

Don't Give Up The Smaller Hopes

"So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today." Matthew 6: 34

Eva Saulitis spent decades doing marine-biology work and writing on Prince William Sound, an archipelago cut off from the Gulf of Alaska by two barrier islands. Her work involved observing a species of orca, the Chugach transients. Her writing includes *Into Great Silence: A Memoir of Discovery and Loss Among Vanishing Orcas* and *Prayer in the Wind*, a poetry collection.

The commitment to write *Into Great Silence* came out of a cancer diagnosis. She said, "When you get a cancer diagnosis, it's conventional wisdom to ask, 'What would I regret not accomplishing?'" Really, it's important to put that question to yourself whenever you're wondering what to do next in life, to hone your sense of purpose: If I were on my death bed, what would make me think '*#&@!'. You want to avoid having big regrets at that moment."

The Chugach transients are a vanishing species of orca. They have not reproduced since before the nearby Exxon Valdez oil spill. She had carried their story for twenty-plus years. She knew she needed to write their story, but she couldn't integrate the pain, the trauma of the spill. But with the cancer diagnosis came an inner edict: You have to write this book. And so she did.

The impulse for *Prayer in the Wind* came after she wrote the book about orcas. Everyone around her hoped she was cancer free, but something inside her told her it was coming back. It had. And with metastatic cancer, Eva said, "There's a strange culture of hope that is extremely difficult to navigate." Her oncologist was resistant to answering questions about prognosis because cancer turns out to be as individual as the human body. Didn't want patients to lose hope.

But at that point Eva's sister helped her understand that she'd had it with the hope for a cure or for a longer rather than shorter life. Her prayers changed. She focused on what was attainable day by day. Much like the scripture at the top of the page.

"Whether I'll be healed of this cancer feels out of my hands, almost irrelevant, in a strange way. I have to focus on what is right in front of me. What do I hope for today, for the next month? In this reprieve that I have now, when the chemotherapy seems to be working, I experience periods of well-being, but if I project too far into the future, it has no reality. And I refuse to live a tragic cancer story. Everyone's life is limited."

She ended her book about the transient orcas, *Into Great Silence*, with a prayer "*That what's broken can be mended. That what's shattered can be made whole. That what's damaged can be repaired.*" She not only applied this prayer to the earth, but also to herself. She said, "I hate reading obituaries that say, 'She died after a long battle with breast cancer.' So she lost her battle? No. I refuse that narrative. She died fully alive. That's the idea behind '*brokenness can be mended*': we are fully alive even in that moment when we die."

"So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today." Don't neglect to hope for what is possible today. Eva Saulitis died fully alive in January of 2016 at age 52. -DJ