Right, before I die

Full transcription of interviews:

RENE':

If anything, I try to keep religion at the minimum—but I believe in God, most definitely

...

The God that I'm talking about is the same God that you talk about when you're silent

...

—Do you have any regrets?

Yes...I have a daughter in El Salvador and I didn't give her the right to be part of my life

...

There is no such thing as happiness in life. What we call happiness are contributions; all we have is what we are and what we have given at that moment—

...

The meaning of life is the search for it—.

JACK:

Death?—Eh, just something that happens— .

..

I believe in a lot of things but not everything. I take after my dad who said we can be religious but we don't have to go to church and listen to the preacher

...

My wife wasn't the greatest love of my life. A Japanese girl was,back in the 1940s. We got along, she was a lot of fun to be with. She enjoyed everything; she enjoyed going to the beach, fishing, walking in the woods, she enjoyed a whole lot of the things I did. Well, that was back when we were 17 and 16 years old. But then during the war, they moved all the Japanese out of here and into camps scattered throughout the country and she was out by Mojave for a while. We were going to get married out there but then the government said no because neither of us was of age, even though her parents said it would be alright and mine didn't even know about it...So I didn't get married and next time I went out to see her she'd been moved to Utah. Her brother Greg, who I'd gone to school with, he'd joined the army and he was killed over in Europe with the Japanese unit in Italy... I would have followed her to Utah but I couldn't get enough A stamps or B stamps for gas...Thought about her the other day because I had a Japanese nurse—I haven't thought about her for years

...

Usually a regret is something you're pissed off about to start with and then a week later you can't even remember what it was—

...

I've had a couple women I've felt pretty strong about but it wasn't nothing I wouldn't leave. You can love someone and set them over here and still love them but they don't have to interfere with your life...I want my life to myself

...

There's only any meaning to life while you're here—

...

I'm proud of some of the work I've done and my reputation. I was always the 'fix it' guy. When someone needed something done they used to say go see the wizard and they'd send them to me

...

I should have paid more attention to my dad but we split apart. I should have been more caring when he was sick. But I ignored it and that's because we had bad relations somewhere along the line

...

Hundreds of little things give me joy. Mostly, getting out by myself sometimes and just roaming around in the mountains. I used to do that every once in a while. Sometimes I'd go out by myself for a month with a fishing pole and a shotgun and I'd have some quail and fish and just wander around and see if I can find my way back.

KIM:

I'm not afraid to die—I'm afraid of what I've got to do to get there

...

First you must learn to love yourself, only then can you truly love others

...

—What's been the greatest love that you've had?

A guy named Marcos, we are soulmates. I talked to him today. He's in a place where he won't be home for a while. We did everything together when he was

home. That was my true love and always will be. It doesn't matter who I married—I didn't marry him only because he went away and I will never stop loving him. He's in my heart and he's in my soul—he's in prison, so it's pretty hard. I can't connect with anybody else...I've been married in between. He belongs with me and I belong to him. And we felt that connection the first day we met

...

Probably my only regret is marrying the person I married because we weren't compatible and I just married him to be out there so I probably wouldn't do that again. Other than that I do not have too many regrets

...

I think I was born to learn a lesson that somebody else didn't learn

...

Don't worry so much, because worry doesn't do anything but stress you out and it doesn't change anything. Deal with it and move on—

...

You think you have friends but when you get sick like this people run. And the ones that you would expect to be there for you are so far gone they tell you 'I'm so sorry you're sick, we'll get through this, don't worry about it' and the next thing you know they don't call you, they don't text you, they don't have anything to do with you because you're sick like they're going to catch it or something. Most people are like that because they're scared, scared of I don't know what— And the people that you wouldn't even think you're friends with are the ones who are here and helping you. People that I would have never thought— still trying to figure that out

When you're a friend *you're there...you* don't leave because someone gets sick

...

I don't candy coat anything, I'm pretty blunt and pretty much say it like it is

...

I'll be remembered by my mom and kids for how much I care about everybody. And I show it a lot because I think you should. I don't think you should hold something like that back because we don't know how long we're here and if you love somebody you should tell them. They don't have to love you back but I think that if you love somebody that they should know it because you never know—you don't know what's going to happen tomorrow. You can walk out that door and that's it, you're done—You just don't know what's going to happen—

...

We have so much here to enjoy and no one enjoys it—God made a lot of things out there and nobody uses them—.

SARA:

I feel that life is very pretty. I've always liked to work, fight, and well, for me, life is very pretty

...

I think growing up with love makes people give love back. And you have to give love to receive love, you have to be good without expecting anything in return. You do it because it comes from within you to do it. I like to help people who are in need—if I see a person who needs help, I will do so even if I don't know them, because I know they have a need I don't... and they do. I don't know if it's right or wrong

...

—And when you think of your life, when were you the happiest? If possible, a specific moment or time—

I think the whole time.

—Really?

Yeah, all the time mostly, maybe from time to time I was sad or angry but it just went away, life had to go on.

—And now what does time mean to you?

I don't know

...

I've always fought to improve myself and risen to the occasion. It's what I was taught growing up and was very ingrained in me. I think that's what I'll be remembered for when I pass on. Possibly bad things about me, too, but I think more good than bad

...

I'm not a person who likes to complain and I do not expect people to do things for me. I've always tried to find a way to live and keep on going—

...

Knowing that I could succeed, doing things I didn't know how to do that came out well and being able to keep going, that's my biggest pride—.

DIANA:

JOSEFINA:

Every single night I dream. People I've never even seen, I see them in my dreams...I tell everyone that I'm sleepy all day from dreaming so much at night and I keep on sleeping throughout the day.

I dream a lot about the water, sometimes it's clear, other times very blurry. I see it coming but it doesn't come into the house, it stays at the door, at the sidewalk, it doesn't go any further—

...

Life is the waiting room to death. We are just passing by because you already know that since we are born we are going to die and we have a specific day and

we don't know when or where or how—I feel calm, at ease, because I already know I am going, so every night I tell God, 'You know what you are doing' I'm not scared of dying; I already lived many happy years—

...

—You've never been afraid to die?

No, never, never—Besides, when I was younger, I didn't think about life or death, I just lived. Until well deep into my years I started thinking about it, that we all have to die, everything that is born has to die, plants, animals, everything—

...

—What have been the most difficult things about being alive?

The most difficult? Living with my grandma and my family.

They never made me happy, they never showed me love or affection. I wasn't a person, I was more like a thing that came and went, that's how they made me feel, all my family.

—Have you forgiven them now?

Yes, all of them. Whoever has done me wrong, I've forgiven them all

...

If you're dead, you're dead. That's it. It doesn't come back and I don't think we reincarnate. I know The Bible says otherwise and I don't want to contradict it but to me, I don't believe that. When we die, we die and we go to nothing. Dust to dust...I think the end of the world reaches you when you die

...

—What do you think you'll be remembered for?

Of course, after I pass on, they're going to talk all the time about the way I was, what I used to do, everything you do or see, you're going to say, 'Oh my mom,

grandma used to...' All the time you're going to be remembering me while you're alive.

SALLY:

I have always been in control. I was the one in charge, and when I got married, I took care of everything; the bills, everything— When my husband passed away, I continued working to take care of my family, even when they got sick. My brothers and sisters they are sick and always something is happening to them. So I continued to take care of all the bills and everything. Then, I developed cancer...Sometimes I look at the cross and say ' Dear God, is this what I have to go through?'

...

When you're in pain, very, very bad pain, and you can't stand it, sometimes you say, 'I wish, I wish I could die' but then all of a sudden, something enters my brain...why should I wish that? If He wanted me to go, He would have taken me long ago—

...

Being in love is like being in a different world. You can take anything that's dished out because there's *someone* who cares for you—

...

Happiness to me is when you feel good and you make somebody else feel good. You don't even know what you're doing and you're making someone happy.

CHUCK:

I got depressed because where I worked for 38 years, at Lockheed Martin, in research and development, they tried to productionize us. How can you productionize research and development?

...

I think I received my faith from my grandmother. She was a true Christian lady. She was loved by everybody, she loved everybody and she loved life. She told me that 'Wherever two or more people gather in his name, you may call that a church. You could be out on the rocks someplace. Even though you might be sitting out there all by yourself, there's still two of you; there's you and there's Christ'. That meant an awful lot to me throughout my life. I really believe that—

...

I've enjoyed my life. Some of my favorite times were, as kids, me and my brothers used to play baseball, and my mom would join us. Later on, when we got into offroad motorcycling, my mom got a bike, too, and joined us

...

One of the happiest moments of my life? At the top of that list would be when I married Sally, who became my wife of 35 years. I had been after her for a year to marry me. I knew when I met her for the first time, but she didn't feel the same way about me. It took me over a year to convince her...I just kept after her, kept asking and I said 'I'm here, I'll keep after you, you're the one.' One day she said 'Yes.' And that was a really happy day of my life. I can't even remember the details of that day because I asked her so many times for her hand—just about every day I was after her. We finally got married in Ottawa, Kansas and when the preacher asked if 'I do', I shouted out 'I DO!' I didn't mean to yell but I meant it, I really did. We were soulmates for years and years

...

Regrets?—I guess I regret kind of hurting my mom when I met my wife—I would spend all my time with her, but I think that's just something mom had to get over—

...

I've had a happy life

...

Life is what you make of it here on earth and a lot of times I haven't made the most of it but a lot of times I have—

...

I didn't quite do everything I wanted to in life. Physically, I'd like to get better, for one. I think spiritually, I'm pretty much up on that

...

Love is something deep within your heart that you can *really* feel. It's a very, very good feeling and very enjoyable when you know someone loves you. Hard to describe...A great joy, love is—Can't help but feel it

...

Who would want immortality on earth? I wouldn't

...

The world is what people make of it—They can make for themselves a good life here, or they can make themselves miserable—and it seems like there's a lot of people who like to make themselves miserable.

JOHN:

I am learning not to shelter myself away, that there are a lot of people out there that will help me, and to just let them help me

…

My faith I didn't get from my family, it came to me from circumstances that have happened in my life—I cling to this faith in times of trouble

...

I have this feeling of let go and God will handle it for me—and to not try too hard to accept that—

...

If I do die from this I will be going home—

...

When I think of death it's like the beginning of a pain-free new way of life—

...

I don't need romantic love, I just need deep caring love and help from my emotions when I'm scared

...

My father's death was probably one of the greatest moments of my life because he was in a lot of pain and in a hospital, like I am now, and I realize that if you let go you're free—you don't need to meet anyone's expectations but your own

...

I have no regrets—I was a good kid, I was a good adult, I was a good helper to my parents

...

I'm lucky to have a positive outlook—it's harder to not have one because then you have nothing to look forward to—

...

People just come out and help me. Now that I'm sick I'm noticing that there are a lot of people willing to help me—I never asked for it before but maybe I should have. My neighbor's gardener was the one who saw me and said you're getting too thin and we have to get you to a doctor. He took me to the doctor, paid for the doctor and here I am now in the hospital getting help

...

It just feels good to be good—

...

Time is just a measurement

...

You can be totally fooled by something, and you can absolutely fool yourself into believing anything.

EDICCIA:

When I was first diagnosed my world collapsed. The first thing that came to mind was my husband and my children. I knew I might be scared but they were going to be in a lot of pain

...

I feel hopeful because I haven't given up. My faith is big and I know that whatever happens, God will decide when I'm going, not my doctors

...

It's not my religion, it's my communication with God. I know I have to go somewhere, sometime—just like anybody and obviously it's not going to be when I want, but when He wants me to, but I'm asking Him to give me some more time

...

I might not be able to do the things I used to do. The disease is all over my body and I will be handicapped, I have to face that, but it's a blessing just to wake up and see a new day, to see the daylight and to know that, even though I'm in the

hospital right now, as soon as my youngest child is out of school he will either stop by or call me. So that keeps me going. My oldest one, since he's in college, he comes out sometimes to be here with me. So I'm thankful for that

...

I was scared and that lasted about three months. But then, I said, I am a woman of faith and even though I'm scared it's OK, I will reach out for Jesus' hand and He will walk me through this and that's basically what I've been doing since then—and praying. I don't know what His plans are or if He's going to heal me. Will He make a miracle?

...

I talk to Him like I talk to any person and I use my heart—that's what I do. I don't ask 'Why me? Why is this happening to me?'—I'm nobody to ask Him that—It just happened and I have to live with it and be strong

...

It's scary knowing you have something that no one has a treatment for

…

Prayer has made me stronger—and less scared. The only reason I get scared is for my boys

…

It feels good when people who aren't blood related care about you and they become your family

...

—*What have been some of the happiest moments in your life?*

Sitting with my grandmother during coffeetime and just talking —that was one of my favorite times. That was beautiful and I miss that. Also, when my children

were born—when you finally see their faces and you know, that's your boy, that's your child

…

God has been blessing me all these years

…

I would just change one thing in my life and leave the rest as it is. I have a regret and I'd like to keep that for myself. If I say it, people will know what I'm talking about

...

Happiness is very simple

...

I love to open my eyes in the morning and hear all these birds by my window, there are so many, singing—that's the meaning of life for me—and feeling the sun on my skin—

...

One day I asked God, I said 'I don't know what your plans are for me, I'm not looking for anyone, but if you ever want someone for me, you have to choose them, I do not know how to choose.' And I think He really did

…

I've been in love twice in my life. When it's the right person it is wonderful—when you know you have found your other half. Finally, you have someone who knows what you're thinking already before you can even say it. That is beautiful, finding the right person

...

I've learned I'm not the only one going through this and even though I'm in a bad situation, there's someone in a worse situation who doesn't have the support of their family and husband, and they are alone

...

The world sometimes is not fair. Some people have cancers that can be cured but they don't have the money to see doctors or get medication

...

—What does time mean to you now?

—Time? I like to spend every minute of the day in the best way that I can, that's what time means to me

...

I hope I'll be remembered as someone who doesn't give up

...

Maybe I was too strict. Unfortunately, I'm just learning that now. If I could go back, I would try to enjoy life more and also try and know the difference between things that can wait and some things that can't—.

JOE

IRENE:

It's a beautiful day—I'm watching the leaves sway back and forth in the wind, and I'm happy that I get to be alive to watch that

...

Before I go to sleep I say 'happy, healthy, love, content and grateful' 108 times

...

After my heart replacement, I haven't been able to recall any dreams

...

I believe in God, the souls of people, my family and in my husband who's the best thing that ever happened to me. *I believe you are what you think you are*

...

My God is upstairs, He's with my mother and father and grandmother, in heaven. I believe He's watching over me but I never ask Him for anything...I never ask Him to keep me healthy or for anything material. I believe what is going to happen to me is His decision. One time I said to a doctor 'Thank you for keeping me alive' and he said, 'Not me, God'

...

It's a gift to have friends and to talk with them and to share

...

If I could go back to any time in my life? Right this minute—

...

Every day to me is a better day because I get to breathe—

...

I don't watch my words and I tell people how I feel ...

I'm gifted with the strength my mother gave me. When I was a child and I'd be in the hospital, there were times when the drugs would make me shake. My mother would say she was too tired to stand and that she had to lay down. She would then lay on top of me to stop the shakes—

...

I am going through the path I'm supposed to be going through... I wouldn't change anything in my life, no—

...

Just do the best you can, I can't imagine any other meaning to life than that. And we have to make ourselves happy, we can't expect that from others

…

Love—I feel it inside my heart, but I don't love everybody. Love is a feeling that I can close my eyes and see—

...

I don't like being on airplanes because I'm not in control. I don't want to do that...I don't do anything that scares me anymore. I don't want to take those chances. I'd rather take the chances with all the medical procedures I'm going through

…

I think people are not satisfied with life and I think people are very unhappy with the world. They're jealous of each other and they don't know which way to turn...I can't control the world, I can only control myself—

I try not to think about time too much. Sometimes it's scary, because I would like to be 70 years old—every 5 years I have all my friends over for lunch and so that means a year and a few months to go...sometimes I don't know if I'll make that...and I'll be 50 years married in a year and a few months and I don't know if I'll make that, either.—And that's why I want to do as good as I can every day. Time is every day, *time is every minute*

...

I hope for the best but I absolutely will take whatever comes. I don't hope all the time, I take it as it comes. *I don't want to hope because hope could be disappointment and I don't want to be disappointed*

…

I can't tell other people what to do

...

In my life, I'm most proud of marrying my husband against everyone telling me 'No,' including his family

...

I'll be remembered for my choice to have the strength to stay alive.

ABEL:

I feel like the door is opening; we go back when we're done with the job that we were put here to do—it's so simple, because it would be such a hoax if it weren't true

...

Everything that you hold dear, everything that you hold important, everything that keeps you together can just disappear in a second unless there's a lot more strength in the way that it's being held together

...

It's very simple, *stupid*, just look at it, come on! We tend to make everything so difficult and the Lord is saying it's *really* not—

...

The most important things in my life have been some of the discoveries of things from people of whom I never would have expected...And some of my favorite moments in my life were having discovered that I was not all that important

...

My mother used to say you cannot build your happiness on top of someone else's unhappiness

...

I do think that there is a meaning to life and that is what compels you to keep on going to help others and to help yourself

...

I believe in heroes because there's such a tremendous feeling of fulfilment in having done the right thing

...

You have a one-way ticket, don't waste it!

...

—What makes you most proud of your life?

Despite tremendous opposition from a number of people in my family, and even though I had fought for at least 2 years in the military, I chose to turn down a particular future because it involved a career promoting violence and warfare. I would have had a lot of prestige and I know I disappointed my folks, still I just couldn't do it

...

I think that what people will remember about me is that I was lucky enough to enjoy doing things that were helpful to a number of people. I never looked for it, never went under the sofas and the beds trying to find a way of doing something that would be meaningful, I just was lucky enough to find it right there in front of me.

DONALD:

I call on God but I don't demand He solve my problems; I've had to solve my problems myself

...

Magnificent love, it goes on and on and on—that's how to love. My love is so supreme that even though my ex-wife remarried and loved another man, I still love her. You have to realize you can't always hold on to it, you have to just let it slide away—

...

There are so many things we are capable of doing that we should be able to go on from mistakes to greatness

...

The meaning of life is to give happiness to the human being that you love.

MICHAEL:

I had been strung out for 10 years using heroin every day, shooting up 3, 4, 5 times a day. I was hooked, possessed—I'd been married 3 times, I had no way of paying my bills, all my friends had deserted me and I thought my only way out was to kill myself. I had a gun, I was writing a letter and when they came home they would find me dead

...

I was one of 7 kids and from a very early age, I can remember I was always with my father when he was out working in the fields in a tractor or at the garden or in our nursery business. Wherever my father was you could find me right there next to him. He always thought the best of me and I was always his boy—later on, when I got into trouble, he would go and rescue me from the places where I was at. He would literally come and drag me out of there and tell me that I could be better than that and didn't have to be in that environment of drinking and doing drugs and that I should come to work, that real men work—they didn't stay

in bed or weren't out getting loaded like I was. He would come to my house at 6 in the morning, wake me up and say 'Come on, let's go to work, son, you have a family to support.' He never put me down, never told me I was a good-for-nothing bum and wouldn't amount to anything. If it hadn't been for him encouraging me to do that, I would have been dead by now. My father was my savior. He was always very loving in the harsh tone of voice he had, but it was love that was coming out of that voice and I could feel the love, not the harshness. I could feel the love that he had for me, that he really cared for me and that he wanted what was best for me

...

My dad was a happy go lucky guy, he was not a worrier. When you were around him, you always felt that something good was going to happen. There were many times I remember when we'd be in a restaurant and he'd see somebody walking down the street, a down-and-out person, and he would go and invite that person to come in to the lunch counter. He'd say 'Come on, eat with us.' He'd buy them a steak dinner, whatever they wanted—that's the way my dad was, he was always a rescuer of down-and-outs and he was always reaching out to help others. I used to see that quality in my dad and I really admired that. He could be so strong yet he could also be very compassionate, very loving, and those are qualities that I lacked in my life—

...

Up until recently, I had regrets. I regretted seeing that my daughters were crying knowing that the end is near. They were crying and crying and I didn't want them to cry anymore. I wanted them to be at peace but yet everywhere we went there was nothing but bad news and nobody took the time to pull us together as a family, to console us, to talk to us, to lift us up. Only through being here at this hospital have I found that peace I now have where if I was to leave, my children and wife are ready to let me go. We have that understanding and I am so grateful for that, it took such a big burden off of me—I don't have to worry about it anymore, my family is willing to let me go. That means a lot to me—

...

If I could go back to any time in my life it would be when I was working at the missionary fields in Mexico. When we started taking clothing and food to the

people over there, I saw poverty that I had never seen exist before. One place in particular was outside of Ensenada where people actually made their living by collecting cans and selling them for food—they lived in little huts and there were flies and black filth covering their whole bodies...you could hardly tell everyone from the blackness of the smoke and the flies. I remember when we brought the supplies there, we started unloading them from our truck and the people were waiting for us to leave before they approached—they would appear like they were outcasts. I told them 'No, come, come' and they said, meekly 'No, no, you go, no, no...' They were used to people just dropping off supplies and taking off instead of going and visiting with them and praying and sharing the love of God. The next time we went there they allowed us to come into their huts and I remember getting down on the floor and we prayed on our knees to God—take these people out of these environments, that is no way for people to live.

Later on, I was given the opportunity to baptise all 38 people in that community. Eventually they all got houses and jobs and they got out of that dump...they saw the vision that was in our hearts. Many traveled across America or Mexico, got a house, made a living. All of a sudden, I was leading a completely different life, doing things that I didn't think I could ever do—I needed those years in Mexico to transform my life

...

So it's not what we possess or what we think we need—it's much better to give than to receive and I've always gone with that—If we could give what we had to people that don't have—it may not be very much—but if we could touch one or two it all starts with someone.—God, I remember seeing those little kids, seeing them feeding their little brothers and sisters who hadn't eaten in days, just bread and sugar. Their pants all torn off, no shoes or socks on, living like that, I could not stand by and see that happen. Four missions evolved from that. We had an organization that started getting supplies and we started going every 2 weeks for 10 years. We'd drive down there and make sure they got what they needed and what they wanted

...

It's been a wonderful life and I'm glad I've seen both sides but I like this side better

...

I found my true love with my wife Lolly. We've been married 47 years and she has shown me what true love is all about. That's not just in the beginning of the marriage and the middle of the marriage but at the end, where there's death—she has been right there with her loving hands and her heart and her words, so comforting to me—She never gave up on me. Her love, I know it'll be there tomorrow. It's a relaxing feeling to know that you have someone who just loves you for who you are and is not expecting or wanting any more than what they married. She knew what she was getting into when we got married but she was part of the process of me getting out of that life so that I could get into this new life. She's been a great woman in my life, and that's true love

...

As a gardener and landscaper, I always felt very close to God with my hands touching the earth and creating something from the dirt. People would always say 'Thank you, thank you for bringing our yard back to life again.' That's something I always valued

...

I am a content, whole, peaceful man right now...Not scared, not afraid, just excited, all bubbly inside, like I'm going to get married. I'm reaping what I've sowed all those years; I've sowed love—

...

I built 8 missions in the 10 years that I spent in Mexico. That was my purpose in life, to help people less fortunate than me. I fought the good fight, I've run my course and I have nothing to hold my head down on. I can walk out of this earth with my head held up high and just go the way I came, naked.

NELLY:

After I received my diagnosis, I stopped taking my medications—I just wanted to die. I cried every day and didn't want to do anything anymore. I gave away all of my stuff. That feeling lasted a year—6 months ago, it stopped. I started praying, and I said 'God, help me because right now I want to end my life and I want to

stop thinking this way.' The next day, I said 'God, give me something so I can change my life'. I finally said 'OK, I know how to sing and I know how to teach.'—Those are the only things I know well in my life so I said I'm going to sign up at the senior center and I started working there and singing for the elderly. I chose the senior center because there people are dying and losing hope in their lives. One day I realized I was making people happy and also I was making myself happy...so I started my life at that time—

...

With my first husband I chose someone not knowing that he was a bad guy. I had never been with a man before and from day one throughout all six years of that marriage I had been bothered, I'd been hit...to the point where I had to go to work with bruises all over my body, raped many, many times and everything else—. The day after my second son died, I came home and my husband punched me in the forehead, there was blood all over the place—A week after that, I left with my other son and we went to California. I went on with my life, I went to school, put my kid through school and I never asked for child support or anything. I never looked back

...

I don't know long I have to live—maybe today? Maybe tomorrow is my last day? I'm not sure. I am very happy, actually, and I don't have regrets even though I've been through hell. As far as I know, I've accomplished what I've had to accomplish in my life

...

I wish I could help more people than I have. I love people. I think the only reason I'm on this earth is to help out in any way I can. For the last three years I've been cooking for homeless kids that are sick in bed. I cook Filipino food—6 course meals—for them at the Moose Lodge in Lancaster—I've chosen to work with disabled kids now because I think they're the only ones who don't have any chance in life and now that I'm very sick I can understand them more than I used to. Very seldom do you see people who want to help people that are mentally and physically ill. My goal in my life now is to help them even more

...

I hope that I go to heaven but if I go to hell what can I do?

...

I don't believe in heaven in that way. I believe that heaven is what you are in this life and if you did good, you're happy and if you didn't do good, then you went to hell

...

I want to believe in reincarnation. My last husband was blind and wasn't able to have sex during our 16 year marriage. One day, I discovered him cheating on me! I want to be a prostitute in my next life!—Kidding aside, I want to just be floating in the air, as happy as that—

...

I believe in reincarnation, and it's not because of Jesus Christ. What happened to all of these people that died? They cannot possibly have just vanished into air. Something happened to them. I don't know where they went, but I do believe they went somewhere.

SARAH:

When I first heard, I said, we're going to fight this, we're going to beat this...I don't know how much longer I have because I'm not the type of person that likes to think like that. I'm stubborn, I'm going to fight this 'til the end. Whatever happens, there's got to be another option. Maybe we haven't exhausted all the options? Maybe we can come up with something new? I'm not averse to being experimented upon but I am averse to being given up on

...

I've always been the caregiver in my family. I took care of my grandmother when I was in high school. I took care of my mom the first time she got cancer...and the second time...and the third time I lived with her for three years and took care of her while I went to school. The hardest thing of all was her seeing me go through cancer and she couldn't do anything to help me. Then, my sister-in-law's cancer recurred when I was diagnosed and all three of us were having chemo at the

same time. I don't know how to explain how all three of us were getting cancer treatment at the same time...I believe in something, I don't know if I'd call it God or the Lord or Krishna...and I know there's got to be some ultimate plan—

...

I can't really think about what's fair—fair doesn't make any sense. Things are not fair or unfair, it's just the way life is. Things happen—or they don't. You take opportunities—or you don't

...

Life is definitely not infinite. You never know what is going to come up and you really have to take risks. I didn't really start taking risks until I was in my late 20s and I feel like I missed out on some stuff in between. I missed out on relationships. You know, in college, that's when people always find their true love or have these dramatic love affairs—and I never got to have that...Well, I kind of did—I had a boyfriend for a while and I really liked him, it was the first time that I really, really felt comfortable with someone. We got along and then after I graduated from the Fashion Institute my mom sent me to Europe for a month long backpacking trip and I came back and he wanted to get back together and I was too afraid, I didn't know what to do.

I had been gone for a month and here's someone telling me they love me, I didn't know what to do with that...

—Have you been in touch with this person?

No, I've thought about it. I saw him on Facebook but he's married and I didn't want to disrupt his life. Like 'Hi...by the way, I have cancer.'—It's been 14 years since we've been in touch.

—Do you feel that he was the greatest love of your life?

I don't know, he could have been, but I didn't give it a chance. He was definitely a wonderful person, but I never gave it a chance

...

I've had to learn this on my own as I got older: hit or miss, fall down and get back up again. I've always been doing stuff for myself. I've gotten a lot of my strength from my parents but I've had to dig it out from myself these last few years—

…

I had to explain to my best friend why I can't be friends with him anymore. And it was one of the most emotional things, I know for me and for him—for a lot of people around us, because he was like part of our family. Over the years, he had become a very cruel person. And verbally abusive and manipulative—and he would just think nothing of it. And this was coming from someone who I'd been friends with for 20 years. It was not OK and so I couldn't do it anymore. Especially at a time like this

...

Yesterday, I said, I'm going to die tomorrow

...

At least I got to see the black president

...

Some of my friends, I didn't realize how much I meant to them before and now they mean a lot more to me because of what they went through with me and just showing up. Many are friends I didn't even realize I really had. And maybe I didn't even bring it out in them, it was that I just allowed people to be nurturing to me. For a long time, I didn't allow myself to be vulnerable or ask for help or open up

...

Time is so precious. God, it's precious...

ODIS:

You try and help someone and sometimes, something bad happens instead

...

I dream a lot mostly about dead people: my parents, my siblings—because I'm the last one left of my family. I've outlived everyone

...

The last time you close the lid of a casket, that is the most heart rending thing you can do. You break, you just break. I have three children buried in Phoenix and four husbands are dead

...

I just turned 89 last week. Who'd have ever thought? If I'd had known I was going to live this long I'd have taken better care of my body

...

Well, first of all, there's the big question 'Why me?'—You have your happy moments and you have your sad ones

...

Nothing I can do about it, it happened and that's it...

...

There are times you love someone so dearly and then moments when you want to choke them

...

When we'd fight, one of us would just say 'Is this our first fight?', then we'd laugh and that was the end of that

…

One of my favorite memories was traveling with my fourth husband before we married. We went on a cruise to Alaska and if he wanted to stop, we'd stop and if I wanted to stop we'd stop and otherwise we kept going. It was just a peaceful, happy time

...

It all blends in, in one life

...

I don't feel like I had a youth, and it wasn't anybody's fault but my own. I wanted to grow up too fast—

...

We're here to improve on what we have

...

I've always had the hope that things will get better. If we don't have any hope or faith in the future we don't have anything

...

I'll be remembered for my red beet jam and my quilting

...

I haven't done anything especially in my life that makes me proud. But my mom once said 'I could die happy if Odis would be brushing my hair'. Since I was 7, I took care of her hair. I was in Washington when she died so we came down immediately and I found myself in the back room where she lay and I went over and started brushing her hair

...

Some love me dearly and others don't like me at all. Sometimes that bothers me and sometimes it doesn't. Because I'm *me*, you can't please everybody so you have to try and please yourself without hurting other people

…

I'm at peace and have been for a few years. You just have to decide that no one can hurt you anymore and you just go from there. You run to the end of the diving board and jump off, into the black void, and hope that you land in water—

...

Being married you have to have a sense of humor, understanding your partner's needs and you must cater to their inner soul

...

Number four husband, when he first came to see me after he got to socializing again after his wife died, we were sitting across the room from each another and I walked over and we had been talking about missing the touch of another human being, not necessarily sexual but just touching. And I said I know what you need, you need a touch so I put my arms around him and I kissed him on the cheek...that's what got him—

…

It's so simple, it's just a kind word and an understanding answer to their question. And most people don't have that, I don't know why. Even if we're raised alike. My younger sister, she didn't have it. I don't know...I'm not a philosopher, I'm not Plato or one those guys—I don't even think I'm related

…

My mother used to say make your face pleasant enough so that people pay attention to it and not your shoes.

WANDA:

I never know minute to minute what my life is going to be but I'm not afraid by that. I'm at peace because I've done everything that I've wanted to do and I try to be the best person I know to be

...

I lost my parents at a very early age and I was crushed because I had no one to lean on...God is how I got through it. I had no one else to lean on in life, not even my husband

...

I had a very religious cousin who told me I was going to go to hell since I had a divorce and I figured, so be it—you've got the same raising as I have in the same church as I have

...

When I pray I just wait until it happens. Either it's answered or it isn't. I put it in His hands and if it works, it works and if it doesn't, then I know it's not for me to do—

...

Being in love is a feeling like you're in a different world. I've been in love twice

...

Happiness is when you're with someone who's a friend who you enjoy and can be true to—that's happiness to me

...

—As I ask her what has been the most difficult thing about being alive, Wanda pauses and doesn't answer. At that moment, the silence is interrupted by the song 'Rock-a-bye-Baby' in muted chimes coming from the distance. This is broadcast in the hospital's PA system every time there is a birth.

RALPH:

Yesterday is a gone day—today is fresh

...

Try and love everyone that you meet. No matter what they are or what they do, try to give them your feeling of acceptance and that's love

...

Be responsible for all your actions and all your words. If you do or say something bad, accept that, own it. If you've hurt somebody, ask them for forgiveness. It's so important that you don't point to other people for your faults—

...

I don't go to church but I'm a spiritual man. I constantly call on a higher power that runs the course of my life. I can rely on that for everything—It's given me forgiveness and the ability to feel good about myself. I didn't always feel that life was good. In the past, I have defied God and refused to rely on Him. But a day came when I realized I needed His help all of the time

...

I want to live, I have much to do—I want people to get back to being decent to each other

...

As a little boy, I used to travel all around the city with my father carrying his packages for him, and I loved that...At my dad's funeral, everyone kept on saying, what a wonderful man he was and how he always cheered everybody up. I hope I've had that same affect on people—

...

The key to life is the realization that there is more than one key. I have had two glorious loves in my life, that's just about the best thing. What more could a man want? It's been a wonderful, wonderful ride.