go" of someone she or he loved in life, the shaman can facilitate the release.

The dying can be teachers to the living. Walker said her brother had created films on the subject of birth and had thought this was the most "amazing transition." When, he was dying, however, he concluded that death was more incredible.

Walker hopes the course will assist people in preparing for dying and death. She expects emotions, including joy, to surface during the course. It will run on Thursdays from March 30 to April 20 from 7 to 9 p.m. at Gulf Islands Secondary School. The cost is \$75.

Prior to this course, Walker will be conducting one on shamanism.

Financial assistance is available for all SSISCE courses. Registration information is available in binders at the Driftwood, Mary Hawkins Memorial Library, PARC, the school board office or Salt Spring Books — or call coordinator Libby Jutras at 537-0037.

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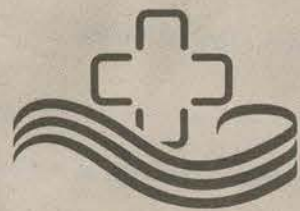


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