



How Clean IS Your Well Water?

with Tami Quinn Hollenbeck

Ever consider what might have gotten into your drinking water? Is your well head surrounded by dirt, or in a little building outside where your pet raccoon or rat has made it's home?

Often your well is out of sight and out of mind. Just because you turn the faucet on and water comes out doesn't mean you are fine.

Take a walk out to the well where the casing comes up out of the ground and look around. Is there insulation falling around the top of the well, spiders, ants, frogs, or mouse droppings? If this stuff is around the top of your casing then, EWV, because there is always a chance that it can get into the well & contaminate your water source.

When you get back to the house and can think again - give your favorite Water Well Pump and Filtration Service a call and ask about getting your water tested. It just might be time to ensure that you have safe clean drinking water for your family.

Water is a geological cocktail, so **DRINK MORE WATER!**

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Warm greetings from the Southern Oregon Living and Dying Alliance

BY HAYRIYA HEIDI HANSEN

It always seems strange, especially at this time of year, when the leaves are changing colors and the whisper of hot summer days still lingers in the air, to be writing a winter article. As if I know what things are going to be like or even if I will still be here, alive!

Most of us live in this slightly perplexing "reality" where we really think our "plans" are going to happen—like "See you tomorrow," "Let's do dinner next week," or booking next year's vacation! We falsely believe these plans will really all come true. But what if tomorrow, next week, this winter, or that holiday never comes? What if this is It? At this moment, this breath is all there is. Have we added beauty to our life and the lives of others?

Years ago, my training as a death doula coincided with a volunteer stint at Celia House in Medford (an amazing 12-bed residential hospice home). I had a hard time leaving each person's room, as I was so programmed (as we all are) to say, "See you later." Previously, I'd believed this would be true. But at Celia House, where 12 people and their families awaited death, I saw the futility of thinking I had any control or knowledge of what would happen in the next moment, the next day, and even much less knowledge or control about when death would come for me or those I love. For the first time, I started living in the unknown and embracing that reality.

Contrast that with here and now, in this beautiful Applegate watershed, where I watched the stunning dogwood blooms fade and fall, and then the leaves change from green to orange to brown and winter begin to set in. The earth around me sends a mighty trumpet as the geese honk across the sky, sounding the shift of life's cycle. Presently, these shifts and the seasons, thankfully, are somewhat consistent, though the tentacles of the climate crisis are apparent (but I digress).

Like the dogwood tree in all its glory—trunk, branches, flowers, fruits—the beauty is only the outward representation. While the tree's beauty supports life—our lives—the hidden microbiome and ecosystem support the tree. These hidden systems, the organizational structure of worms, fungi, forest animals, weather systems, and much more, support the life of the tree. Often, these foundational, underlying systems go unnoticed, are undervalued, or are not valued at all.

The Southern Oregon Living and Dying Alliance (SOLADA) is much like the ecosystem of the tree. Many people are the microbiome, volunteering their time and energy to form the unseen, integral part of our organization, which is spreading the message of conscious living and conscious dying. All of us are dedicated to encouraging death literacy and to supporting healthy ways to help individuals process grief. The best thing

we can hope for is that our message will reach far and wide, allowing people to have more peace in their lives and more peace at death. Here and now, I'd like to offer deep gratitude to the amazing human "organisms" that allow SOLADA to continue: Angela Franklin, Dr. Megan Frost, Michelle Keip, Dave Levine, Evelyn Roether, Jack Shipley, and Karma Mykal Jensen. Also, many thanks to past hardworking members, Tressi Albee and Kate Clark, and to SOLADA's newest volunteers, Kelli Rua Klein and Stacy Raffety.

Just as the tree needs the microbiome and the ecosystem for its life support, SOLADA could not survive without the dedication of the folks mentioned above. SOLADA also needs your support! Our organization survives on a "thin root system," and everything we do is by donation. We are here to serve our community. Presently, we are very much in need of a website upgrade, and we need support for our mission to continue. Please consider making a tax-deductible donation. We sincerely hope to continue our mission to shift the taboo about planning for and discussing grief and death! Check out our offerings—death cafes, grief rituals, films, and more—at solada.org. Thank you for your support and enjoy the beauty of this changing season!

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Finding grace...in place

Building community is more than hosting block parties and managing emergency phone trees. It's about working on yourself.

BY CHRISTINA AMMON

Some time ago, I assembled a little altar of travel-themed curios: a vial of apricot-colored sand from the Sahara Desert, a blessing scarf from a Nepali monk, and a dish of Milagro charms from Mexico. Every trinket serves to remind me of the magic and serendipity of travel.

I recently accepted a job in local tourism, and life has taken a settled turn. These days, I'm more often in the role of host than nomad. Plus, I acquired a piece of land that requires a lot of tending. Now, instead of learning the stops of the London Underground or the names of Himalayan peaks, I learn the names of the trees, plants, and birds that populate my yard: miner's lettuce, acorn woodpecker, and madrone.

Becoming part of a community has been a satisfying—but not entirely comfortable—transition. To the altar, I recently added a potted plant to represent rootedness. Then I tucked a feather in the soil. For flight.

During my 20 years of traveling, both solo and as a guide, people often remarked on the bravery of travel. They weren't entirely wrong; the loneliness upon arriving in a new place is bracing, and navigating foreign streets isn't easy. But as I try to settle down, I realize that it takes at least as much skill to stay in one place as it does to travel.

A life of travel affords easy escape. If novelty wears off, you can move to the next place. If relations get strained, there's always a new crowd. When clouds roll in, you can head south. Mistakes and regrets can be abandoned roadside like blown tires, and through the wide-angle lens of travel, most problems shrink down to size.

Staying still is entirely different. When smoke rolls in, you breathe it; when heat descends, you endure it; when rain falls, you get wet. Small problems can loom large, and if relations are strained, you must work them out.

I look at the plant and the feather, which together seem to convey the tension I carry: Do I stay in place or hit the road again?

A poster on the wall of my house reads "How to Build Community" and includes a list of pointers: Know your neighbors. Listen to the birds. Organize block parties. I delight in all these things and try to do most of them. But in all its cheery encouragement, it fails to cover the harder side of community building: working on yourself.

I was on a walk with a friend the other day, and we explored this trickier aspect of community. For all the support and solace that it provides, there can also be feelings of exclusion, misunderstandings, and conflict with neighbors. I confessed: "Community can kind of hurt!"

My friend, who has lived here for decades, empathized. She suspected this pain was tied to an almost primal instinct. In our animal bones, we sense that staying in the pack is essential to survival, and the deep biology of this makes some anxiety almost inevitable.

You must learn how to be a good pack member: Don't take things too personally and do your best to minimize harm to others. Also, be reliable; the reputation of your work follows you around. Hold good boundaries around your own privacy and



The potted plant represents rootedness; the feather, flight. Drawing: Christina Ammon.

that of others. Sharing the wrong detail—even in the form of concern—could be the stick of dynamite that blows up a valuable relationship.

Of course, we are human so we *will* mess up. And since you aren't going anywhere, these mess-ups accumulate around you like debris in a river eddy. You have to learn to live with the humility of that. Others will mess up, too, and from that you have to learn forgiveness.

"Maybe this is your growing edge," my friend said.

That felt right. To deny community is to deny your own personal evolution.

The feather and plant will remain on my altar among travel memorabilia from what feels like another life. But when the fall breeze blows in, or when I stare at the horizon too long, my mind goes to fresh starts and new lives, and I feel claustrophobic, squirmy. Over time, maybe the feather will become less about flight and more about grace—the grace of staying in place.

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Christina Ammon traveled as a freelance writer and worked as a tour organizer with her company Deep Travel Workshops for 15 years. She now manages the Applegate Valley's new destination website, wanderapplegate.com.