

Sono's Death Poem

by Mona (Sono) Santacroce (1928 - 1995)

Don't just stand there with your hair turning gray,
soon enough the seas will sink your little island.
So while there is still the illusion of time,
set out for another shore.
No sense packing a bag.
You won't be able to lift it into your boat.
Give away all your collections.
Take only new seeds and an old stick.
Send out some prayers on the wind before you sail.
Don't be afraid.
Someone knows you're coming.
An extra fish has been salted.

Frank “Ostaseski ended with a story. One day at Zen Hospice in San Francisco he was in the kitchen reading a book called *Japanese Death Poems*. A tough old lady from the streets named Sono, who was there to die, asked him about the book, and he explained the tradition of Japanese monks to write on the day of their death a poem expressing the essential truth discovered in their life. He read her a few. Sono said she'd like to write hers, and did, and asked that it be pinned to her bedclothes when she died and cremated with her. She wrote [the poem above]: ¹

¹ [Frank Ostaseski: What the Dying Teach the Living - The Long Now](#), (accessed May 2, 2024). Note: *The Five Invitations: Discovering What Death Can Teach Us About Living Fully*, by Frank Ostaseski is available at Amazon and other booksellers.

Storytelling in small groups or personal reflection. One by one, each person shares their answer to the first prompt below. Then go to the next prompt and so forth. A person can pass.

- 1) Share what stirred inside you as you heard or read Sono's Death Poem?**

- 2) Tell a story about how your parents or grandparents live, or have lived, and what they might include in a Death Poem they would write.**

- 3) Write some verses that would be in your Death Poem if you were to write one today.**

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Death Poem

_____ (Name)

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