

Always Say Good-bye

Gail Balden

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I've never agreed with comedian Lenny Bruce who said, "I hate small towns because once you've seen the cannon, there's nothing to do." Not in our towns. With spring sprung, we've had a selection of so many things to do that it's been hard to choose.

On a Sunday in late May, we had to choose between hearing Cappella Romana, world-renowned masters of Byzantine Chant perform at St. Catherine's Episcopal Church in Nehalem or taking in the North Oregon Coast Symphony's performance, "An American Dream" in Tillamook with selections from Copland, Sousa and Rachmaninoff.

These concerts came on the heels of three of the biggest annual local events of the year which brought out most of the town with the Cart'M Trash Bash, the Nehalem Bay Garden Club plant sale and North County Friends of the Library book sale which amazingly raised over \$8,000.

Hoffman Center events included the ongoing Manzanita Film Series, an embedded imagery workshop by local artist Lori Dillon, a performance by a bicycling street harpist and the popular Manzanita Writers' Series which brought in playwright Bryan Harnetiaux and a staged reading of Harnetiaux's play, *Vesta* performed and directed by local resident and actress Liz Cole.

Always say good-bye if you can. *Vesta*, the play's main character named after the Greek goddess of home and hearth, spoke those words. *Vesta*'s an independent 75-year old confronting a debilitating stroke followed by terminal cancer. With humor, poignancy, and tenderness, the play depicts the feelings and decisions a family must grapple with as they learn when to hold on and when to let go. *Vesta*'s story is our story. For as many hellos' as we have in this life, we have an equal number of good-byes.

Years ago I stood in a Michigan airport with my parents and infant daughter. I was about to fly far away to begin the next chapter of my life, and I was scared. As I embraced my mother and father, I began to cry and all I could utter was "I don't like good-byes." They held me close, wiped the tears from their own eyes and bid me farewell. Two years earlier I'd stood in the same airport, pressed my nose to the window and tried to capture the image of my husband who was walking up the ramp to a plane that would take him to Viet Nam. I thought I might never see him again. Good-bye, I mouthed through the window as he turned one last time before entering the plane.

A member of our family was recently taken ill and whisked off to the hospital and then to a nursing home. "I never had a chance to say good-bye to my friends," she said. For a little break, we took her to lunch at the Grand Lodge in Forest Grove. As she savored her salad in the soft breeze of the outdoors, I began to understand the importance of what we've known all along—to just be present. For a little while, there was no past, no future, just this lovely spring day under the shade of an apple tree as we enjoyed our food and watched a young couple toss a Frisbee on the expansive green. There was no anxiety about tomorrow, no worry about where we'd been, no fear of the unknown, no looking into the eyes of death. There was just peace and the moment.

In a closing scene of Vesta, teenage granddaughter Kelly says, "I don't want to leave, Gramma. I do and I don't. I don't want to say good-bye."

Vesta responds: "That doesn't make much sense. If it is good-bye, if you think it is, don't pass up a chance to say it. You're not going to jinx me, child. Death will come. Always say good-bye if you can. If you turn out to be wrong, there are a lot worse things to be wrong about. Besides, we're never really gone. You wanna see me, I'm here in a blink."

Vesta reminds us that wherever we are in life's journey, it's important to live each moment fully and always, remember to say good-bye if we can.