

In Memoriam
On Living Immediately
October 19, 2014

The writer Annie Dillard said “How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives.” I think looking back we can learn a lot from the way Sandy Dennehy spent her life. Sandy was a verb, not a noun. She was an action, not a thing. She was process over product. She was. She IS.

In talking with her husband, Paul, over the past week, I understand her relationship with clients was one that focused on “putting them at ease.” She initiated an important conversation that will continue for years to come between (1) people and their churches, (2) students and their schools, and (3) children, parents and their parks. She and Paul’s legacy throughout Ft. Worth will not be a host of buildings boasting of their designers, but an offering of brick invitations and concrete prayers. Places that invite their congregants to engage with them in the way Sandy engaged with life: Presently. Immediately. Of-the-moment.

Characterizing a goal in life as “absolutely secondary,” Hunter S. Thompson once said “it is functioning toward that goal which is important.” For Sandy, this high-level functioning, this living immediately meant taking out student loans for her education at UTA and using them to pay for her only child’s school – to assure Jennifer had the “best education possible.” For Sandy, living immediately meant not just singing “You Are My Sunshine” to grandkids Eva and Will to put them to sleep, but singing it to her husband Paul after he learned she was sick. For Sandy, living immediately meant working on

plans for a West Texas house that faced Cathedral Mountain, complete with a meditation porch. She carried that notebook with her to the hospital on Oct. 13, 2014, what would be her last day her on earth.

Finally, living immediately meant overseeing new fencing and concrete pours at her home on College Avenue. Many people told me that Sandy was so busy doing for others that her own home was always put off. These upgrades were the first of a few on a lengthy to-do list she left for Paul, like an open-ended conversation...like a love letter only an architect could leave.

In her speech to graduates in 2009 at San Jose State, artist and businesswoman Debbie Millman explained: "The grand scheme of life, maybe...just maybe is not about knowing or not knowing, choosing or not choosing. Perhaps what is truly known can't be described or articulated by creativity or logic, science or art---but perhaps it can be described by the most authentic and meaningful combination of the two: poetry. As Robert Frost wrote, a poem 'begins as a lump in the throat, a sense of wrong, a homesickness, a lovesickness. It is never a thought to begin with.'"