

Good But Not Religious (GBNR)

FEBRUARY 2021 - A monthly update on Keith Martin's work as a nonreligious chaplain and educator online

LETTING GO OF AN AFTERLIFE (and embracing this life)



At the University of Guelph a year ago, Keith offered a series of Good But Not Religious Monthly Get-togethers with TED-like talks on the following:

Jan: Letting Go of God (and embracing goodness)

Feb: Letting Go of an Afterlife (and embracing this life)

Mar: Letting Go of Meaning (and embracing meaning)

For the February event, he played another excerpt from Julia Sweeney's monologue, "Letting Go of God." Then he played a Larry King interview with Neil deGrasse Tyson on "What Happens When We Die?"

Here are excerpts from Julia's journey:

I was lost in thought, thinking, "So, I don't think anything happens to us after we die. Consciousness fades and stops like every other organ. So people just die."

And my brother Mike. He just died. I always had this idea that Mike's death, while premature, was his divine destiny somehow. And that his spirit didn't really die, it lived on. Not just in the memory of those that knew him, but in a real tangible sense. And I realized that I now thought he died. He really died. And he was gone, forever.

Then I thought, "Oh, I get it. I am going to die. I'm going to die." I sat down on a bench and watched people bustling by and thought, "Wow. Life is so cheap and so precious."

I suddenly felt very deeply that I was alive: Alive with my own particular thoughts, with my own particular story, in this itty-bitty splash of time. And in that splash of time, I get to think about things and do stuff and wonder about the world and love people, and drink my coffee if I want to. And then that's it.

I walked to my car and I had a ticket. My time had expired.

Here are excerpts from Larry's interview with Neil:

Neil: There's no evidence that I'll have any consciousness of anything. And by the way, is that so weird? Did you have consciousness before you were born? Were you saying, "How come I'm not on Earth? My gosh, I need to be on Earth," or "Where am I?" No, there's just the state of nonexistence.

Larry: Ah, yeah, but now I am born, and I can't stand the thought of nonexistence. See I already have existence.

Neil: Okay, it is true, we fear death.

Larry: You bet.

Neil: Because we're born knowing only life. I get that. I take another view. 'Cause I've been asked, "If you could live forever, would you?"

Larry: Yes.

Neil: Okay, we're done with the interview!

Neil: Okay, sure, that's an attractive idea. But the way I look at it is, it is the knowledge that I'm going to die that creates the focus that I bring to being alive. The urgency of accomplishment. The need to express love. Now. Not later.

And this is from Keith's tribute to his wife at a Celebration of her Life on September 14, 2019:

Without a belief in a supernatural Being to bring us back from the dead, Jenny and I have had to let go of our belief in heaven. So I can't say what many of you may be saying, "See you in heaven, Jenny." Much as I wish heaven were real and that I could see her again—along with my parents and my brother, Dan—I have to believe in what I have evidence for, not what gives me comfort. So on August 8 I had to say goodbye to Jenny—which, as some of you have said in emails and facebook posts, really sucks.

Meanwhile Jenny lives on in us. I have been incredibly blessed to know and live with a remarkable woman, a remarkably good woman. Thank you, Jenny, for 43 years of companionship, marriage and love—real love.

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