

Other epitaphs recount acts of heroism or inspiration. A 125 pound dog named Bear defended his wheelchair bound owner from an intruder. A St. Bernard named Lady Louise would cheer up her cancer-stricken owner: "You were my best friend. When I cried because of the pain from the cancer, and when I got sick because of the chemotherapy, you were there. You would lie next to me and lick the tears away from my face. I want you to know how much you meant to me and how much I loved you."

From games to gifts to grief, the World Wide Web runs the spectrum. Stop in and have a look at the flip side of life.

National Public Radio. **The End of Life: Exploring Death in America.** <http://www.npr.org/programs/death/>, Pp. 7, Transcripts, Resources, Bibliography, Readings, Tell Your Story, Feedback. No date.

Elinor Levy

In November 1997 National Public Radio's (NPR) "All Things Considered" launched a year long, multi-disciplinary investigation into death in America, entitled *The End of Life: Exploring Death in America*. This massive endeavor explores death from the perspectives of folklore, religion, personal experience, science, business, and art, among others. The radio broadcasts are augmented by a website that provides visual images and resource information.

The main page of the website features a photo of a sculpture by Augustus Saint Gaudens, later titled *The Peace of God that Passeth Understanding*, providing a fitting undertone to what many Americans fear most—death. The main page acts as a jumping off point to the other links: "Transcripts," "Resources," "Bibliography," "Readings," "Tell Your Story," and "Feedback."

"Transcripts" includes both the complete transcript of each segment and the audio tracks from the broadcasts. This is an unusual and very welcome link as NPR does not usually provide transcripts on its websites, only summaries. The "Transcripts" section offers many opportunities for folkloric discussion and points for further research. The segments range from round table discussions on scientific, medical, and religious aspects of death, to personal narratives of the dying, to handling grief and suicide, and to roadside memorials. A few examples include stories about Do-It-Yourself Funerals, thanomusicology, and death and society. The "Resources" link offers a list of organizations for people coping with death and life-threatening illness. The "Bibliography" link provides books and journals, both fiction and nonfiction, on a wide variety of topics relating to death and illness.

The links that are of most interest to folklorists are "Readings," "Tell Your Story," and "Feedback." The "Readings" link offers excerpts from poems, essays, novels, short stories, spiritual and religious texts, plays, and broadcasts, which are used in conjunction with the broadcast series. These excerpts range from the serious, such as *The Nature of Suffering and the Goals of Medicine* by Eric J. Cassell, M.D., to the religious "Ministration of the Time of Death" from the *Book of Common Prayer*, and from the sentimental *Charlotte's Web* by E. B. White, to the comic "Chuckles Bites the Dust" from "The Mary Tyler Moore Show." This link also features visual images with the caption: "Photographs can spark memories—of childhood, or of the early years of a relationship....These images are examples of the sort that might prompt...(a) life-review."

My favorite link, both personally and as a folklorist, is the "Tell Your Story" link. "Sometimes, the best thing you can ask someone who cared for a dying person, or was with a loved one when they died, is not 'How are you doing?' but 'How did it happen?'" Over three hundred people have responded with short narratives of their own stories of death that are powerful, heartrending, and sometimes joyful.

In the "Feedback" section, listeners and visitors to the site are invited to comment on the program to the producers. Not all the segments have been planned, so it is possible to have some impact on the program in the future.

The End of Life website offers a variety of areas of interest to folklorists. Personal narratives about illness, death, and dying are presented equally with information provided by experts such as doctors and theologians. The sites, as well as the broadcasts, cover the broad range of religious and ethnic death experiences found in the United States. Bess Lomax Hawes, in her 1992 article "Happy Birthday, Dear American Folklore Society: Reflections on the Work and Mission of Folklorists," stated the importance of folklorists broadcasting the information they gather (1992, In *Public Folklore*, Smithsonian Institution Press). Although Hawes does not take broadcast literally, *The End of Life* series fulfills her exhortation to folklorists in two mediums: the Internet and radio. And its producers aren't even folklorists.