

Film explores the life-affirming possibilities inherent in death

By Jon Lewis

Marilyn Schlitz, a cultural anthropologist, researched, wrote and served as executive producer for "Death Makes Life Possible" and hopes the film will remove much of the fear and denial surrounding death and free people to view death as an inspiration for living.

Deepak Chopra, the esteemed physician and author who also produced the documentary, calls it "a must-watch film for anybody who is going to die."

"Death Makes Life Possible" is scheduled for 7 p.m. screenings on Tuesday, March 3, at the Sisson Museum in Mount Shasta; Saturday, March 7, at the Center for Spiritual Living in Redding; and Thursday, March 12, at Havurah Shir Hadash in Ashland, Ore.

Jennifer Mathews, a Mount Shasta-based counselor, will lead a discussion on the film and other aspects of death and dying following all three screenings.

Tickets for the Mount Shasta screening are \$10 in advance or \$15 at the door; tickets are available at Village Books or by visiting www.deathmakeslifepossible.com. Tickets for the Redding screening are \$15 in advance and \$20 at the door; tickets are available at the Center for Spiritual Living, 1905 Hartnell Ave. or online. Tickets for the Ashland screening also are \$15 in advance or \$20 at the door.

In an interview with *After Five*, Schlitz said she is using the film, and a book with the same title to be published this spring, to initiate "a campaign to redefine death and turn fear into an inspiration for living."

Death is "one of those big things that represent a taboo topic in our culture," Schlitz said. Through the film and the resulting conversations it will prompt, Schlitz hopes people will have less fear and denial about the natural cycle of life.

"Having people come to terms with their views on their own mortality and what will happen next will help them to live better," Schlitz said.

In the film, Schlitz explores the mysteries of life and death from a variety of perspectives and world traditions and how popular culture deals with the ever-present fear many have about our own mortality. Interviews with mental health experts, cultural leaders, and scientists explore the meaning of death and how we can learn to live without fear. Mixed in with the interviews and evidence presented are personal stories of people facing



Above, Marilyn Schlitz, a cultural anthropologist, who researched, wrote and served as executive producer of "Death Makes Life Possible" walking with Deepak Chopra, the physician and author who also was a producer of the documentary. Below, Schlitz (center) at a Day of the Dead Celebration.

"Death Makes Life Possible"

March 3 at 7 p.m. - Sisson Museum
1 N. Old Stage Road, Mt. Shasta.
Tickets: \$10 in advance (Village Books)
\$15 at the door. Call 926-4770

March 7 at 7 p.m. - Center for Spiritual Living
1905 Hartnell Ave., Redding. Tickets: \$15 in
advance, \$20 at the door (at CSL). Call 221-4849.

March 12 at 7 p.m. - Havurah Synagogue
185 N. Mountain Ave., Ashland, Ore.
Tickets: \$15 in advance (at Music Coop)
\$20 at the door. Call (541) 488-7716.

their own death as well as those who report encounters beyond death.

Schlitz contends that a greater understanding and acceptance of death and an appreciation of how different cultures deal with death—regardless of one's personal beliefs—will reduce anxiety and aggression in society. Numerous studies indicate that a fear of mortality can serve as a trigger for violence when people encounter opposing belief systems.

"People who don't deal with their own mortality end up having a lot of anxiety, and when that fear gets triggered, they end up being aggressive and less happy," Schlitz said. "If they come to terms with (mortality), they become healthier, happier and better citizens."

"There is too much fear, too much anxiety and too much suffering around death," Chopra says in a foreword to the film.

On an individual level, open



discussions about death can lead to a better understanding of one's wishes and beliefs. Would they prefer to die at home? Do they want heroic life-extending measures taken?

"Even with advance directives, doctors don't know," Schlitz said. "If people gain greater comfort about their mortality, they are able to make choices and have those choices accepted later in life. Those desires and requests will be honored if we can talk about it."

The act of dying itself can be therapeutic for loved ones, Schlitz said.

"Grief can be a catalyst for personal growth and transformation," she said. "A gift we are given is to be with someone at end of life. Instead

of frightening, it can be liberating. It's an opportunity to touch something that is so pure and so authentic—we don't get the opportunity to do that in a lifetime very often."

Schlitz teaches a course on the subjects that are raised in the film and has presented it to retirement communities.

"I find that people are less fearful and feel more positive about the opportunity that lies ahead," she said. "We collect data and monitor word use before and after the course and find that people express less fear and anxiety."

"People were so deeply appreciative at the opportunity to have this conversation. They never had the opportunity before."