

Karen Wyatt:

Hello and welcome to Death Expo, which is being brought to you by End-of-Life University. I'm your host, Dr. Karen Wyatt, and I'm glad you're here today for another one of our keynote speakers. I'm very happy to welcome Dr. Marilyn Schlitz today, who is my friend and colleague. And I'll tell you a little bit more about Marilyn. She is a social anthropologist, researcher, writer, and charismatic public speaker. She is currently the founder and CEO of Worldview Enterprises, and she also serves as president emeritus and a senior fellow at the Institute of Noetic Sciences.

Additionally, she is a senior scientist at the California Pacific Medical Center, where she focuses on health and healing, and a board member of Pacifica Graduate Institute. 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, extended human capacities, 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 individuals and organizations identify and develop personal and interpersonal skills and capacities needed by 21st century leaders. She is currently traveling the world promoting her feature film, *Death Makes Life Possible*, which she wrote and then co-produced with Deepak Chopra, on the topic of death and dying and how engaging that topic in a deep and meaningful way informs the way we live our lives.

And I interviewed Marilyn last year for last year's series on *Death Makes Life Possible*, but it was before the movie was released and I hadn't actually seen it myself. And now that I've watched it a couple of times, Marilyn, I'm so excited to be able to talk to you once again, and I want to welcome you back and thank you for consenting to another interview.

Marilyn Schlitz:

Well, thank you, Karen. It's always a delight to be with you and I'm just so appreciative of what you're doing to advance this conversation.

Karen Wyatt:

Well, thank you. And we're both really working in the same arena, trying hard to bring more awareness to the subject of death and dying, and I'm so excited about this film that you've created, *Death Makes Life Possible* because it's stunningly beautiful, for one thing. The music and the photography in the film are so well done. It's a treat and a pleasure to sit for an hour and watch it. But you've brought in so many perspectives on death and dying and it's really

a journey for a seeker through various perspectives, through cultural, religious, societal perspectives on death and dying, and then even personal narratives about death and dying. So I wanted to just ask you again if you'd talk a little bit about your inspiration for creating this movie.

Marilyn Schlitz:

Well, let me just thank you for that. It's always helpful after you've invested three plus years and then a lot of emotional energy into something. And to hear somebody describe it the way you just did, I feel very grateful for that. So thank you. Oh, gosh, the project started for me probably before I can even remember, and I was a precocious toddler, about 18 months old, and I was exploring the world as good toddler does, and being an empiricist from the beginning, I was sampling what I discovered, and one thing I discovered was a can of lighter fluid sitting on the table. My father had inadvertently left it there within my grasping range, and I ended up in the emergency room, and ultimately intensive care on and off for about three months.

So I think something was planted at that time that gave me a reverence for that kind of semipermeable place between living and dying. And I think it also gave me a deep respect for the practitioners who were there, for the doctors and the nurses, the candy strippers, whoever it was. I think I have come to have such high regard for health care practitioners. And I'm sure part of that came from that encounter with my own mortality.

And then I had a near death experience or out-of-body experience, I guess more appropriately, when I was about 16, when I was on a motorcycle and we were hit by a drunk driver, and I clearly remember watching my body tumbling through the air and landing with a thud on the concrete. And at that point, recognizing that consciousness may be something more than just my brain or my body, but something that was actually able to be outside of my brain and body and watching me. And that intrigued me as much as it could in that moment of crisis.

And I was whisked off to the emergency room, and the doctors talked about a possible amputation of my left leg at the knee. They ended up putting 66 stitches in it, putting a cast on me, and sending me home. And somehow I have this insight – I want to say it was a noetic kind of insight, a direct personal awareness – that if I could visualize my immune system, maybe I could heal my leg and encourage this healing response. And so I did that, and I remember the tingles in my leg, and ultimately I have two firm feet on the ground today. So something worked in that process.

But, again, I think it gave me a sense of appreciation for the powers and potentials of consciousness. And so that led me to explore various aspects of consciousness, and one of those topics was survival of consciousness after bodily death. I think I taught my first class on that topic in about 1980 at the Institute for Parapsychology, and have kept an interest over the years, and as I was doing research on worldview transformation, interviewing masters from different world traditions, I began to talk with them about death and what happens after, given their own worldview and cosmology, and began to collect these video recordings.

And it was about three and a half years ago now that I was doing some teaching with Deepak Chopra, and I showed one of these segments of about 20 minutes to the class, and he got excited about that, and he encouraged me. He said, "Let's make a movie." And I thought, "Well, who doesn't want to make a movie with Deepak Chopra?" But the next day I was a little daunted and I just thought, "Oh, my gosh. It's such a big responsibility and it's so much fund raising. And if we were going to do it, we really needed to do it right with quality, and beauty, and the art that you talked about." And so I went to him at lunch and I was like, "You know, I just don't think I can take that on." And he was like, "Oh, Marilyn, don't worry about the money. The money will come."

And, in fact, it did. We were able to get some support from some foundations. We did two successful Kickstarter campaigns. And a number of organizations, The Institute of Noetic Sciences, The Chopra Foundation, all supported this endeavor. And I thank you. Mark Krigbaum is our director and he did a beautiful job of weaving together a very complex topic and covering a lot of territory. So I'm delighted to talk about it.

Karen Wyatt:

Well, the film is really a tapestry in some ways of so many different threads, and different perspectives, and different ways of looking at life and death. But when it's all woven together, the underlying, very simple message of the film that came through so strongly to me is don't be afraid of death, that death is nothing to be feared. And that was such a powerful message that was delivered in so many different ways by so many different speakers. And I thought it was beautiful that all this information could be distilled down to that one statement: don't be afraid. And so we don't need to have all the answers. We don't need to know exactly what happens after death or be able to explain it, but we know enough to know that we should overcome our own fear of death.

Marilyn Schlitz: Yeah. I think redefining our relationship to death is really fundamental. I also have a companion book that will be coming out in May of next year that has the same title, *Death Makes Life Possible*. And in it, I was able to sort of dig a little deeper into this incredible terror that we have around our own mortality and how ultimately that leads to very pathological behaviors, emotions, experiences. And so how can we really grapple with the big questions, the big transformation, as it were, and do it with a sense of balance and resilience? And so really redefining the conversation around death was important in doing this.

And I discovered the work of Ernest Becker and have been very grateful for what he won a Pulitzer prize for, a book called *The Denial of Death*. And the inspiration that book had for a lot of social psychologists who have gone in and really attempted to understand what is this fear about and how is it that we can develop capacities that will make us more hearty and more curious in the face of our own mortality? And ultimately, how does it imbue our life with greater purpose and meaning? So it's really about life. It's how we live. But recognizing that death is an important part of that process.

Karen Wyatt: Mm-hmm. And I love that you even, you visited a zoo and you talked about animals and death and a couple of stories about grieving and how, in the animal kingdom, death is approached. And I think it's important for us to have that perspective, as well, and understand that primitively we're a part of the animal kingdom, and so our association with death derives somewhat from that basis of our being.

Marilyn Schlitz: Well, the cycle of life is everywhere, and I have to say it was such a privilege to go and meet with Nikko, who is a gibbon at the Oakland zoo, and to experience him. He had been in a monogamous relationship for decades, and his mate died, and the zookeeper shares with us what appears to be grief in terms of his behavior. Gibbons do this amazing duet in the wild together, and after his mate died, he stopped singing, and fortunately, by the time we had gotten there, he had started to do some riffs with some other primates in different parts of the zoo.

And since then, has been united with a new mate. They seem to be doing well, and so there's the life part - after the death and the mourning comes the opportunity to embrace the transformation. And I think we saw that in the case of this beautiful gibbon in the Oakland zoo.

Karen Wyatt: Mm-hmm. And one of the other story lines throughout the movie that is just very touching and compelling for me is the story the movie begins with, Dr. Lee Lipsenthal. And I had seen him speak in the past a couple of times, and he, for me, was really, I found him to be a mentor as a physician who was just awake, and so alive and vibrant, and such a beautiful speaker and an authentic person. And I had great admiration for him.

But the movie begins with Lee talking about the fact that he had a terminal diagnosis and was really in the last months of his life. And so we, through the course of the movie, at least for me, I experienced my own grief process of being able to see Lee, and listening to him talk, and his insights. And then recognizing that he did, indeed, die during the filming of this movie.

Marilyn Schlitz: Hmm. Well, one thing I hold is that the relationship isn't over, and it's still very clear that Lee is an inspiration for all of us, and it was a privilege to be able to have his voice in this film in such an intimate way, and to follow his own journey, which was absolutely inspiring, no question. And he talks about his process, both as a physician and as a patient in his book, *Enjoy Every Sandwich*, which, again is part of the theme of the film, how does our awareness and relationship to our mortality really inform the quality and meaning of our lives?

Lee was and is a beautiful voice for that, and also working with health care professionals as he was, helping them to engage in conversations that are often taboo. We think that organized medicine is about these heroic interventions, and the emphasis on curing but not so much on healing. And so I think what we see in Lee's journey is a healing and his own sense of curiosity about what would come next.

Karen Wyatt: Mm-hmm. And that's what I was thinking. He inspired me as a physician to become bolder and to be able to talk about these taboo ideas that our organized medical system, as you said, tends to shun and shy away from. And so he really inspired me to step up and say, "I, too, want to engage in these conversations, and I want to have the courage to step forward." And so I was just touched to see the images of Lee, and to hear his voice again, and to hear his wisdom coming through this movie and informing the movie.

And I loved the line when he was saying, "Society has set it up that death and aging are the enemy." And he's so correct about that. And how sad, how sad is it that we are at odds with a normal part of our experience of life: aging and dying?

Marilyn Schlitz: And one of the things we tried to do in this film is to lighten the conversation because there is a lot of sadness and there's a lot of pain for people as they deal with this kind of transformation, whether it's their own health or the death of a loved one. But there's also a way in which engaging in a more lighthearted fashion can help us. So the movie offers various moods and opportunities to laugh with a sixth grader who is sharing her insights about the afterlife, or hearing from Monty Python when they do their wonderful riff about death coming to dinner. So there are ways in which we can experience death from the multitude of emotions and see that it is something that's a natural part of life. And so to the extent we can give it its place rather than pushing it off to the margins, I think that we can help shift the society's conversation.

Karen Wyatt: Mm-hmm. And one thing I wrote down that sparked some interest for me, you interviewed an imam who said, "Everyone meets at death." And I think that's such a pertinent statement right now, when our world is a bit chaotic in the things that are happening: death is the one thing that combines all of us, that crosses all lines: socioeconomic, cultural, religious. It binds all of us together, all living things on the planet. And I think it's important for us to keep that in mind, as well. If we can deal with death and dying and if we can embrace it, it gives us a common bond and common ground with everyone else in our world that we're trying to figure out how to relate to and how to connect with.

Marilyn Schlitz: Hmm. Yassir Chadly is the imam you were talking about, and he is absolutely brilliant, and inspirational, and a true delight to be around. Going back to the terror management theory literature, one of the things we know is that when people have this terror around death and they repress it or suppress it – and culture gives us various tools for doing that, for avoiding our awareness of our own mortality – it can lead to these pathological behaviors.

And in particular, when somebody has pushed down their awareness around death and then it gets triggered, but not triggered in a healthy context, they can become very aggressive toward their out-group, and particularly focused on their in-group. And by that I mean groups that we share our values with or groups that are different from ourself. So we can think about the kind of religious or cultural conflicts that epitomize the modern world, and we can think about this meeting of death and of a redefining our relationship to death in a way that helps to ameliorate that kind of aggressive, pathological behavior.

So when Yassir Chadly says, "This is a good question. What happens when we die? This is a good question, because it unites all of us." If we can begin to engage our own awareness, our own conversation, and then their conversation that we have with others, in a way that bolsters our self-esteem, that encourages our curiosity and engagement with the mystery, these qualities can radically impact our behaviors toward people who are different from ourselves.

And so I really, I sometimes think about as I've been traveling all over the world that it's like the campaign for death awareness for peace because as we resolve our relationship and as we change the discourse – not only in American society, but globally – I think we can have a very profound impact on what's happening in terms of disorder in the world.

Karen Wyatt:

Hmm. Yes. I think that's so profound, and I have exactly that sense, that if we want to resolve some of these major issues happening in the world, we can't afford to continue to be in denial of death. We have to be able to embrace it, face our fear, and move through it. That's the only way that we're going to find common ground and be able to unite and then move forward and find solutions to our problems. So I love that idea of death awareness for peace as one of the steps – a major step – we need to take toward peace.

Marilyn Schlitz:

Well, I think just this conversation we're having, and to the extent it stimulates or inspires a listener to expand the conversation, extend it out to their family or their social groups, engage in dialog, it will eventually begin to ripple out into the world. And we already see that happening. I think your program and the work you've been doing, your writing, is a beautiful example of that. But we now know also about the proliferation of Death Cafes, people just spontaneously organizing around this topic. They have informal conversation. Or the Dining with Death project. Or the Death Salons. Or The Conversation Project. All of these things have really emerged in the last few years, and I think speak to the timeliness of the conversation and the opportunity that we have to really begin to deepen our awareness, not only as individuals, but in our collective institutions.

Karen Wyatt:

Mm-hmm. Absolutely. I find it very exciting to see all these new movements springing up. And I was wondering in your experience, I know since the movie has been released, you've had the opportunity to travel a bit around the world. And so I'm wondering what you have seen in other countries where you've

traveled with the film, what the atmosphere is like in terms of death awareness and death acceptance.

Marilyn Schlitz:

Yeah. And I come from a science background and have been a very studious academic. And so I have to say touring with a feature documentary has been a lot of fun. We've been at a lot of festivals, done a lot of community viewings, and been, as you say, in a variety of venues such as medical centers. I had an opportunity to speak with a group of doctors and nurses and psychologists at Dartmouth Medical Center. Went to Taiwan and had the opportunity to show it in a Buddhist monastery to about 350 people. It was a very powerful experience and very interesting to see it from such a different cultural perspective.

Went to Sweden, had the opportunity to show it there to a very high level group of leaders representing different interests in the European area. And then I just had an opportunity to speak to a group of Muslim leaders in West Virginia, was down with a group of Christians in Los Angeles. And the first of November, it will play in Tel Aviv at the Spirit Film Festival there. So we are really reaching out to a global audience. We are finding with great delight that people are really embracing this. I've had offers to translate it into Chinese, Japanese, Spanish, hopefully German. It will go out to Germany and Switzerland in the fall of next year.

So it really is a common denominator and it has the opportunity as a film, as a book, as a series of educational programs to impact people at an intimate level, to offer them tools that they can use to explore their own transformation, their own relationship to their lives, and their own mortality. And it's really an exciting moment, I have to say. I'm just thrilled.

Karen Wyatt:

Absolutely. I was thinking we last talked a little over a year ago, and the movie hadn't even been released yet. And so a lot – you've been awfully busy for this last year with all the traveling and the release, and the showing, and you've written a book, and you've accomplished a great deal. But there's still so much left to go, I'm sure, with everything that you have in mind for the future.

Marilyn Schlitz:

Yeah. We really want to feed this movement, this growing awareness. So stimulating conversations. We also created a facilitator guide for people. They can download it off the website. And if they go to deathmakeslifepossible.com, they can learn more about the various programs. But as people take it out into community, how do we deepen the conversation and what are some of the tools that facilitators can use to really work with

groups to invite in the most authentic conversations people can have?

And then I'm very interested in working with health professionals. We're starting with nursing and creating a facilitator guide for nurses that can help them to examine their own worldview around death and the afterlife, how does that inform the quality of their relationships with their patients? How does it affect their own health and well being? And what are some of the tools and strategies that people can use in order to buffer any of the negative affects that happen for caregivers on the front line of death? And really, to help them have new skills and opportunities to live their lives as fully as possible.

I just had an opportunity, we showed the film at a screening in San Francisco last week, and a person who started the Hospice Volunteers of America was in the audience and has since sent me a detailed email about his enthusiasm for taking this out through his networks. And I think that it's also about collaborations. So how do we really help support one another? The work you're doing, Karen, is so powerful, and you represent such a great voice in this. And how can we be supporting one another as the field builds?

And I think that that, for me, is what the work is in the next couple of years, really helping to facilitate at the grassroots level, at the organizational level. And also what we're really aiming for in terms of the health professionals is leadership. How do we really influence the conversation at the highest levels so that we can affect fundamental change in the ways in which our organization supports the dying process?

Karen Wyatt:

Mm-hmm. Well, one of the issues I'm passionate about is this idea of changing the health care system and how we approach patients and deal with the end of life with patients. And it occurs to me that our health care system is pathologically in denial of death, in spite of the fact that the health care system is where death takes place, within that system. But there is a denial of death and a reluctance to even look at what happens when we die and after we die. And I think it's because of the scientific model and basis of our medical knowledge. But it occurs to me that one of the reasons our health care expenditures are so high at the end of life is because we have – the medical system has – nothing to offer patients except more treatment. And I think that's one of the greatest issues that we have to overcome.

Marilyn Schlitz: Well, it's, again, going back to this idea of healing and healing as transformation, acknowledging and being in right relationship with all facets of our lived experience, it's really, really important. And inviting people more and more to consider hospice, consider the dying at home movement and restoring that, how it used to be, how can we kind of bring that back into our social order? And there's a way in which there has been a decline in that integrity of the family unit, and so more and more people are having to think in creative ways about how they want to approach end of life. And being prepared at any stage, not only in aging.

But it can happen suddenly for people. So rather than feeling scared or overwhelmed by that, I think one of the values of our film is that, as you mentioned, it offers this immersion into beauty, and wonder. And hearing from people from different world traditions about their beliefs around the afterlife, what comes next, how does living this life with purpose inform the quality of our transition, the vibration of the transition that we make? These are really beautiful insights and to the extent that the film can serve to help invite people's imaginations into places that they hadn't gone before, I'm happy.

Karen Wyatt: Mm-hmm. I loved the interviews you did in the film with some people who had had out-of-body or near death experiences. Those were also very well done because they were very believable in the way that they were presented and discussed. And one comment that I wrote down that was so beautiful, it was the woman who had had surgery, I think, for a cerebral aneurysm –

Marilyn Schlitz: Pam Reynold.

Karen Wyatt: Yeah. She stated that she was standing in the breath of God. That was just such a beautiful description of what she experienced when she was in that near death state.

Marilyn Schlitz: Yeah. We talk about in the research I've done on transformations and worldview what are the factors that facilitate a worldview transformation? How do we change how we believe and how we behave? And a fundamental piece of that are these noetic experiences, these deep personal experiences. They may often be painful. They may often be a kind of life threatening illness, or the death of a loved one, the loss of a job, things that really disrupt our steady state. But we hear about these experiences: the near death, the out-of-body, the reincarnation experiences. All of these have this profound potential to shift people's worldview and to lead

them to begin to question and look for deeper paths of meaning in their lives.

And so I think that one of the things I try to do in the book is look at how people engage in different practices around death as transformation. How do we approach grief? What are the different ways in which we can use grief as a way of empowering ourselves? Art, and music, and ritual, personal practice as well as collective practice.

We're coming up to the Day of the Dead here in California, a practice that originated in Mexico, but is now widely held in a lot of the United States, where there really is this kind of celebration. There's this sense that there is a fine line between the living and the dead and that it's a veil, and we can begin at this time of year to have more intimate communications with those who walk on the other side. And so they come together, build altars, engage in public parades, and it's a really beautiful opportunity to see that it isn't so far away and that we can share our sense of grief together. But we can also celebrate the lives and in this tradition, the communication that continues after death.

Karen Wyatt:

Mm-hmm. And that was some rather fun footage in the movie to watch, you participating in, I think it looked like a parade during Dia Del Muerte, and that looked like a really fascinating experience. I'd love to take part in something like that myself.

Marilyn Schlitz:

Well, lots of fun. One of the great things about doing the film is it put me in so many different places and from being in a mosque or a Buddhist temple, or a Christian cathedral, being with the people on the street when they did the parade. Probably will go again. I was actually in grief at that time. My mom had just passed when we did that particular shoot. And it was a really cathartic experience for me, the opportunity to be in the midst of all the dynamism of this parade, young people dressed up as skeletons and all kinds of ephemeral characters, and the devil.

And there's also not this sense that we need to compartmentalize what is good and evil. I think a lot of people approach death, particularly in some Christian traditions, some aspects of it, where there's going to be this judgment on the day of death. And sometimes people can be very frightened by that. So there's a way in which these kinds of celebrations that don't hold the good/bad, living/dying dichotomy in the same way can really help to liberate the spirit, and the spirit of the community as well as of the individual.

Karen Wyatt: Mm-hmm. And I wanted to mention, too, that in the film you also interviewed a skeptic, Michael Shermer, I believe, and so I thought it was fascinating that you were able to present his point of view, as well, having no sense whatsoever that there is an afterlife, but being able to talk to him about his perceptions of death and dying.

Marilyn Schlitz: Yeah. I'm really interested in reflecting a range of different worldviews. I, as an anthropologist, find it fascinating that we can have so much diversity demographically, culturally, racially. We share the same grocery stores, restaurants, schools, hospitals. And yet, we walk around in these different ontological bubbles, these little worldview frameworks that define how we ascribe meaning to our lives, how we engage one another. And I just find that extremely interesting.

And the notion, Rupert Sheldrake in the film talks about how perhaps the ideas that we hold in this life inform what happens next. And so for me, part of my curiosity is what are the range of ideas and how can we come at different perspectives with respect and curiosity? Again, this death awareness for peace. It includes our ability to be okay with somebody's position being different from our own, and how do we then hold that with a sense of right speech, right action, and deep appreciation, really?

Karen Wyatt: Mm-hmm. And I was interested, Michael Shermer related that after his mother's death, he had an experience of hearing her voice, which could be one of those noetic experiences you were talking about that are transformative for some people and their views, and yet in his case, as Rupert Sheldrake said, his worldview created the interpretation of that event and he didn't find it to be an experience that changed how he viewed death and dying.

Marilyn Schlitz: Yeah. Interesting about Michael Shermer, he's a columnist for *Scientific American*. And he recently posted a little article about – I can't remember the title of it. I wish I could. But it was about kind of reevaluating his position on the afterlife. And he has recently gotten married and prior to the wedding, his soon-to-be wife's grandfather had left her a radio. And he had tried to fix the radio for her and had no luck. And so they stuck it in a drawer.

And she was sad the day of the wedding because she was apparently really close to this man, and sorry he wasn't there. And they had their ritual, exchanged their wedding vows, and suddenly they started hearing music [*laughter*] and they went through the ceremony, and afterward, they went to find the source of the

music, and it was this radio that had started to play in the middle of their ceremony. And so I –

Karen Wyatt: Wow.

Marilyn Schlitz: – am highly intrigued by this turn of events and interested in talking to him again about how worldviews change. And the beauty of them is that we have these very fluid capacities within our bodies and brains that with right practice, with right intention and attention, we can begin to shift our perspectives and these noetic openings, and under the right circumstances, with the right kind of curiosity and then discipline can really shift what we perceive as possible.

So I think that's one of the hopeful things about what's happening in the world today is that if we can embrace this kind of pluralism, which is this reverence for diversity, and really create spaces for dialog, intimate dialog with people whose worldviews are different, eventually people begin to shift in all directions. Not assuming that I have the right answer, either. I'm an explorer, really interested in the journey, as you said, and in a certain sense, the film is my arc of exploring through these different traditions what has meaning and purpose for me?

Karen Wyatt: Mm-hmm. And it's beautifully done, the film stimulates thoughts and conversation, but doesn't necessarily push you in any certain direction. It just opens. It opens the mind and heart to various possibilities. And I think it has, it strikes the perfect tone, as far as I'm concerned, and makes it an ideal vehicle for diverse groups to use for conversation.

Marilyn Schlitz: Yeah. I'm really excited now. I think the next phase in my own work is to engage in this kind of multicultural dialog and using this as a springboard to that conversation, and I'm really fascinated and delighted by the opportunities I've had in the last six months to be immersed in community with people of different faith traditions and cultural backgrounds. And it has been transformative I can say for myself, just deepening my own appreciation for what gives me purpose and meaning in life, and how is it that I want to engage with the world, and how do I want to be an ambassador for a different way of being?

And what encourages me is that I do think we're at a kind of tipping point. I think that there is the possibility that we are at a moment when we could fundamentally change our relationship to death, and I think it's happening as the health care system is

breaking down. Out of crisis comes possibility. I think it's happening because the boomers are reaching the age now where these questions are up. Either they're caring for their elders or they're dealing with their own issues, health issues. And boomers have this quality of wanting to do things differently.

And so even as we think about death, we want to do it in a different way. And so that's a cultural opening. And then all of these particular movements, I think, as they can begin to cross-fertilize, seed and support one another, we can become that kind of critical mass that can shift the conversation. And more than the conversation, the fundamental practices that are institutions in body, in a certain sense. So I'm optimistic that this is a very unique moment in our history.

Karen Wyatt: Mm-hmm. Yes. In a sense, the perfect storm is brewing around us. The perfect elements in a way of threats and disasters occurring around us that are opportunities for this growth and transformation to take place.

Marilyn Schlitz: Yeah. And that's what our work is and our having these forums, like what we're doing today, to talk about these ideas, the research. We did a little study. I created a little online class as a pilot to explore how we translated the content of both the film and the book to educational format, and eLearning. And so before and after the course, we asked people to journal, and we were able to then do an analysis of the content of those journals before and after the course.

And we found that people expressed less fear as a result of diving deeply into this topic of death. They referenced death less at the end than at the beginning, which is curious given the whole course was about death awareness. And we also found that there was a shift in the pronoun use. So people moved from the first person pronoun to a kind of third person, more objective, collective pronoun. So rather than talking about, "I have fear," it was an awareness of something bigger.

And that's, to me, very encouraging that as people engage in this conversation, we can begin to look at what qualities it shifts in them and ultimately, then, in groups, to see if we can't really measure some of the ways in which there is something powerful going on here.

So I'm excited about that, too, is thinking about how we evaluate, how we create content. One of the things anybody who's made a

film knows is that you end up with many times more footage than you're able to use in the actual product. But we have a number of vehicles that we're going out with. So the film now is in festivals and community viewings. It will be available very shortly for individual sales on the deathmakeslifepossible.com site. It's available for community viewings through specialty studios and The Video Project, who are the distributors for this.

We will be doing a limited kind of theatrical release early next year. Then when the book comes out, there will be the opportunity for it to go into a more public format, so we're hoping it will end up on public television, potentially the Oprah Network, if we get lucky. So that is taking it out in a popular forum. And then creating these educational programs so that we can facilitate conversation at the level of community, professional health care, and leadership. So that's really kind of creating a coherent hole that can be used by people in various sectors of society to engage their own work and projects.

Karen Wyatt: Well, it seems to me that this film would be a great basis for a community discussion group to take place. So if someone wanted to create an event around the film, they could just go to the Death Makes Life Possible website to learn about –

Marilyn Schlitz: It's deathmakeslifepossible.com.

Karen Wyatt: Deathmakeslifepossible.com?

Marilyn Schlitz: Uh-huh.

Karen Wyatt: Okay.

Marilyn Schlitz: And they can learn from there. They can follow some links and that will get them to the community viewing page.

Karen Wyatt: Okay. Because I think it would just be a great format for many different groups – many groups – to use the movie to stimulate discussion and then utilizing your facilitators' guide, to help lead those conversations. I think that would be fantastic to see this movie, this film, being shown in every major city in the country and groups coming together to talk about it.

Marilyn Schlitz: Well, maybe so. Thank you. *[Laughter]*

Karen Wyatt: *[Laughter]* Well, I wanted to just say from listening to your bio and your story, it seems so clear to me that this work you're doing

right now, it's really the culmination of all your life experiences coming together, and it's beautiful to see that. It's beautiful to see how you have taken your experiences, both the traumatic ones and all of your knowledge and your intellectual studies and the scientific research you've done, and it seems to me that it's all merging together in this film and the book that you've written. And I just want to commend you because I just have this sense that you are truly manifesting your purpose here on the planet, and I'm so happy to see that.

Marilyn Schlitz: Thank you. I appreciate that vote of confidence and [laughter] maybe it will be so.

Karen Wyatt: [Laughter]

Marilyn Schlitz: Uh-huh. I feel that way. I feel as though I've had a lot of inspiration. The gift for me is all these relationships, friendships. At some point, I don't know that it's – the culmination sort of implies it's the end, and I hope that it's gonna continue to unfold with new directions and new dimensions, but it does feel as though it's a natural progression from looking at the work I did with consciousness and healing around an integral model of healing, how do we really bridge that? And then a couple of decades of work on the transformations and worldview and really seeing the death issue as the big transformation that people have not been really grappling with.

And so now, being able to take the various skill sets and move them forward. But none of it would be possible without these relationships. So at some point I really want to write and focus on friendship and conviviality as the tool of transformation. Because really, if you can create relationships that are meaningful, and deep, and powerful, authentic, filled with love, that is transformative and it is in that inter-subjective space that I think we can co-create something. We can co-evolve a new story. And that story is rich, and complex, and as you mentioned, like a tapestry.

And so it's the potential of a beautiful image on that tapestry that is about the sustainable nature of our human endeavor. And thinking the biggest, boldest possible dreams we can.

Karen Wyatt: Mm-hmm. Wow. That's beautiful. I love that sentiment, that relationship is really the crucible of transformation and authentic loving relationship is really what we should be striving for in life as part of our living. And that's a beautiful message. So is there

anything else that we didn't cover, Marilyn, that you'd like to bring up about the film or the book coming up? Any closing comments?

Marilyn Schlitz: Let's see. I feel, again, like I said, grateful for the work that you're doing and appreciative that we have this friendship and collegiality and that we can begin to aim our various resources in a common direction. And using tools of social media, the eLearning platforms, the community where people are in proximity to each other, all of these are ways for us to help support one another. And I think that's really important is people feel connected. They feel more empowered. And so to the extent we are part of that process, I appreciate it and I'm grateful and I look forward to the next installment.

Karen Wyatt: Mm-hmm. Well, same here. I am looking forward to next year and hearing about your book, and the community learning that you bring forth into the world. So, Marilyn, thank you so much for doing another interview and taking time out of your busy schedule to share with us about your movie, *Death Makes Life Possible*. And I want to wish you the best of luck in the next year and wish you also health and wellness for yourself, too, while you're in the middle of this busy work.

Marilyn Schlitz: Yeah. Living a balanced life is very good. So my garden comes in handy. And I'll tell you, raising a teenager keeps one humble.
[Laughter]

Karen Wyatt: Mm-hmm.

Marilyn Schlitz: So thank you and let's just stay in touch.

Karen Wyatt: I'll look forward to it.

Marilyn Schlitz: All right.

Karen Wyatt: Thank you, Marilyn.

Marilyn Schlitz: Okay. Bye.

Karen Wyatt: Goodbye.

[End of Audio]