



**A 10-hour day of inspiration, information and connection  
held Saturday, October 17, 2015  
on the campus of Reed College in Portland, Oregon**

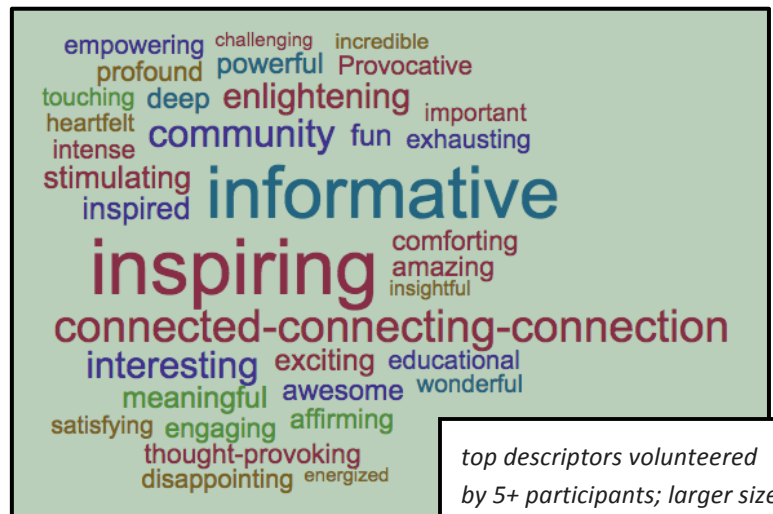
## **FINAL REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY**

**Death:OK, Let's Talk About It** was a one-time event produced by an all-volunteer steering committee of four people in partnership with more than 70 volunteers and 70 presenters. Five hundred people attended the sold-out event; another 170 joined the waiting list before it was closed. The event mission: *to help build a community where we reconnect to life and death and to each other, reducing the silence, fear, and isolation that too often surround the topic of death.*

This report provides highlights of how the event was organized, what participants said about their experience, and what we learned.

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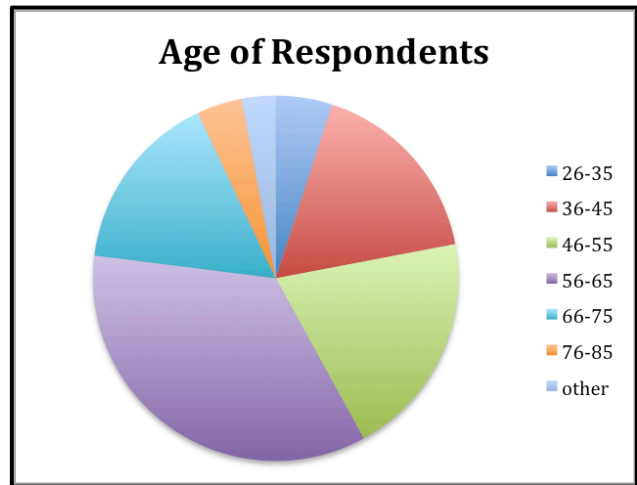
*top descriptors volunteered  
by 5+ participants; larger size  
= more frequent mention*

## SECTION I: WHAT PEOPLE SAID & WHAT WE LEARNED

### WHAT PEOPLE SAID ABOUT THE EVENT

We asked participants, including presenters and volunteers, to participate in an on-line, post-event feedback survey. We heard from a whopping 50% of those who attended. Respondents were mostly women (as were event participants); 45% of respondents were under age 55 with the largest group (35%) aged 56-65.

Respondents offered an abundance of appreciation and thoughtful reflections about the organization and impact of the event, such as...



“Wonderful energy throughout, a product of excellent leadership. Very interesting speakers, sharing generously; minimal ego, maximum helpfulness. Reed College was a great place for such a conference. Lovely natural setting.”

“The design of the event was surprisingly moving. Having so many different parts of the conversation around death phobia - from artists, health care administrators, caregivers and activists - was gorgeous in its scope. Seeds were planted during Death:OK which will be carried into many different communities and families. I was particularly impressed with the communication and management skills of the organizers. Their leadership was both professional AND loving.”

“I applaud the intelligence (both emotional and cognitive) that the conference team demonstrated from the time I submitted my workshop proposal to the time I left the closing events. The creativity, risk-taking and concern for the human condition impressed me as a presenter.”



**Opening Ceremony** – This 75 minute session included opening videos, a welcome and invocation by the event steering committee, opening remarks by former Oregon Governor Barbara Roberts, and a 50-minute keynote by Stephen Jenkinson. Average Rating 4.8 (5 the high end).

“I was not prepared for the emotional impact of the opening session. That's NOT a negative though. I feel the opening session could not have been better. Thank you.”

**Stephen Jenkinson** then presented a highly-attended 75-minute talk during the first workshop session. Average Rating 4.3 (5 the high end of the scale). Between his keynote and the talk, Jenkinson inspired 183 comments on the survey; of these 86% were positive and 14% were critical (with some experiencing him as “divisive” or “polarizing”). Additionally, in the open-ended “What I appreciated most” question, 58 people cited Jenkinson, placing him in the top-five most highly appreciated aspects of the event.

“Stephen Jenkinson did a wonderful job dropping the whole group into a really deep place right from the get go. I think it had a profound effect on many people’s experience. I wish I had the chance to learn more from him.”



“Probably the best keynote I have ever seen at such a conference. His grace, language, humor and no-nonsense way of speaking about death was absolutely refreshing and inspiring.”

“By five minutes into his speech, I turned to my pal and said that I’d already gotten my money’s worth. What a brilliant, passionate, and compassionate man. One of the most inspiring moments of my whole life.”

### “Things I Appreciated Most Were...”

Several themes emerge from participants’ top responses to this open-ended question:

**High Ratings for Presenters (108 mentions)** – Many were astonished when we confirmed more than 70 presenters; choosing among them was challenging for everyone, overwhelming for some. While 8% of respondents commented that there were too many sessions, 68 people (27%) cited the range and variety of speakers as what they appreciated most; another 40 people said they most appreciated the quality of speakers and presenters. Most individual workshops were generally rated highly and every presenter had at least a few passionate supporters even if their overall rating wasn’t as high as some.

“I cannot adequately describe the amount of support and help I received because I got to hear both Barbara Roberts and Stephen Jenkinson. Their authentic languaging about death and dying was a great relief.”

“[I appreciated] the breadth of topics included and the expertise of the presenters. It was extremely well organized - and especially for a volunteer based event - right down to the presentations we had chosen being listed on the back of our nametags.”

“Kudos to all. Loved the variety of workshops... my choices pushed my edges and I was glad that I opted for those choices.”

**The People (98 mentions)** – Using phrases like “found my tribe,” a quarter of participants referenced the other participants (31 mentions) and networking, community, and connections (33 mentions). Another 22 appreciated being with “people willing to talk about death” and 12 described a sense of “like-mindedness” or “belonging”.

“[I appreciated] being surprised to see people from other areas of my life and having the opportunity to connect deeply with them in a sacred space around death and life.”

“[I appreciated] the sense of community and community engagement; the welcoming of a variety of the 'less heard' voices.”

**The Organization & Energy (62 mentions)** – Also earning “most appreciated” status was the organization and energy put into the event. “Well organized and planned” said 62 people. Another 34 used words like these to describe the energy put into event: love, dedication, respect, grace. Another 26 praised the event’s openness, honesty, and authenticity.

“Ritual. Reverence. Storytelling. Deep presence. Humor.”

“Congratulations to all who dedicated themselves to a wonderful, honest, very human event.”

“It was very well organized from start to finish. The information was clear, accessible and sent to participants in a timely manner. Lots of details were thought of and the day flowed amazingly well for the number of attendees; the snafu w/ lunch was just that ~ the system simply didn't work and we all got a chance to practice some kindness. There were plenty of volunteers to answer questions and organizers were present and available during the day.”



**Stephen Jenkinson (56 mentions)** – see above

**Location/ Venue (43 mentions)** – We were fortunate to be able to book this private college setting in a residential neighborhood. A natural wooded canyon runs down the center of the campus and the pathways between our buildings, and several of our event rooms, were open to this greenspace. We rented two golf carts to provide mobility support from the parking lots and between the three buildings we used.

“The beautiful, quiet, soothing and inspiring setting of Reed College was perfect! It set the correct tone. If it had occurred in a more medical environment it would not have had the same positive impact. It lent a calming, neutral air to thinking about death.”

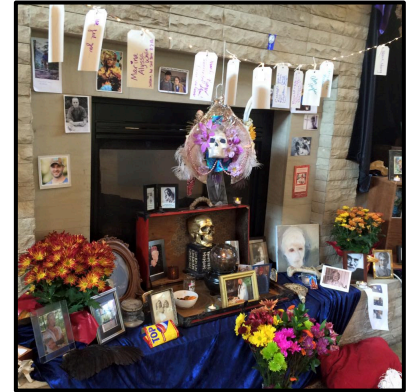
Also earning mention as a “most appreciated” aspect by 10 or more respondents: the volunteers (25 mentions); Governor Barbara Roberts (22); the Opening Ceremony (15); email updates/ communications from event organizers (12); music and the Threshold Choir (12); “that it happened at all” (11); the Ancestors Altar (11); and the Resource Area (10).

“The main stage in Vollum Lecture Hall was stunningly created. The Ancestors' Altar was gorgeous, meaningful and brilliant.”

“Barbara Roberts was eloquent and focused. She was accessible and connected well with the audience.”

“The Threshold Choir was a true personal gift.”

“I found the resource tables very informative – an abundance of information! Great opportunity to connect with others and hear their stories.”



### “Constructive Feedback on What Could Have Gone Better...”

Our one significant logistical challenge (other than the last-minute need to accommodate a memorial service unexpectedly scheduled on campus during our event) was lunch. We allowed only an hour (though we were welcome to take food into the 1pm session) and initially expected our participants would speedily pass through a two-sided line with a limited offering of entrees. Instead they used meal tickets to select from a full food court before entering the logjam of cashier stations. While 40% (101 people) cited lunch as too hectic, crowded, or short – the overwhelmingly top-mentioned critique – most brought a sense of humor and perspective to the one major glitch in the day. (One other disappointing snafu resulted in a much-anticipated workshop using sand tray being cancelled at the last minute.)



Aside from lunch, the other “could have gone better” aspects mentioned by 20 or more people all reflect “too much of a good thing”: event too short, should have been two days (29 mentions); not enough down time, breaks, time in between sessions, etc. (22); not enough time for networking, connecting, mingling (14); and too many sessions (20) – see also “Most Appreciated”. Also reflecting the theme of “too much” were words like “overwhelming” (9), “too tired by the end of the day” (9), and “no quiet place for reflection” (5).

About a dozen people each cited the crowded and somewhat chaotic registration area; presentations that were unavailable; and speakers or presentations that didn’t match expectations. In another mark of the overall goodwill that pervaded the event, the challenges with our nametags (hard to read and occasional inaccuracies in the session selection data they contained) were mentioned by only 7 people.



## WHAT WE LEARNED: TOP 5 TAKE-AWAYS

Building off the feedback provided by these 250 participants, presenters, and volunteers, here are some further reflections from event organizers:

1. **There's a hunger for what we offered.** With a maximum capacity of 500, we expected that we would sell out in advance. But we didn't anticipate how high the interest would be: 200 responses to our 2014 input survey; presenters, and some participants, from all over the country; a flood of workshop proposals, nearly none of them duplicative, from all kinds of presenters; waiting lists for tickets and for volunteer positions; 100 people attending an added Friday panel discussion. Focusing primarily on conversation ("Let's Talk About It"), building from Death Café principles (nurturing, non-commercial, inclusive of the full spectrum of beliefs and orientations around death) – we promised "Inspiration. Information. Connection." Clearly this tapped a deep need: Inspiring, Informative, and Connecting/ Connected/ Connection/ Community were the top words used to describe the event.
2. **The event required exceptional flexibility and commitment from its organizers, to a degree not easily sustained or replicated.** Spanning a full two years from the first brainstorming session to the event itself demanded a continuity of commitment that not everyone could make. The original concept for the planning committee structure was a model that typically relies on paid staff support (both Megan and Holly had professional experience in staffing comparable events) but in this case that level of support was uncompensated. Shifts in availability, interest, skill-task fit, and group chemistry resulted in the workload transferring to two leadership volunteers with the life flexibility that allowed them to make this an unpaid part-time job for the final six months. Their extraordinary level of volunteer commitment enabled the event to minimize financial risk – but it didn't create a sustainable or replicable model for future events.
3. **What we did particularly well:**
  - **Renowned & thought-provoking opening speakers:** Early booking of Stephen Jenkinson as our keynoter and former Oregon Governor Barbara Roberts established credibility and created interest. Opening the day with them in a plenary session attended by all gave everyone plenty to think about and talk about from the outset.
  - **Blend of programming & presenters:** Our three programming tracks (see Event Design, below) and community space options – along with the mix of professionals and presenters speaking from personal experience – reflected the diverse range of perspectives that make up the current groundswell of interest in dying and death, providing something for everyone and ample opportunity for cross-pollination.
  - **Head + heart:** Feedback from participants before, during, and after the event confirmed that we achieved a balance between effective organization and treating people well. The level of personal attention given to relationships and communication was time-consuming (described by one observer as "morally admirable but operationally problematic") but rewarding.
  - **Fiscal systems:** We partnered with a 501(c)(3) non-profit to serve as our fiscal agent (using their bank account and bookkeeper to manage our finances); conducted nearly all

transactions on-line using PayPal; set up a clear system for payment and reimbursement requests; and monitored and adjusted our working budget regularly to ensure that we didn't commit to any expenses we couldn't cover.

- **Modest expectations:** While the event's programming was complex and ambitious in its scope, we keep our focus on producing a great one-time event that would inspire, inform, and connect – without attachment to what would result from that inspiration, information, and connection. After much thoughtful early conversation we were deliberate in choosing not to form an ongoing organization, not to commit to an annual event, and not to see ourselves as organizing a movement. While all of those might be worthy objectives, we recognized the limitations of our capacity and trusted that, if a true movement is underway, or an annual event or a new organization is needed, others would step forward and build from what we created.

#### 4. What could have gone better:

- **We may have undervalued what we provided & crowd-funding underperformed:** Ten hours of mostly very high-quality programming, including food and free parking was a real deal at \$60, and did not cover the true costs of the event when considering the level of unpaid staffing (see #2 above). While it's likely that many if not most participants could have paid more, we did not attract a strong level of additional financial support from the community. We set a \$5,000 goal for individual donations (tax-deductible via our fiscal sponsor), and raised \$4,000 (which included a \$1,500 gift from an event organizer). Without real data we can't know why we fell short... factors could include failure to make a compelling case that funds were needed; lack of a crowd-funding platform that would convey urgency and momentum (we used PayPal and a thermometer to show progress to goal); shortage of time and energy to support more effective fundraising; and lack of donor history on this issue.
- **Many of our systems were highly complex:** From advance ticket sales to advance session selection, name tag production, on-site session selection, recording of sessions, collecting and sharing presenter hand-outs, ticket waiting list – we contracted for expert tech support to custom-build these systems, but the volunteer nature of the event combined with the high volume of presenters, volunteers, and participants meant that glitches happened. While what worked far exceeded what didn't, tougher choices could have resulted in simpler systems that delivered less but also required less of event organizers. For example, committing to a distinct blog post showcasing each presenter became a daunting task once we'd confirmed 70 presenters.

- 5. **It was worth it!** While we agree we wouldn't attempt something of this scope again in this same way (see #2), the core team that produced the event has no regrets. It was an incredibly rewarding experience, one that will ripple through many lives (and deaths) in years to come.

## SECTION II: BACKGROUND

### HISTORY & LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE

In the spring of 2013, Holly Pruett, a Life-Cycle Celebrant and Home Funeral Guide with a background in nonprofit management, joined with several colleagues to organize Portland's first Death Café – a participant-generated conversation format designed to help people make the most of their (finite) lives by increasing awareness of death. More than 100 people expressed interest in attending. Since then, 1,000 have joined the PDX Death Café notification list and each Café attracts dozens of participants.

In response to the initial groundswell of interest, an ad hoc group of volunteers met on October 10, 2013 to ask: *What next?* We wrestled with the question of forming an ongoing organization, whether to think of ourselves as a movement, and what kind of activities would serve our sense that people wanted a place to talk about death differently. Over a series of several meetings in the winter and spring of 2014, a shifting composition of interested people considered both organizational and programmatic options. Some participants took the lead to organize what were informally called “Death Café Plus” events with programming such as a story-hour, a labyrinth walk, a theatrical performance, and a death planning workshop presented before or after a Death Café; later, a monthly movie night was launched.

By March, 2014 Megan Braunsten, a community organizer, and Holly (who together had been organizing the meetings of the larger group) decided to begin organizing a one-day event. The larger group discontinued meeting. Megan and Holly put together a structure for a volunteer planning committee, which Megan offered to chair, and put out a call for volunteers to apply to serve on the committee. Dozens of people responded, and by the end of May we had a working steering committee comprised of chairs who would lead volunteer teams focused on programming, marketing, finance, and logistics.

The programming team, made up of about a dozen volunteers, met for the first time in May, 2014 to begin to envision the quality and shape of the day. We put together an on-line survey to invite input from the community, gathering more than 200 responses over the course of the summer. The marketing team had a number of meetings to brainstorm outreach and communications plans.

On September 21, 2014 the full planning committee came together for a half-day retreat to consider the results of the community survey and engage in a brand development exercises led by communications pro LeAnn Locher.

By the end of 2014 we had arrived at a date, place, and name for our event, with clear concepts outlined for our programming and a working budget. In early 2015 we finalized a fiscal sponsorship agreement with White Eagle Memorial Preserve to handle fiscal management of the event.

The first quarter of 2015 saw transition in our steering committee, with a reorganization resulting in the four-person team that worked intensively for the next six months to bring the event to its conclusion:



Holly Pruett, serving as chair, handling finances, and co-chairing programming; Tio Houston co-chairing programming; Jodie Buller chairing logistics and volunteers; and Traci Emerson chairing marketing. Megan Braunsten, by then 8 months pregnant, rejoined us on the day of to coordinate on-site volunteers.

### **DESIGN OF THE EVENT (see Appendix for the printed program distributed at the event)**

We debated the merits of a **one versus two-day event**, including the idea of using the second day as a strategy session for those wanting to make change in the community. We decided to go with a single, long day, not knowing how many would really have an appetite and the stamina for two days of programming, and cognizant that we were already asking a lot of our all-volunteer planning team. We decided to leave the question of “what’s next” off the table and focus on creating an exceptional one-time event, trusting that any next steps would develop organically where there was sufficient energy.

Based on the community survey, we made a few other early decisions about the **character of the event** which we shared as we began to elicit support from potential partners:

- Non-profit: Not designed to generate revenue for commercial purposes.
- Independent: Produced in partnership with many entities, but not controlled by or identified with any one business or organization.
- Non-commercial: While sponsors and vendors may offer products or services, their participation in the event must be aligned with the event mission; participants are seen primarily as empowered members of a grassroots movement seeking information, inspiration, experience and connection and not as a marketplace of customers.
- Collaborative: The volunteer organizers of the event recognize and appreciate the many established organizations which have been supporting education and services around end-of-life issues for years. It is our hope and intent that the event will “float all boats” and contribute to a healthier environment around death and dying in which all can do their important work.

We also established early on that we wanted to hold the event in a place surrounded by nature, at an accessible price point, with a robust mix of programming: keynotes, workshops, performances, art, Death Cafés, and resource information.

The final design of the event included:

- **Opening Ceremony:** volunteers transformed a sterile lecture hall into a beautiful ceremonial space with loaned art work, memorial quilts, folded cranes, and video; participants were welcomed with a ritual that welcomed the deaths of our past, present, and future
- **Opening remarks by former Oregon Governor Barbara Roberts**
- **Keynote** (and 75-minute talk) **by Stephen Jenkinson**, MTS, MSW, author of *Die Wise*, subject of the documentary *Griefwalker*, and founder of the Orphan Wisdom School
- **Three workshop tracks presenting more than 50 options in four 75-minute time slots** (we allowed for a one-hour lunch and 15-20 minutes of passing time between sessions):
  - **Advance Planning Track: Dilemmas, Decisions, Documents** (9 workshops)

- **Death Care & Bereavement Track: Reclaiming Rights, Rituals & Remembrance** (26 workshops) focused on Bereavement (5), Caregivers (3), Ceremony (4), Death Care (4), Home Death Care (5), Preparation for Dying (7)
- **Arts & Experience: Imagine, Inspire, Immerse** (18 workshops) focused on Hands-On (3), Music (2), Theatrical (4), Visual Arts (4), Writing (3), Yoga (2)
- **Community Space options:** in addition to the workshop track sessions, we offered the following:
  - An **Ancestor Altar** in the lunch room where we also held our closing festivities; this was thoughtfully curated and tended by a presenter and a team she recruited
  - **“My Life, My Legacy, My Wishes Photo Booth”** offered by Departing Decisions as a way to consider and record one’s wishes
  - **Song Baths**, a chance to rest in a comfortable chair surrounded by members of the Portland Threshold Choir offering personally-tailored songs
  - A **Death Café** and a chance to play **My Gift of Grace**, a card game fostering conversation about life and death (with so many other choices, these were not highly attended)
  - An unstaffed **Resource Fair** where presenters and providers (those who purchased a premium ticket recognizing them as a provider of goods or services) displayed informational material on shared tables
- **Closing Festivities:** we closed the day with happy hour refreshments and musical performances in a setting intended to allow participants to relax and mingle with others.

In addition, we added two Friday events. We held an early-evening Presenter Welcome Party at the world-renowned children’s grief program The Dougy Center. Earlier in the day we showcased several out-of-state presenters in a panel discussion on Challenging Our Dominant Culture’s Relationship with Death. Offered on a walk-in, donation basis at a local community center, this add-on provided access to many who were on the larger event’s waiting list; it was attended by about 100.

## FUNDING & FISCAL MANAGEMENT

Early on we developed several budget scenarios and adjusted as we went to ensure that our costs would never exceed our revenue. We sought to balance a number of considerations:

- Setting a ticket price meaningful enough to represent commitment but affordable to a non-professional audience: our \$60 standard ticket included lunch, coffee and snacks, and a 10-hour day of programming; the \$100 provider ticket included the opportunity to place informational materials in the resource area.
- Creating an incentive for early ticket sales that would answer the question, *If we build it, will they come?* Early-bird ticket buyers could sign-up in advance for their top choice of workshops – and also ensured their spot at the event (tickets sold out two months in advance).
- Conducting limited sponsorship outreach to organizations that could respect our commitment to a non-commercial, independent event. An early \$5K commitment by a champion from a major health care organization ended up being anonymous (the higher-ups in the entity were unwilling to publically associate themselves with the event) but was matched by a contribution from Compassion & Choices. We provided several other organizations and small businesses with sponsorship recognition in exchange for in-kind contributions.

- Forgoing the potential revenue of a vendor area in order to emphasize conversation over sales; leveling the playing field among providers with large marketing budgets and the emerging solopreneurs in this field by offering only an unstaffed resource area with shared info tables.
- Committing to subsidize the attendance of all presenters (including travel stipends for out-of-town presenters) and all advance volunteers; day-of volunteers were offered half-price tickets.
- Limiting merchandise to advance sales of products intended to stimulate discussion, reducing the risk of (a) commercialization, and (b) unsold inventory.
- Offering the community a chance to contribute through tax-deductible donations, including memorial donations acknowledged on site at the event with room placards.

Our final results represented a healthy mix of revenue: 54% from ticket sales (\$20K); 27% from sponsorship (two \$5K contributions); 11% from memorial and community donations (\$4K); and 8% from merchandise (\$3K). We ended the event with a small fund balance that we returned to our fiscal sponsor, White Eagle Memorial Preserve, to use to further end-of-life and green burial education.

### **MARKETING, MERCHANDISE & RESOURCE MATERIALS**

Our sole personnel expense was a contract for 3-5 hours a week of tech support. We were fortunate to have the services of Rory Bowman who offered us a reduced rate for his work. Save for the cost of domain registration and hosting, we relied on free software and services. Rory custom-built a Word Press web site (DeathOK.com) that became our platform for all event information and sales. We relied heavily on Google forms to survey people and collect data; on Google's shared document drive; and on the free version of MailChimp to email participants. We also established a Facebook page for the event.

Given our expectations of selling out the event, marketing focused on boosting circulation of our presenter request for proposals, and then communicating with all participants. The former took the form of reaching out to others in the field via Facebook and email; the latter relied on a monthly newsletter, regular blog and Facebook posts, and occasional emails. Capacity constraints limited our use of Twitter.

We offered four products for sale to help underwrite the event and stimulate further discussion: a t-shirt and tote bag featuring the Death:OK logo (additionally we produced logo bandanas worn by volunteers on shift). We retained half of the purchase price of two external products: the card game My Gift of Grace and an all-access pass to End-of-Life University. Sales were by advance purchase for pick up at the event, which reduced what we made from merchandise but limited risk and the labor involved.

Given the waiting list that developed once we sold out, we made an effort to capture and share some of the event's content. Limited media outreach on the eve of the event resulted in a lengthy segment on Oregon Public Broadcasting's Think Out Loud featuring an event organizer and three presenters, and an hour-long behind-the-scenes interview on End-of-Life University. Programming volunteers developed resource lists that are available on the event web site. And we used Reed College's A/V department to record a limited number of sessions; these recordings are available to those who participated in the event or were on the waiting list.

## APPRECIATIONS

We gathered as volunteers on May 24, 2014 to begin to dream up the shape of the day we came to call Death:OK. Once we circulated our request for proposals, an incredible array of presenters answered the call. They brought their time, talent, and in many cases, their heard-earned personal experience to the table – and what a feast it was! An overwhelming number of folks purchased tickets – or tried to, only to discover we'd sold out before the end of August. None of that would have mattered if not for the collective team of 70+ caring, focused, generous volunteers who dedicated all or part of their day to ensuring the experience went smoothly for everyone else. Specific shout-outs to:

- The **Death:OK steering committee**: Holly Pruett, Jodie Buller, Tio Houston and Traci Emerson with Megan Braunsten, who helped get the steering committee going and then rejoined us to lead our huge day-of volunteer team.
- The **program team** met for over a year to envision all that the day could be, working from the hundreds of voices who provided input through our community survey: *Gretchen, Donna, Ames, Sandy, Jules, Holly S, Stefanie*, Wendi, Derianna, Kate, Lily, Nancy, Tio, and Holly P. (*track leaders in bold & presenter liaisons in italics*).
- **Marketing committee members** Nora, Noraleigh, Emily, Cecily and Traci spread the word, aided by the **beautiful design work** of LeAnn Locher & Mary Eliot.
- These teams laid the groundwork and then dozens of fresh volunteers stepped up to help the day go so smoothly – **more than 70 volunteers**, all told. A big shout out to our registration, grounds, hall & building, a/v, and liaison volunteers.
- The creators of the **special community spaces**: Khaliqa, who led our Death Cafe and the other Death Cafe facilitators; Shelly, our Resource Area Coordinator, and the Providers who bought premium tickets and shared their resource materials; Stella who tended the Ancestors Altar and her helpers; Departing Decisions for the photo booth; and the Threshold Choir for providing song.
- For donating their **creative talents to our opening**, gratitude to: artist Lillian Pitt; memorial quilt maker Lori Mason; origami crane artist and filmmaker Leslie Kimiko Ward; the late crane folder John Worley Symons; and the crew that pulled it all together so beautifully: Inga, Gail, and Claudia.
- All of these fantastic volunteers set the stage for virtuoso performances by our **68 presenters**. From the empowering remarks by Governor Roberts, to the deeply thought provoking keynote by Stephen Jenkinson, to the dozens of workshops and performances, these artists, storytellers, healers, practioners, and visionaries provided an astonishing breadth and depth of content.
- **Reed College** for hosting and welcoming us.
- Our **sponsors** who provided generous support and assistance: Compassion & Choices of Oregon; Holly Pruett, Life Cycle Celebrant and Conversation Leader; the Northwest Association of Death Education & Bereavement Support; and Departing Decisions; along with our memorial donors.
- For **technical support**, big thanks to fiscal agent White Eagle Memorial Preserve and the Sacred Earth Foundation; tech and organizational whiz Rory Bowman (additional tech support from Eva Schweber); and to community radio KBOO for taping Friday's bonus panel discussion.

## CONCLUSION

What an assemblage of people, stories, memories, talent, tenderness, and longing for a different way! And, to top it all off, a double rainbow graced the campus just as we ended our day together...

To all who gathered that weekend – and the larger audience who watched over our shoulder with curiosity – thank you, thank you, thank you, for inviting, supporting, and being so deeply present in this important conversation.



The group of volunteers who produced this one-time event has now disbanded. Stay tuned for news from some of the organizers involved with the event about new initiatives to continue the conversation in 2016.

*Report written by Holly Pruett with data analysis by Kate Brassington, and review by Rory Bowman, Jodie Buller, and Traci Emerson.*

## EVENT PROGRAM

# Death:OK

LET'S TALK ABOUT IT  
PORTLAND 10.17.15

## Welcome!

We organized this day of inspiration, information & connection to help build a community where we reconnect to life and death and to each other, reducing the silence, fear, and isolation that too often surround the topic of death.

And what a community we're beginning to knit together - 500 strong! YOU are here, along with 68 presenters, more than 70 volunteers, and our generous donors and sponsors. An all-volunteer planning committee has been dreaming this day for two full years.

May your conversations be rich and your connections uplifting; and may we as a community grow in our capacity to talk about dying and death, grief and remembrance. Thank you for your full-hearted participation.

*Holly Pruett, Jodie Buller, Tio Houston, Traci Emerson, Death:OK Steering Committee*

### Need Assistance?

- Volunteers are identified by their Death:OK bandana.
- Grounds volunteers can connect you with our golf cart shuttles if you need mobility assistance.
- Our Office/Help Desk is in Vollum Lounge in the morning and outside Gray Campus Center Room A from noon-7pm.

### Recordings & Web Site Resources

We're recording some of our sessions – watch our e-newsletter after the event for details on accessing the recordings. And check out the great bibliographies, TED talks, and other resource listings on [www.DeathOK.com/resources](http://www.DeathOK.com/resources).

### Please return your plastic name badge

Before you leave, please deposit your name tag in our handy bins (these are loaners that we need to return or replace). Special thanks to our generous sponsor Compassion & Choices of Oregon for additional name badge support.

### Feedback, please!

After the event, please give us your feedback in an on-line survey by logging on to [Feedback.DeathOK.com](http://Feedback.DeathOK.com). You'll also get the link via email. We'll pass your comments on to all of our generous presenters and dedicated volunteers.

IT'S OKAY TO TALK ABOUT DEATH.  
IT'S OKAY TO BE SCARED.  
IT'S OKAY TO LAUGH.  
AND TO CRY.  
LET'S TALK ABOUT IT.





## Death:OK Break-Out Session Schedule & Room Locations

Go to [www.DeathOK.com/schedule](http://www.DeathOK.com/schedule) for session details

### Access to Reed WIFI

[www.reed.edu/cis/help/wireless](http://www.reed.edu/cis/help/wireless), join ReedXenia

Vollum Rooms	10:45-noon	1-2:15	2:30-3:45	4:00-5:15
<b>Vollum Lecture</b>	Dying-Centered Language for Dying-Centered Care; Stephen Jenkinson	Beyond Kubler-Ross; Catherine Beckett	The Care you Want; Matt Whitaker	Death and Doctors; Matt Chan, Eriko Onishi, MD
<b>Vollum Lounge</b>	Grief as a Mystical Journey; Terri Daniel	Articulating the Essence of Your Life; Susyn Reeve	Natural Burial Options; Jodie Buller, Brian Flowers, David Noble	The Heart of the Matter; Selene Seltzer
<b>Vollum 110</b>	Death with Dignity; Matt Whitaker, Dr. Pete Reagan	Oregon's Advance Directive; Amy Veatch	Aspects of Caring for the Dead at Home; Heidi Boucher	How to Write a Death Plan; Ashley Benem
<b>Vollum 116</b>	Green Funerals; Elizabeth Fournier	Deciding to Die; Susie Cunningham, Julie Nelligan	Two Rare Birds--A Legacy of Love; Lily Myers Kaplan	Writing Through the Conversation; Shelly Sweeney
<b>Vollum 118</b>	1000 Cranes; Leslie Kimiko Ward	A Holistic View on Estate Planning; Melanie Marmion	Oregon's POLST: What's It All About? Gretchen Brauer-Rieka	Talking Openly about Infant Death; Lucinda Weatherby
<b>Vollum 120</b>	Beyond the Veil; Alice Hardesty	Planning For the Final Rite of Passage; Charlene Ray	Music-Thanatology; Sharilyn Cohn	Mourning the Loss of Your Pet Georgena Eggleston
<b>Vollum 126</b>	Earth My Body; Teri Ciachi, Tai Fenix Kulystin, Karissa Ronkin	From the Morgue to the Museum; Angela Hennessy	All That Is Solid Melts Into Air; David Orr	Still, Life: A Creative Journey of Living with Death; Sarah Treanor
<b>Vollum 134</b>		Memorial Quilts & Remembrance Boxes; Lori Mason with Mary Elliott + Ellen Fortin	Mindful Photography and End-of-life Caregiving; Jessica Thomas	So, You've Chosen Cremation; Sally Shannon
Eliot Rooms	10:45-noon	1-2:15	2:30-3:45	4:00-5:15
<b>Eliot 207</b>	Shamanism; Analouise Williams	From Coffins to Compost; Nora Menkin	Planning Your Own Memorial Service; Kim Wieneke, Carter Smith	Creating an EOL Support Group; Marta Shoman
<b>Eliot 216</b>	In The Parlor: a Documentary Film; Heidi Boucher	Being Present with Death; Lisa Bordner	The Geography of Grief; Tony Grace	Doing It Your Way; Phyllis Petteys, Lynda McCormick
<b>Eliot Chapel</b>		Theatre of Remembering; Harry + "Going On" excerpt	Going On: An Inspiring Story; Kristin Olson-Huddle	In Memory of YOU; Jason Myers, Stella Maris
<b>Eliot 314</b>	Let's Talk About Death; Torrie Fields, MPH, Bea Barton	Death Midwifery; Ashley Benem	Caregiver Response When the Veil is Lifted; Susan Schoenbeck	Re-Visioning the Dying Process; Lori Beth Stargrove
Gray Rooms	10:45-noon	1-2:15	2:30-3:45	4:00-5:15
<b>Commons</b>		Threshold Song Bath + Ancestor Altar + My Life, My Legacy, My Wishes Photobooth	Threshold Song Bath + Ancestor Altar + My Life, My Legacy, My Wishes Photobooth	Threshold Song Bath + Ancestor Altar + My Life, My Legacy, My Wishes Photobooth
<b>Commons Café</b>		Resource Fair + Death Café Classic	Resource Fair + Drop-In Death Café; Estate Planning with Melanie Marmion; Conversational Cards with Camella Nair	Resource Fair + My Gift of Grace
<b>Gray B</b>	Singing at the Threshold; Portland Threshold Choir			Using Sand Tray to Explore Grief; Pam Crow, Gaby Donnell
<b>Gray C</b>	The Art of Burial; Carrie Ahern	Death Doula; Kenneth Weizer (B/C)	Collage for the Grieving Heart; Jennifer Wohl	
<b>Gray D</b>	Powerful Ritual of Forgiveness; Camella Nair	Yoga Nidra; Camella Nair	The Art of Burial; Carrie Ahern	Savasana; Renee Sills

## Schedule Highlights

### Opening Session: 9-10:30am in Vollum Lecture Hall

Featuring a keynote by Stephen Jenkinson, MTS, MSW, Governor Barbara Roberts, artwork by Lillian Pitt, along with remembrance art and ritual – this session is not to be missed.

### Lunch: Noon-1pm in Gray Campus Center Commons

We have only an hour to feed you all, and not quite enough seats; feel free to take your lunch “to go” into your afternoon classroom. Your red meal ticket is in your name badge holder; present it for your buffet-style meal. You may purchase additional food a la carte.

### Community Space Options: 1-5:15pm in Gray Campus Center Commons

Spend some time in contemplation or conversation at a Death Café, or by the Ancestors Altar, or with the “My Life, My Legacy, My Wishes” Photo Booth, or getting a Song Bath from the Threshold Choir. Death Café will offer its classic format 1-2:15, a drop-in space from 2:30-3:45, and the conversation game My Gift of Grace from 4-5:15.

### Merchandise, Book Sales & Resources

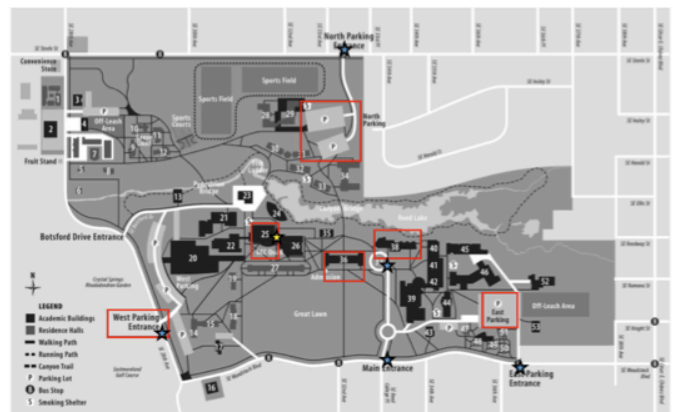
- Visit our Resource Area adjacent to the lunch room in Gray Commons Café from noon-7pm to check out materials offered by participating Providers and Presenters. This is an informational area only, no sales on site.
- Our Opening Session speakers will sign and sell their books during lunch – Stephen Jenkinson’s *Die Wise: A Manifesto for Sanity and Soul* and Barbara Roberts’ *Death Without Denial, Grief Without Apology* – cash or check only, no credit card sales (there’s an ATM one floor below the lunch room).
- Death:OK merchandise purchased in advance can be picked up at our Help Desk outside Gray A during lunch. There are no on-site merchandise sales.

### Closing Festivities: 5:15-7pm in Gray Commons

Join us to close out the day with happy hour refreshments (complimentary food and beverages with a cash bar for beer and wine), mingling, and performances by Motherlode, the Game Hens, Heather Michet, Sarah Lambert & Yvette Starkey.

## Break-Out Session Notes

- If you’ve pre-registered your session preferences, they are printed on the back of your name tag along with room locations.
- On-site session registration is open 8-9am in lower Vollum lobby.
- Only those registered for each session (in advance or on-site) will be seated until 2 minutes before the session begins, then it will be open to walk-ins... so registered folks should be prompt.
- Some sessions are being recorded; volunteers can assist you with any concerns.
- Seating for sessions in Vollum Lecture Hall & Eliot Chapel, and for Death Cafes, is unlimited.



Welcome to Reed College. Please park in East (preferred) or North lot, off SE Steele. Greeters and signs will help you find Registration at Vollum College Ctr (38), which is accessible for drop off at Eliot Circle(37). Blue stars show these entrances. Presentations sessions are in Vollum (38), Eliot (36), Gray Campus Ctr (25). Lunch, Help Desk, Resource Fair, Death Cafes, Ancestor Altar, and Closing Festivities are in Gray Commons (25). ATM is located downstairs in Gray Commons (yellow star).