

Patrick  
MACDONALD

# The great beyond

*Purpose of death is to make life more cherished*



As a parent, one of my most difficult tasks is to explain to my children why things happen. I can fall back on my considerable knowledge of science to help me deal with questions like "Why is the sky blue?" or "Why do leaves fall from the trees in the fall?"

Now I have to face the challenges of answering questions like "Why do people act the way they do?" or the most difficult question of all "Why do things have to die?"

I was confronted with this question recently in dealing with the loss of a pet. Like any other member of the family, pets share in your good moments and help comfort you in more troubling times. This particular pet was a cat that had lived with us for almost 10 years. She shared in the good times and the bad and provided comfort to every member of my family. She will be sorely missed.

My son is taking this loss especially hard. Sure, he has seen death on a limited scale in the loss of a fish or an occasional hamster,

**“***So how do you explain to a child the concept of life and death? How do you comfort him when he feels he has lost such a close friend?***”**

but they don't really survive long enough to create a lasting bond. They don't rub up against you, purring and meowing, begging for attention. They don't respond to your emotions and jump into your lap or lick your hand to lend moral support.

So how do you explain to a child the concept of life and death? How do you comfort him when he feels he has lost such a close friend?

Like anyone else, I would draw on my past experiences. I would study my feelings regarding death and try to establish a means to explain why this had to happen and what good will come from it.

I remembered my maternal grandmother's painful death to cancer, a close personal friend dying of a heart attack while serving in the Navy and the lost pets I cherished as a child. The experience that helped me deal best with my son's feelings was the loss of my favorite pet to a fire.

I remember vividly the firefighter

apathetically carrying my friend by the tail from our burnt home and dropping her lifeless body on the ground. I spent several stunned moments pondering why this happened, then got to the task of giving her a proper burial — one that a good friend would truly deserve.

Had I known then what I know now about Viking funerals, I would have carried her body to the creek that ran behind our home, built a small raft, placed her lovingly on the raft, set it afire, then prayed that she would welcome me as a Valkyrie when I someday made my own way to Valhalla.

As it stood, I had to settle for burying her in my backyard, muttering some magic words to release her spirit and spending several hours crying beside her crude grave.

Realizing how much these simple actions had helped me deal with my own loss, I now approached my son to explain death. I try to tell him

about the cycle of life and how everything that lives must die someday so that they can move on to a better place. I tell him about Cat Heaven, a place where cats are never chased by dogs, the food and water are always plentiful and little sisters aren't there to torment them or pull their tails.

Most important, I have to understand his feelings and let him have the time to grieve. Like my own situation, he will never truly get over the pain or the feelings of loss, but he will learn to accept them, someday. Until that day comes, all I can do is listen to how he is feeling, provide a shoulder to cry on and support him as any parent would.

So, why do things die? Well, son, things die so that they can be remembered and praised by future generations. Death is necessary to free our loved ones from pain and suffering and allow them to move on to a better place where the food and drink are plentiful and debates are on a friendlier scale. But most of all, death is necessary so we will appreciate the value of our own lives.

To my pet, I hope to see you in Valhalla someday. Rest in peace.

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# Women's Club

*Responses varied on the meaning of what 'real' is*



Calling to order the first meeting of the Real Woman Club — a club dedicated to advancing acceptance of the non-Cosmo woman.

Women who walk to the beat of their own drum. Females who are comfortable being themselves and resist society's attempts to fit them into neat and tidy little categories.

Real women stand up for what they believe in and aren't afraid to cry in public — if that's what they want to do. Nor do they have to put down men and masculinity to be strong. Real women are strong because of their essence and the experiences that have shaped them.

In an attempt to truly represent what makes up a real woman, I solicited suggestions from female friends and family. As the responses rolled in, I was amazed and humbled at the breadth of experiences that these women have had. Experiences that have shaped their life philosophies and outlooks on the world.

The best came from Mom, who, as always, is a fountain of inspiration.

She writes, "A real woman is one who doesn't get pissed when her preppie daughter mocks her jean dresses and Birkenstocks in a DN column."

Point well taken, Mom.

I'd like to share some other tidbits of real women wisdom. The thoughts that follow come from women like you and me, from our mothers and aunts, teachers and bosses. Take them either at surface value or read them for more.

*"Real women don't deny their femininity for the sake of participating in a male-dominated society. Real women are capable, strong beings who can admit they've learned their grandmother's recipes, as well as their grandfather's love of hunting or football."*

*"Real women are masculine, feminine, bitchy, kind, proud, humble, opinionated, quiet, the cheerleaders and the players — all at the same time."*

*"A real woman doesn't worry about how messy her house is when her mother — or mother-in-law — drops in."*

*"A real woman doesn't need to*

*claim credit for every 'good deed' she does or helping hand she gives."*

*"A real woman knows actions speak louder than words — she backs up her words with actions."*

*"A real woman accepts the color of her skin, the color of her hair, the size of her body without trepidation and with open arms."*

One real woman writes, *"As I write this, I have not shaved my legs in exactly five days; the glare from my white legs blinded another person on O Street this morning, and no fingernails impede my speedy typing."*

*"As far as I'm concerned, a real woman is someone who continues to love unconditionally, even though she finds that few people are willing to love her in the same manner."*

*"A real woman knows that she is a queen — that despite her outward appearance, her emotional flaws, her intellectual shortcomings, she is and always will be a queen above all."*

*"I think what makes us all real women is that we have fragile self-esteems — the biggest road block to our happiness."*

*"I think all strong women have an innate knack for loving, and it's other people who choose not to see us as accepting, forgiving, loving HUMAN BEINGS."*

**“***Real women stand up for what they believe in and aren't afraid to cry in public — if that's what they want to do. Nor do they have to put down men and masculinity to be strong.***”**

*"Real women know the difference between love and sex."*

*"Real women aren't afraid to buy birth control, are familiar with their bodies, say no to sex if they don't want it and know who is important in their lives."*

*"Real women don't wake up in the morning with perfect hair or skin."*

*"I think I'm a real woman because when I need clean underwear, instead of doing laundry, I just buy more."*

*"A real woman decides, after much thought, what her priorities in life will be and will let no circumstance or person twist them."*

For my mother, her priority was family. She didn't work outside the home; when society told her she should be a working woman,

juggling power suit and spatula, she continued to bake cookies and give out kisses.

*"A real woman knows the difference between the love of her life and the man she's going to marry."*

Real women pledge — to themselves and other real women — to leave time to discover who they are, to celebrate what they've become, to refuse to be pushed and pulled by society's demands, to celebrate in the truths they've discovered.

Real women are just that: real. They know when to roll up their sleeves, use a little elbow grease, when to ask for help and when to do it themselves.

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