

- Karen Wyatt:* Hello and welcome to End of Life University. I'm your host, Dr. Karen Wyatt. The title of today's discussion is, "Death Makes Life Possible: Transforming the End of Life."
- I'd like to welcome my very special guest, Marilyn Schlitz, Ph.D. Marilyn is a social anthropologist, researcher, writer and charismatic public speaker. She is currently the President Emeritus and a Senior Fellow at the Institute of Noetic Sciences, where she has also served as President and CEO. Additionally, she is a Senior Scientist at the California Pacific Medical Center, where she focuses on health and healing. For more than three decades, Marilyn has been a leader in the field of consciousness studies.
- Her research and extensive publications focus on personal and social transformation, cultural pluralism, and mind/body medicine. She has a depth of leadership experience in government, business, and the not-for-profit sectors. Her broad and varied work has given her a unique ability to help both individuals and organizations identify and develop the personal and interpersonal skills and capacities needed by 21st century leaders.
- And as if that is not enough, she is also currently producing a feature film with Deepak Chopra.
- Hello, Marilyn. I am thrilled and honored to have this opportunity to talk with you today.
- Marilyn Schlitz:* Thank you, Karen. I'm a big fan of your work and have been over the years, and I'm just delighted to participate.
- Karen Wyatt:* I was just remembering today I think, wasn't it, about ten years ago that we met each other up in Ken Wilber's loft when we were brainstorming about integral medicine?
- Marilyn Schlitz:* Yeah, I think so and then your chapter for our *Consciousness and Healing* book was actually my favorite, I think, in the book.
- Karen Wyatt:* Thank you.
- Marilyn Schlitz:* I think you brought such a soulful perspective to this topic of end of life and your work as a healer and physician. I'm greatly appreciative.
- Karen Wyatt:* Thank you. I'm so happy that you're willing to be here today, because you bring such a wealth of knowledge in such a variety of areas of consciousness and healing and I feel like I could probably

talk to you all day, asking you questions about what you know. But just for this call we'll be focusing in on your interest in death, dying and the afterlife, and just end of life issues in general.

I wanted to start first by asking you about the movie you're producing with Deepak Chopra. Then we'll move into a more general discussion of end of life issues. But I'd like you to just tell me and our listeners about *Death Makes Life Possible* and what we can expect from the movie and just what it consists of.

Marilyn Schlitz:

It's part of a project that I've been involved in really probably for a couple decades. I was very interested in consciousness transformation. How is it that people make fundamental shifts in their worldview and what are the consequences of that? How does that impact how they live their lives?

So we did a book called *Living Deeply: The Art and Science of Transformation in Everyday Life*. That was the culmination of interviews with 60 masters from different world traditions, talking about their practices, their observations. After we were done with that it occurred to me that one of the significant aspects of transformation that we hadn't had time to really develop in the course of that book was death and what happens after, so kind of the big transformation from a lived experience, existential point of view.

So I began to collect interviews with people using some of the interviews we had already collected, but I began to really look in earnest at how people were addressing this question of death and what happens after. And how do these cosmologies or models of an afterlife impact how people live every day, and does that imbue our life with greater possibility?

That began with people from different cultures, looking at many of the different world traditions and what kind of ontology or model of reality do they hold about the afterlife. Then it broadened to including people who were scientists, who were attempting to bring an evidence-based perspective to this question of the possible survival of consciousness after bodily death.

It moved into talking about the kind of "so what" questions. How do these worldviews impact our healing and our sense of health and wholeness? So we began to interview people who were health practitioners and professional hospice workers, for example.

It became a rich and fascinating journey. A couple years ago I was teaching with Deepak Chopra and I showed a little video clip from some of these interviews and he got very excited. He was like, “Marilyn, let’s make a movie.” I thought that could be a lot of fun to work with Deepak and to really dig in and bring a story to these narratives.

So that’s what we’ve done over the past two years is reshoot a lot of those interviews now with high-def instead of standard def technology, and then really began to create a narrative line through the thing so that it becomes in a sense my journey and what was my call to this question of death and beyond.

So we’ve been working in a very diligent way. We did a number of fundraising efforts, including a Kickstarter campaign that was very successful for us. So we’re now in the final stages of that edit and we’ll be going out with some sneak previews this summer, and hoping to begin the process of distribution in the fall of this year.

Karen Wyatt: Well I’m so impressed. I’ve seen the trailer for the movie and it’s so beautifully done. I can’t wait to see the whole movie. I’m so excited about it that you’re putting it out there, because I think film is such an important medium to take advantage of as far as spreading information and spreading the word and teaching people things that they need to know.

Marilyn Schlitz: That’s right.

Karen Wyatt: And you’ve taken on this huge project and you’re actually completing it and have been successful with it.

Marilyn Schlitz: Well, it is a huge project and one wonders would they have started it if they’d understood how big a project it was going to be, but we’re getting there.

Karen Wyatt: Most huge projects happen that way. If we actually knew what we were getting into –

Marilyn Schlitz: Yeah. I think the narrative thread from the movie comes from my own personal experience, before I can even remember. I was 18 months old, a precocious toddler who was interested in investigating everything, and as good 18 month old kids do checking it out by putting it in my mouth; and it happened to be a can of lighter fluid that my father had inadvertently left on our table within my grasp.

That led to three months in and out of intensive care and sort of that borderline between living and dying. I don't have any recall of that at a conscious level, but I'm sure there was something in that that spurred an interest in these depths of consciousness and the potentials that lie within us.

Then when I was 16 I had a serious motorcycle accident where I almost lost my leg. I had this experience as the accident was happening, where my body had been thrown into the air and I had an out of body experience, where I was able to watch my body tumbling and then very quickly crashing on the ground, and 66 stitches later and talk of me having to have a leg amputation.

It was very sobering, but it was also I think a catalyst for me to try and understand, again, what is consciousness. And what are the capacities that lie within us to have this kind of experience where my consciousness seemed to be separate from my physical body?

I think those events probably really seeded a lifelong career in consciousness research and ultimately into this project, where I'm attempting to translate some of those insights that have come from these masters and people who are living the process of dying, and to share with people the insights that have come from that so that we can address some of the fears that our culture has around death, and also to look at some of the principles and practices that people have developed over the millennia to deal with those questions about what happens when we die.

Karen Wyatt:

It makes sense to me now why the consciousness studies have merged with an interest in end of life, and that really this is the culmination of your life experiences, your research and studies all coming together to bring you to this place where you're putting it all together.

I guess I look at my work with end of life in much the same way, because I was 16 when a friend of mine in high school died in a climbing accident. Her death really spurred me on to start to consider the meaning of life and what is my purpose. It was the first time I had this realization that people my age can die, and the first time I recognized life is short and you have to do something with it while you have it. So that really spurred me at that young age to start considering: What is the meaning of life? What is my purpose? Why am I here? That ultimately led me into end of life studies as well.

It's fascinating. Both of us have been called in very different ways, and we really approach the end of life from different perspectives, but it's interesting that we've been brought together to try to bring forth the same type of work in the world and to try to make a difference. It's beautiful.

Marilyn Schlitz:

Yeah. I think about that, too, in my own family experience. We lost a cousin, a niece, a nephew all within a short period of time and that realization – I remember when my nephew died thinking life goes on within you and without you, so really having that sense. I hadn't been aware of that so much until I just heard your story.

I think that's important. I think as people listen to each other's experiences and can share from a soulful, heartfelt place it has a very therapeutic effect for folks. We can see that now with these Death Cafes that are springing up all over, and a number of initiatives that are coming at the popular level that I think are really about our call to understand more about who we are and what our potentials are.

Karen Wyatt:

Yes. I feel as though we are on the verge of a sea-change in our society. As you mentioned, so many initiatives springing up in the general population that it's really time now. It's really time for us to start to look ahead and look at the end of life, and give it a place in our lives and in our awareness and consciousness, to help us find more meaning in day-to-day life.

One question that I had for you that I was really curious about. The process of making the movie itself, did that change your perspective at all? I just was fascinated by all the people you interviewed, and wondered how you found yourself transforming during this process of learning from the people.

Marilyn Schlitz:

Since we're not quite finished, I guess my after-reflections will come a little later. But it's been a beautiful, beautiful opportunity to participate in things like The Day of the Dead. In Petaluma and in many places there is a huge celebration.

It comes from the Mexican tradition where there's an honoring of this kind of semi-permeable layer between the living and the dying. At the time of the winter solstice they believe that the veil becomes much thinner, so it's an opportunity to appease the spirits who have transcended, so making offerings of food and drink for them.

But it's also an opportunity to communicate and sing songs and celebrate, and be silly and act in a way that is irreverent, in some respects. So that was a very joyous possibility for me.

We went to the Oakland Zoo and filmed a gibbon who had lost his spouse. Gibbons are monogamous - they mate for life. Nikko had been married to or bonded with his partner for over 20 years and she died, and he went into an experience of grief. Gibbons, when they're mated do these duets and they sing in the morning. Nikko had stopped singing and was really, from the external point of view, experiencing a mourning process for his beloved.

So we went over and interviewed the gamekeeper and got to hear from her about what happens in nature, in the wild when animals have these losses. Her insight there was that it's important to grieve, that animals in all aspects of the kingdom do experience loss.

We see this with elephants, for example, dogs. But that it's very important in nature to get over that because it has such a detrimental effect on the immune system and on the psychological system that people, animals, organisms generally need to be resilient. So grief is a natural part of the process, and then that ability to move beyond it becomes very, very important.

So that was a beautiful experience and I just went to the Oakland Zoo this past weekend for their annual fundraiser. They have found a new mate for Nikko. She's a blonde. She's very cute. They bonded immediately. The gamekeeper, the zookeeper was telling me that as soon as she came into their compound they embraced like they were long lost partners. So there's something beautiful in that.

One of the people that we interviewed was Lee Lipsenthal. I believe you knew Lee. He was a physician and had done a lot of work on healing the healer, so working with other health practitioners on dealing with burnout and stress that comes from being a health professional, but also then dealing with his own diagnosis of esophageal cancer.

His attitude about the prospect of dying was so enlightened and so beautiful. We were able to follow him through his journey and to gain insights from him about what he held as the next possible adventure. And he really did, up until the day he died really thought to explore the mystery and the adventure that was going to come next for him. That was sometimes hard for his family to

understand because they were, again, in their own state of grief and loss, but it was so inspiring for people to hear.

Then we interviewed scientists. Peter Fenwick is a psychiatrist in London and has done a tremendous amount of work looking at death experiences, near death, and out of body experiences, and gaining insights from him about how you could bring an evidence-based perspective to these kinds of phenomena that people report, whether it's the deathbed apparitions, seeing somebody. Many people report at the end of life that – or many observers of someone who is dying report that the person begins to communicate with spirits. This is a very common and culturally ubiquitous kind of report that people begin to find those departed loved ones, who have already passed over, and who can help them make the journey.

We also were in a lab where scientists were studying mediums, people who believe they can communicate with these departed souls or spirits. And how do scientists begin to really try and grapple with these phenomenal and mind-boggling kinds of encounters?

Then people who have had the experiences of near-death and out of body. Simon Lewis was a person who was in coma for a month. He had these profound experiences in coma, realized that there was a guide who was coming to help him come back into lived conscious awareness, and as he woke up he realized that that person was his wife, and his wife had been killed in the car wreck that had caused his coma.

That led him into this journey of exploration. He's a very ebullient, positive, life affirming person who has been able to take these tragedies in his own life experience and use them to understand better: what are the potentials for our human experience and where does that lead us as a collective?

So those are just some highlights. We interviewed an imam in the Muslim faith. They believe that the life we're leading right now is actually the death, and what comes after that death is life. So this is the temporary and it is after that that you have that kind of permanent experience of heaven and different levels of heaven.

So everything from that to an atheist, Michael Shermer, who is the editor of *Skeptic* magazine, who basically told me when you're dead you're dead and you're done and that's it, and hearing about his experiences. There was nothing curmudgeon-y or unhappy

about him. He has no fear of death and has a very positive attitude toward life.

So I guess the insight for me, going back to your original question, is that there are in a sense multiple ontologies or multiple models of reality. You can go to a grocery store or a hospital or a school and we're all there in the same space, experiencing that same set of products on the shelf or books on the bookshelf, and yet people are holding very different models of reality and experiencing life in fundamentally different ways.

To me that's an incredible mystery, how it is that we're all living together as human beings and yet holding these very different views of what life is all about and what happens after.

Karen Wyatt:

That perspective is so interesting because it accounts for why we have a lot of conflict going on in our society right now, because we sometimes have difficulty understanding another person's view of reality and recognizing they just see things differently than we do. It's as if we're not really perceiving the same things.

Marilyn Schlitz:

I've been reading Ernest Becker and *The Denial of Death* that he won a Pulitzer for. He has a theory. He was an anthropologist who believed that death is the core terror for people, and that we become very defensive when what's called mortality salience gets triggered.

So as people encounter some reminder of their own mortality they experience this terror and this defensiveness, which ultimately leads to a stronger identification with their in-group, so people who believe the way I do, look the way I do, experience the world in a similar way to the way I do, and then this incredible sense of otherness toward the out-group. That can lead to what you just described, which is the kind of violence and intolerance that people are experiencing.

I think his insights are very profound. One of my motivations in this project and in some of the research that also is accompanying the project is: how do we help people to become more comfortable with the idea of death? How do we expose them to these alternative points of view so that they seem less other? They seem more intriguing and compelling and curious. How do we begin to bring that beginners mind in a way that lessens our defensiveness, and encourages our open-mindedness toward all the dimensions of what it means to be alive, including death?

Karen Wyatt:

It's interesting because that's one of the thoughts that I had when I was writing my book. What really matters is that death is the one commonality we all have. Every single one of us will face death at some point. So my thoughts in sharing stories of patients I worked with in hospice is that there is some universal appeal to describe to people what happens and the stories that unfold at the time of death or various patients that I've worked with.

I agree with you completely that if we can help people become more comfortable and less fearful of the idea of death, we will trigger less of that defensiveness and retreating to the in-group as a way to protect ourselves. We need to be in a space where we can talk about death and think about it and contemplate it without reacting with so much fear.

Marilyn Schlitz:

I think that's so true. Yassir Chadly, the imam, said when we first started the interview, "This is very good question," he said, "because it doesn't matter if you're Christian or Buddhist or Hindu or Muslim or atheist. We're all going to meet at that spot." So it becomes an opportunity.

I also think that in working with patients it's a big challenge for health professionals, because we're all human and even if you're a nurse, say, and you have had a lot of experience with patients, you may not have had a lot of experience really reflecting on your own world view and your own existential understanding of what happens at death.

So one of the questions I have is: are there ways that we can begin to train professionals in this kind of pluralism, so that they can be more effective practitioners with their patients and the patient's family at the end of life? Because people approach that transition point in very different ways. So how can we be empowering of the multiplicity of perspectives that are out there?

Karen Wyatt:

Yes, absolutely. That's something I've been doing some talks at medical conferences for physicians who are already in practice, but addressing end of life care. How do physicians approach end of life care with patients?

One thing that has been really helpful to me in talking about it is: can Wilber's integral theory, in using the integral model help understand just what you were talking about? People are at different levels and they view the end of life from totally different perspectives, but then to also use Paul Tillich's definition of

spirituality, which is that spirituality is one's ultimate concern in life.

And by providing that thought for people in hospice particularly, because hospice workers are called upon to provide spiritual care for patients, but are confused because what if you have a patient who says, "I don't want spiritual care. I'm not religious." I gave them that word ultimate concern because it creates a way to look at: what's the patient's ultimate concern?

It might be a religion or a spiritual practice, but it might be that they love baseball. So if baseball is their ultimate concern then you use that as your focus for helping the patient find meaning and purpose.

Marilyn Schlitz: That's beautiful.

Karen Wyatt: So for me it's been very helpful and I'm trying to disseminate that now in medical circles, when I've been invited to attend medical conferences. I agree with you. We have to start there. We really have to train providers of medical care to view death differently.

Marilyn Schlitz: I see this movie as having that kind of audience. It's actually everybody. Deepak likes to say this movie is for anybody who's going to die. That's true. And we also know that there is a huge number of people that are caregivers now. So it's not just health professionals. It's people who are involved in any level of care for a seriously ill or dying friend, relative, colleague.

So I think that the opportunity to help educate and expose, and one of the beauties of the film I think is with a compelling soundtrack and beautiful imagery – and funny stories. We pulled a little clip from Monty Python's death visits the dinner party. I loved that.

We interviewed kids and in the trailer you'll see Indigo. She wondered what happens after we die, but, "I still haven't figured out the answer." That brings down the house every time I've ever shown the trailer to somebody, because her innocence and yet her quality of curiosity and engagement is beautiful. So we're trying with this film to lighten, but also deepen our appreciation for this topic.

Karen Wyatt: Yes. I have to agree with you. Just from the trailer I could see how beautiful the images are that you've used and the music. I'm so excited to see the full movie whenever it's available, because it's a broad and comprehensive look at the end of life and you've

incorporated so many different perspectives that it can't leave anyone untouched. That's how it appears to me. Everyone has to find something they have a commonality with in this movie.

I'm really excited to see the impact it makes whenever it's released. Is that something that we can expect later or hope for later on this year?

Marilyn Schlitz: I sure hope so. We're showing some sneak previews of it. We can begin then in the fall to submit to film festivals, and then we will begin to run in parallel the film festivals and then the gradual release. So we'll do some limited showing in various places.

Then there's a book project that's paralleling the movie. So the hope is that we can begin a theatrical release sometime in the fall of next year, and then the book will drop in through January of 2015. So that's when we'll make a very big push to get the film out on television and then for individual sales, and in the process also creating educational materials that will allow the general population to access this material through conversations, these death cafes that have picked up and begun to prosper in the world actually, not just in the United States, and so giving some content that will help in discussion guides around some of these interviews and the insights that have come from them.

So it's kind of a process and it requires patience to get all the way through, but the trailer is available and if anybody just wants to Google *Death Makes Life Possible* they can go on and see that. Also, we have posted a lot of material that is kind of behind the scenes as we're doing the interviews and making the film. So it can be fun for people who want to track that.

I also on a fairly regular basis have been tweeting and blogging about some of the developments that we have been making. So that's for people to just follow Marilyn Schlitz, either on Twitter or to go to my website, MarilynSchlitz.com, and people can – you know, to help to track our progress.

Karen Wyatt: That's fantastic. So people could subscribe just to get mailings or to be updated about this.

Marilyn Schlitz: Mm-hmm. That's right there on that MarilynSchlitz.com website, so people can get alerts when something new has been posted. I just posted a series of three blogs that were on Whole Person Healing, and really taking some of the insights that have come from the consciousness and healing programs, interviews I've done

with a number of nurses, for example, talking about the various simple tools we can use in order to promote our own healing, our own well being, and certainly this issue of end of life, death, and what comes beyond are really important tools for people to hold.

Karen Wyatt:

Yes, absolutely. I definitely feel that the timing is right, and partly due to healthcare reform becoming a reality and bringing up the controversial idea of death panels, which are not actually happening, but just bringing to light the idea that we need to have conversations about the end of life, and people need to talk with their family members and loved ones about what their hopes and expectations are for their final days. I think it will make a difference in all of our society, in every area of society, when we can have a conversation and be open and upfront about the fact that we're going to die.

Marilyn Schlitz:

And then knowing where to find the resources to cross the line then so that people can actually fill out the paperwork and complete that process with each other. I know I just was talking to somebody. They're launching a big initiative. I think it's called "Dining with Death," and they're inviting people to just have a dinner party and have this conversation.

In particular that movement is about – I think it's sponsored by Aetna and is really about inviting people to think about the specifics of drawing up your will, and setting your instructions for the process that you want to engage in or not engage in at the end of life.

I think our project is a little more philosophical and cultural. There is that specific mandate and the practicalities of those details that absolutely have to be addressed. But it's also important I think when you were talking about the spirituality, really coming to terms with what has meaning in our life and how is it that somebody like Luisah Teish, who we interviewed for the movie, she's a Yoruba priestess.

She believes that the spirits and the ancestors are everywhere. They're in the water. They're in the ground. They're in the air. They're in the leaves, and that it's easy to access that communication with the departed.

One of the quotes that she made was that she has more fear of an unfulfilled life than of death itself. We heard that over and over again, that people want to bring the understanding and the insight into a purposeful life that allows us to be agents of healing and

goodwill, and the positive qualities of experience, and to become more aware of those triggers for our own defensiveness that may be fueled by this inability to come to an awareness around death.

So I think that all of these angles and perspectives are incredibly important. And I think, going back to your work, your capacity both as a physician, but as a storyteller to help people understand the commonality across the lived experience; I think it's so very powerful and one of the things I'm so appreciative about what you bring.

Karen Wyatt:

Thank you. I was going to say I have been participating a lot lately in a small book clubs. They found groups getting together to read my book and talk about the stories, and I've been able to attend some of those groups to help facilitate, which was really fun and it goes along with that idea of just sitting down together and having the conversation in a safe place, where you can start with the story of someone else and their experience of dying, and gradually ease yourself into thinking about your own death and what that might look like and what that means for you. So it's been very gratifying to be part of this work.

Marilyn Schlitz:

I did a telecourse, it was a six-part course on *Death Makes Life Possible*, and I asked people to journal before and after the course. I was then able to collect those journals and do a little pre-post analysis of the language use, and we gave them specific death prompts, you know, imaging your own body at the point of death and what will happen there.

The analysis program that I was using allows us to look at pronoun use and references to anxiety, discomfort, references to death itself. It's interesting how we haven't finished the analysis yet, but there appears to be a shift in the pronoun use from less individual identification with the I statement and more into a we, and also then the level of anxiety around their dealing with this question before and after the course seems to be reduced to a significant degree. So those things and being able to collect some data at the same time as we're offering these gifts to the world is, I think, a wonderful kind of parallelism.

Going back to what you were saying about Ken Wilber and the integral model, it's really important to address that first person I, like, "What do I think is going to happen? What is my experience? Have I ever had a mystical experience that gave me a sense that there's something more beyond the physical?"

Then there's the cultural because we're so embedded in that sense of what society, what our culture, what our worldviews have imposed on us in a certain sense. We're like living in the ocean and not understanding oftentimes how much that society impacts us. So being able to kind of do that cultural critique I think is also extremely important.

Then Ken talks about the upper right-hand quadrant of science and objectivity. So how do we marry that to the continuum between the first person subjective phenomenological truth of my lived experience with then the objective third person data collection, and what can we learn from a scientific point of view?

Then ultimately that bottom right-hand portion of the quadrant system, which is society and the institutions, and we have lived in a society that is very death-phobic. We want eternal youth. If you look at the commercials on the television, we're all looking for the capacity to be younger and more fit.

Those things are good, but they're also sort of indicative of a system that has denied the inevitability of our death. So I think that integral model becomes a wonderful framework for understanding the multiple dimensions of what we're dealing with in this inquiry we're involved in.

Karen Wyatt:

Yes, definitely. And it has been fascinating just watching the evolution of it, because it does seem that we're on the verge of a major change and a shift in our perception and our acceptance of death and dying. It's wonderful to have the vantage point of being able to observe it and at the same time watch it happen and, hopefully, to help affect that change and help foster it and help nurture it in a healthy way.

Marilyn Schlitz:

Yeah. I was driving down the street and there's a church near my house and it had a marquee sign outside, "Get a fast trip to heaven. Details inside." I was like, "Oh, how funny." People and religions, you know, religions have been an important part of helping us to articulate a philosophy, a cosmology, and I think that can be very helpful for people.

It can also be hard for people who aren't religious. That's where I think somebody like Michael Shermer, who really comes with a materialist/physicalist model, is able to discuss death without grasping, without fear. So it's all of those points of view that are going to ultimately liberate us and help alleviate the suffering in our society.

Karen Wyatt: Yes, definitely. I have to say I'm so impressed with the work that you're doing and very excited about it, and eager to support you in any way and to help promote you any way I possibly can. So call on me if there's anything that I could do for you.

I will be telling everyone about *Death Makes Life Possible* as it becomes available, and I really look forward to seeing the impact that it makes on our society.

Marilyn Schlitz: Thank you, Karen. I so appreciate that. And ditto. I'm a big, big fan of yours, and so I would love to be able to figure out paths for collaboration, because I think that there's opportunities for us to weave back and forth some of our mutually engaged work and see how we can help benefit humanity.

Karen Wyatt: Absolutely. I think the door is wide open for anything we want to put out there I think is needed right now, and even being called forth it feels that way to me sometimes more and more. There's so much need and demand out there sometimes I feel like I can't quite keep up with what I've committed to, but I really want to see things change and I want to see the evolution of our consciousness take place.

Marilyn Schlitz: I think that's important and I think taking care of ourselves is really important as well. Living life to its fullest, staying grounded, staying in a place of ultimate wellness, health, healing, because we can't do it all, but I think we can do a lot more as we look at how we connect the dots between individuals who are standing up to help promote this consciousness transformation.

I think there is that kind of critical mass of people. You were talking about a sea-change earlier. I think that's true and I think the Internet and our ability to have a global conversation now is strengthening that network.

While we're still seeing the aberrant dysfunctional aspects in society, it's clear that there are many people who are hungry to engage these conversations. So I think it's being part of that tipping point, as Malcolm Gladwell talks about it, that can be so empowering to each of us.

Karen Wyatt: Yes, definitely. In some ways, as I mentioned to you earlier and this feels true to me, too, it's as if all of our life experiences, knowledge, education, research and study, they're all coming together now and converging at this point where we're able to

bring forth the work that perhaps was really being developed within us back when we were children. It's exciting to be at a place now where you can see how it all comes together.

Marilyn Schlitz: That's beautiful.

Karen Wyatt: I wanted to remind anyone listening that they can connect with you on your website, which is MarilynSchlitz.com and Schlitz is spelled S-C-H-L-I-T-Z. Correct?

Marilyn Schlitz: That's correct.

Karen Wyatt: Then just to Google *Death Makes Life Possible*, if anyone wants to watch the trailer, or the trailer is on your website also.

Marilyn Schlitz: It is. That's right.

Karen Wyatt: Okay, but listeners can Google *Death Makes Life Possible* to find out more about the movie and get updates about when it's going to be available.

Is there anything else, Marilyn, that you would like to talk about or that we didn't cover?

Marilyn Schlitz: I'm sure there are many things that we didn't get to today. I think one of the dimensions that we were talking about as we both shared our personal stories and what kind of brought us into this is that if we kind of review our life and we think about what are the catalysts for transformation and what are the points in our life where we were called, whether we understood it at that moment or not we kind of through the transformation research created a change model.

We found that a catalyst for transformation really is these kind of noetic first person experiences. There was something that occurred directly within our lifespan and over the course of our lifespan that has led to epiphany or led to insight, led to a sense of that questioning of something larger than ourself.

So inviting people to really look at: what are those catalysts? What were the trigger points? Were there times when we got lost in that, the fascination with the opening and then got distracted by that? So that's kind of the pitfall on the transformational journal.

Or were we able to push forward and begin to ask questions about: what was that like? If people have had near-death or out of body

experiences, what are the implications of that? So then learning and gaining information.

I think that's one of the places where the Institute of Noetic Sciences and other organizations have been so helpful is providing an opportunity for learning more and asking the questions. Ultimately in transformation we have found that by and far the teachers and the masters of transformational process have talked about the importance of a practice.

So what is a practice? It can look very different. I mean we interviewed a Catholic priest and a Wiccan priestess and their worldviews are very different, and yet there were qualities of a practice, a transformational practice that they shared in common. So we found out of those practices that there are things like setting intention, that I bring intention to my life to grow, to develop, to become a more balanced person. And yet we know that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. So intention alone isn't enough, although it's fundamental.

Then there's that idea of attention. Different practices, meditation practices, prayerful practices, walking in nature, gardening can all help us to cultivate our attention. Are we putting our awareness on the glass half empty or the glass half full? And that comes with a kind of discipline to become more aware of where we get tripped up.

And also the whole area of cognitive science now, looking at inattentive blindness, the way in which our culture and our worldview and our assumptions create these filters that inhibit our capacity to see beyond what we expect to see. So using transformative practices is a way of opening ourselves to seeing more possibilities.

Then the idea of repetition, building new muscles, as it were, that will help us to find these transformative principles as our default option, recognizing that in our brains we have these neural pathways that get laid down. It had been thought that once you lay down those pathways that there is no changing. You can't teach an old dog new tricks, and yet we now know through neural plasticity that we can change our brains and we can change the grooves that are our habitual default.

Then guidance, finding able teachers, finding movies or books that inspire us, but also really begin to cultivate the inner guidance and that noetic quality, so deep listening for what is true for ourselves

and what gives us that sense of meaning and purpose in our lives, and then really listening, paying attention and acting on those.

So that process then becomes a call that moves people, in our experience and in our model, from the me, a self-absorbed look at myself and my own progress, into the we, how is it that I am offering gifts for the collective, and at the same time not neglecting the me, so going back to making sure that we're healing and taking care of ourselves.

Then ultimately I think that notion of living deeply, like coming into a recognition of our mortality, of the inevitability of our death, and that there is a way in which that imbues our life with greater wholeness, I think ultimately leads us into something that is probably a fractal. People come into this journey at different points along the way, but ultimately when we're thinking about whole systems change then I think this change model is effective not only at the individual level, but as we look at changes in healthcare today or our interest in the death industry, which is a huge enterprise today, you think about business or education. All of them are calling for and are hungry for a transformation.

So how do we begin to use these tools, these simple little methods within ourselves in order to rally our energies together, so that we can begin to really facilitate that kind of full systems change that I think can lead to a better prospect for humanity?

So that's how I want to end it. I think that really understanding that death is part of a larger conversation, that our understanding and our awareness of the little deaths, the little ego deaths that come as we begin to broaden and become larger.

I'm a gardener and I know just yesterday I was having to prune. That process of pruning, you're taking away some of the life. At the same time you're allowing the growth of the plant. So in order for the chard to really develop I needed to stop the multiplicity of growth in that one little area in order to shine the light on the individual plant.

So I think that the metaphor of the garden and our cultivation of our fullest capacities is a beautiful one to hold in this conversation.

Karen Wyatt:

Yes, absolutely. Marilyn, you are just amazing. You are so articulate and you are such a wise leader and teacher and catalyst for change. I want to thank you so much for all of your work, all of the years of research that you've done so meticulously and

carefully and thoughtfully, and now for the movie that you're making and the writing that you're doing, and all of your wonderful gifts that you're bringing to the world. Thank you for that. Thank you so much for being willing to talk to me today.

Marilyn Schlitz: You are more than welcome and I look forward to the next collaboration point.

Karen Wyatt: The same here. I'm very excited for that to happen. This brings to an end our discussion today on transforming the end of life. Thanks once again to Marilyn Schlitz for being with me. Be sure to check out her movie, *Death Makes Life Possible*, and her website, MarilynSchlitz.com. Thank you and good-bye.

Marilyn Schlitz: Bye-bye.

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