

Death as Motivator

By Gloria Hildebrandt

Rationally, I know this is ridiculous, but I can't help feeling that I let my father down. On his death – in fact during his final days in hospital – I took over the care of his dog Thomas. I moved him from my father's house next door, to my house. After my father's death, people would say "Sorry to hear about your father. What about Thomas?" Everyone was relieved that he was living with me, still able to enjoy the same trails through the property as he always had.

In September, Tommy suddenly, rapidly, declined and died. At the age of 14 years and five months, he died in my arms, at home.

I had taken him to the vet, he had received medicine; I cared for him as best I knew how, while he lost the ability to walk and had to be lifted out onto the lawns, was gently placed on a soft dog pillow, covered up for warmth, offered water from a little bowl brought to his mouth, which he refused. He died and I wonder what more I could have, should have done for him, for my father's dog.

Rationally, I know there was nothing.

I have become acutely aware of the rapid passage of time. I went to a college that has the motto above the dining hall door, "Slow comes the hour; its passing speed how great." At age 19, I used to squint up at it and think it was just a smarty pants saying. With age I realize its profound truth.

I've been trying to focus on my life's priorities and actually get important things accomplished instead of just thinking about them. As Thomas lay for hours at my

feet in his final illness, I was so aware of the possibility of death, that I wrote my own obituary, or what I would like to have read out at my funeral or memorial service. I had thought about doing it for a few years now.

It's why my co-publisher and life partner Mike Davis and I finished and published our book *Views & Vistas*. It's why I completed the registration of my family's land as the Hildebrandt + Davis Nature Park. We've even created a logo for it, which we plan to put on a couple of signs at the roadside of the property.

Logo with Family Ties

Our park logo has special family significance to me. Creation of the logo began when I asked my nephew Brit Jennings for ideas. He used to work as a

graphic designer and had already created a couple of logos for me, including the "secondary" logo for this magazine that we sometimes use, a horizontal version that includes a Turkey Vulture.

For our park logo, Brit suggested using some of the Niagara Escarpment rocks that are found on the property. That got me wondering which of the many rocks to choose. Then I remembered a big rock with cedars growing out of it, that used to stand out alone on the virtually tree-less land. It was on a slight rise, overlooking the site that my father had chosen for a pond that would be fed by the existing springs. My parents and I used to call it Picnic Rock because we would eat there while we visited our land before the house was built.

A beagle called Socks, from the neighbouring property, used to come over during our picnics and get a few morsels of food. So if there was a rock on the land that had significance for me, it was that rock.

I took some photographs of the rock and our talented magazine graphic designer Nicholl Spence simplified it and transformed it into a black-and-white version that looks like a sketch. The font we chose was the same as we used for our book *Views & Vistas*, because it looks to me a bit like scratches on rock. Next, we have to have the logo put on metal signs that we'll put up at the edge of the park.

Getting important life achievements completed helps to quell my anxieties about the rapid approach of the end of life.

Gloria Hildebrandt is co-founder, co-publisher and editor of this magazine.



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