

HOMELESS IN PARADISE

April 19-25, 2019

PENINSULA PULCHRITUDE - Part 16



*rising toward the sun
grandfather viewed earth below
through an eagle's eye...*

Wanda Sue Parrott

(Photo courtesy of Clip Art)

LIFE AT DEATH; LOOKING AT EARTH THROUGH THE EYE OF AN EAGLE

by Wanda Sue Parrott

“**GOING HOME**” is a metaphor Christians use to explain the unknown answer to the question:

When a human dies, where is Self? Heading to Heaven, Hell, Purgatory or free in space?

If a human’s pet dies, “Crossing the Rainbow Bridge” implies continued existence of Fluffy, Fido or whatever we call our precious non-human family member.

Does being homeless complicate dying?

Last week’s column about two old dogs of local homeless women drew responses from several readers, one of whose comments inspired this column.

“If someone dies in his or her sleep, would he or she be trapped in the dream he or she was having at the time?” David J. Thomas emailed from Springfield, Mo. “Crazy thought, huh?”

“We all wonder!” I replied.

David, past president of Missouri State Poetry Society, responded, “Hope it's a good dream and not a nightmare!”

I added, “You don’t have to be a poet to ask the question. Amy Kitchener (1820-1889) was a self-described humble farm woman in Iowa before it became a state. I edited her dictation in 2001. Here’s the shortened version of her description of what happens right after the soul leaves its body while awake.”

“A Gift For Red Feather”

When Indian Moses died, . . . he leaped like a running hare from his body, then stood staring at it. “That’s not me,” he mused in his native Sioux language.

But it was definitely the man children of the tribe called Ton-ta-tanka, meaning “everyone’s grandfather.”

And it was unmistakably the old man his white friend Cyrus had called Indian Moses since the day they met thirty years earlier on the Iowa prairie in 1849.

“That crippled old man was in so much pain, he groaned when his wife pulled him out of their tent.” He remembered. “. . . she went down to the river to wash his soiled blanket.”

He landed in a young hunter’s crouch, whirled, and snubbed the corpse.

In the distance, he could see the women scrubbing soft deerskin loin cloths and roughly woven cotton feed sack dresses they got from white farmers.

The woman with long gray braids was washing an old bearskin blanket with missing patches of fur. He recognized it as a wedding gift they’d received more than fifty years earlier, before white men and the railroad came, before he became Indian Moses, whose body, with its glazing open black eyes and head raised toward the sun, was now propped against dry stalks of sun-dried corn whose seed would be used for next season’s planting if crows didn’t get them first.

The stalks served as litters that held up sick individuals while they received good medicine of the Great Spirit’s Sun Light, as scarecrows, and as launch areas from which the dying could easily ascend into the sky.

“If you are dead, why don’t you rise into the sky?” he thought to the immobile body. It did not move, so he poked his finger under the dead man’s chin. His hand moved through the jaw. . . He pulled it back out and shook his fingers. He could see through them.

Just then the old man’s wife, who was carrying the wet blanket toward a tree on which to hang it, approached the row of corn.

“Hello,” he called, but she did not hear him. “Red Feather, I’m right here!”

She looked around, as if she thought she heard a voice.

He leaped in front of her, waving both invisible hands. “Red Feather! Look at me!”

She glimpsed her dead husband’s clouding open eyes, dropped her load in the dust, and began to moan. . . a keening wail that attracted other women and a few stray dogs.

“Red Feather, beloved wife, don’t cry so loud,” he joked. “You might wake the dead!”

She gazed right at him without seeing him. The other women came running, staring, mumbling, as Red Feather tenderly closed the glassy eyes of the man who had been her husband since she was a child bride with shiny hair the color of a nut-brown prairie dog.

At that moment, a great burst of white light filled the consciousness of the spirit of Indian Moses and, despite his efforts to stay grounded, he rose into the sky and saw the scene beneath him grow smaller as he ascended higher toward the Great Spirit.

He laughed, using his white friend Cyrus's language as he shouted with enough power to move the wind, "Well, I'll be danged. . . I'd swear I just shapeshifted and am now looking at Earth through the eye of an eagle."

Then, with the renewed vigor of an unencumbered young hunter, he intoned the sacred sound of Aho, soared through the flock of black birds descending toward the banquet below them, and dropped a white feather at the feet of the wrinkled old woman who was wrapping her husband's empty body in the wet blanket to preserve it until the shaman could bless it as food for crows.

Red Feather lifted the sacred sign, pressed it to her heart, looked up into his open eyes, smiled, and blew him a kiss.

What Really Happens At Death?

David J. Thomas said, "I wonder what really happens at death. Don't know anyone who has come back to tell us. I do think it's a waste of the library we've amassed if it all simply goes away. I like to think a consciousness continues. Hope so. I am certain that we'll all find out one way or another."

Meanwhile, if a pet's human dies first, what happens if it has no home to which to go?

To be continued next week.

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CREDIT: Photo Courtesy Of Clip Art

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~ Wanda Sue Parrott

This column appears in the weekly edition of Cedar Street Times, hometown Newspaper of Pacific Grove, California at www.cedarstreettimes.com.

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