

# TRANSITIONS

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## the necessary pain and work of grief

Happy New Year

by Andrea Ruggieri

As a funeral home, we are subject to many email mailing lists. Occasionally, I'll scan through and hit an article that intrigues me. Time and time again, I find these articles are written by Dr. Alan Wolfelt whom we have hosted seminars with on a number of occasions. He is well known as an expert in grief care and his strong belief in the benefits of having meaningful funerals to aid in the grief journey.

The article, *The Inconvenient Funeral* (Blog *Last Word*, by Alan D. Wolfelt, PH.D, Oct 4, 2023) was directed toward funeral care workers, funeral home owners and the like, but the point of it all made me feel like I should share.

Wolfelt discloses that the American culture's unyielding quest for easy satisfaction has entered funeral care and the lack of ritual in the death of our loved ones today. A funeral in some cases, has become inconvenient. Many feel it takes too much time and is too much pain to endure. So, instead of considering the benefits of having a well-planned funeral, it gets overlooked and pushed by.

This brings us to the question; "Why have a funeral?" Wolfelt states that funerals have been happening since the dawn of mankind. Neanderthal graves which date back to 60,000 B.C. were discovered by modern researchers who found human remains with animal antlers and flower fragments. These are signs of a ritual and offerings to the deceased. This tells us that by nature, humans have always felt the need to honor their dead.

So what do you miss out on by not having a funeral service for your loved one? You still won't miss out on the grief and discomfort of losing someone you cared about, this can't be avoided. However you may long after the fact, for the last act to help you acknowledge a death has occurred. You may long after the fact, to share memories about your loved ones with others who care about you and your loved one. You may long after the fact, for a gathering in a safe place with those who care about you and would help bear your burden. Having a funeral gives you much needed time to reflect on your relationship to that person and how meaningful that relationship was. It helps you to initiate a transition from your ties in life to how you will connect to them in death.

Wolfelt skillfully states, "a convenient funeral is by its very nature less meaning-filled than a thoughtful funeral with many elements. The convenient funeral sounds good in the planning stages, but as it's unfolding, it's all too often unsatisfactory for the participants. Easy, yes, but also potentially generic and meaningless."

What does taking the more difficult road of planning a funeral mean? It means hard work. It means facing your grief and allowing yourself to begin to mourn, traverse, and grow through a difficult time. By taking this important step, you will eventually understand it is part of the equation toward healing.

To read Alan Wolfelt's entire article, visit: [www.centerforloss.com/2023/10/the-inconvenient-funeral/](http://www.centerforloss.com/2023/10/the-inconvenient-funeral/)

  
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# what we can learn from blue zones

by Andrea Ruggieri



## WHAT are Blue Zones?

Blue Zones are specific areas in the world with a dense population of people living well past the average lifespan; many are living to 100 years or more. The term was created by National Geographic explorer and author, Dan Buettner and his colleagues. But why Blue Zones?... It was simple, a blue marker was used when circling areas in the world during his research!

As with the onset of all research, a question was asked. How did these blue zones happen? Why are these people

living longer? Several interesting and diverse justifications were found for this phenomenon. Outside of the recognized reasons like a balanced diet, healthy lifestyle and regular exercise, were other very important variables; social cohesion, community and caregiving came into play.

## WHERE are the Blue Zones?

The following are discovered blue zones. There may be blue zones yet to find!

- OKINAWA, JAPAN
- ICARIA, GREECE
- SARDINIA, ITALY
- NICOYA PENINSULA, COSTA RICA
- LOMA LINA, CALIFORNIA

## WHY are they Blue Zones?

\* **EATING ROUTINES:** Those who live longer eat smarter, drink lots of water and do things routinely in their everyday lives that support their temple... their bodies.

**Vegetables – Whole Grains – Legumes – Nuts.** Diets rich in these categories can reduce blood pressure, the risk of heart disease and cancer. Beans, peas, lentils and chickpeas are legumes to add to your diet. Five servings of fruits and vegetables per day may just help keep the doctor away! Add in olive oil to replace butter or other bad fats for healthy monounsaturated fat.

**Less Red Meat – More fish.** The Omega-3 fats that are in fish have incredible nutrients for the heart and brain. This supplement will aid in slowing down brain deterioration as you age, as well as heart-related diseases.



**80% Rule.** Let's take advice from the Okinawans who stop eating when they feel 80% full instead of 100%. They call this "hara hachi bu." This limits calorie intake which keeps body weight in check.

**Eat Slowly.** Here's the logic. The hormones that identify that "full" feeling take close to 20 minutes after you eat to kick in, so by eating slower you will hit that mark before overeating, therefore decreasing caloric intake.

**Drink Alcohol in Moderation.** Now there's no surprise. It's common knowledge, everything in moderation is typically better. There are studies that have shown that some alcoholic beverages imbibed moderately can actually safeguard against heart disease, helping you to live longer. Many red wines contain antioxidants that come from the grapes it's made of. Antioxidants scour damaging insurgents from the cells in our bodies and reduce injury caused by oxidation. In Sardinia, Italy, their Cannonau wine, made from Grenache grapes has some of the highest antioxidant content around.

\* **DAILY EXERCISE ROUTINE:** Keeping your body moving is a significant piece of the longevity puzzle. The interesting thing about exercise in blue zones is that it is usually non-purposeful. In other words, it is a natural part of their daily living. Most of these zones are smaller, tight-knit communities where people typically walk everywhere. Many are mountainous areas,





adding up and downhill exertion, burning more calories. In Okinawa, it was observed that many of its residents mainly sat on the floor as opposed to chairs or couches. This increased their use of leg and core muscles to get up and down, another example of non-deliberate exercise.

According to the Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, we should have a minimum of 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity or 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity every week for added health benefit.

**\* SUFFICIENT SLEEP:** Americans have never really caught on to the idea of health-related rest. We work hard, play hard but often don't sleep hard. The "siesta," (daytime napping), that is practiced in many Mediterranean countries has shown vital to the equation for longevity. The blue zone populations tend to not work, live or sleep at set hours. They listen to their bodies and rest when it is needed. Napping over 30 minutes was found not to be as beneficial. A broad study showed that a duration of 7 hours of long-term sleep was most favorable.

**\* SOCIAL & LIFESTYLE INFLUENCES:** Who would have thought, that your lifestyle, your relationships, your community, your spirituality could have an effect on how long you live? Blue zones have shown this to be critical to length of life.

**Spirituality | Religious Beliefs.** An example: The Seventh-Day Adventists in Loma Linda, CA have strong religious views which include doctrine on healthy living and a vegan diet. The people of this religious group are tight-knit and supportive. They worship together, but also enjoy healthy eating and healthy activities together. Because of the close sense of community between the members of their group, they feel part of a greater whole and feel supported, which in turn creates less stress. Less stress- fewer health issues.

**Having Purpose.** Many times when we send our elderly parents to a nursing home they lose their sense of purpose. This purpose can be anything: watering plants, walking dogs, caring for your friends and your community. In Okinawa, Japan they call it "ikigai." In Nicoya, Costa Rica, they call it "plan de vida." Either way, as people age and their role changes, the biggest mistake is to neglect their overall purpose. What lights you up and makes you feel like you have worth? Always add purpose to life's daily routine in any stage of life.



**Generations Living Together.** Let's take a look in the past, and currently in blue zones where grandparents live with their children and grandchildren. This is almost a lost, but meaningful societal design. Unfortunately, in modern days the American culture has fallen into a trench of de-valuing our elderly. By doing this, wisdom and human worth are lost. In blue zones where many generations live together, it has been shown that grandparents who helped rear and care for their grandchildren felt purpose and meaning, and they lived longer.

**A Solid Social Chain.** Friends, neighbors, family... they are so important to a long, happy life. Stress can cause health issues but can be abetted when you feel supported in your tribe. Having a pack of healthy-minded friends will also help increase your life expectancy.

Some will say that the influence of genetics has a huge bearing on the age you live to. Though this may be partially true, blue zones have proven that other factors make an argument for longevity. Whether intentional or unintentional, living well, maintaining positive social connections and having purpose will undoubtedly have a positive effect. So take a moment to contemplate the layout of your life. Is there room for improvement? It may just lead to a happier and more full life. To learn more, watch *Live to Be 100: Secrets of the Blue Zones* on Netflix or read one of Dan Buettner's many books on the topic.

**Source:** Why People in "Blue Zones" Live Longer Than the Rest of the World; [www.healthline.com/nutrition/blue-zones#TOC](https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/blue-zones#TOC)  
**TITLE HDR 2**

# Join the Remembrance Movement



Don't let their story be forgotten



#lifestorymovement

*Do you ever feel the world is moving so fast that you miss the important things?*  
take moments to breathe - to be grateful

*As we say goodbye to the lives of people we love:*  
slow down - remember - appreciate

*Every Life has a Story*

Honor them

  
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