

CCHC Herald article

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Title: Do you have any dreams? (Reflections on a senior's life story)

My story with seniors

As a professional counselor, I have the privilege and honor to listen and journey with my clients through their life stories. As counseling offers a safe space through confidentiality, it provides an environment where trust between client and counselor can be developed. As the therapeutic relationship progresses, clients allow themselves to be vulnerable and share some of their deepest thoughts and emotions, dreams, and frustrations. It is a place where we can celebrate the joys, walk together through the struggles, and mourn the losses. In counseling, I have seen clients of all ages, but I have a special heart for senior citizens.

Since I was a child, I have enjoyed interacting and talking to seniors. In my family, I had only one now late grandmother with whom I interacted more, while my other grandmother is in Asia, and both my grandfathers passed away when I was very young. But in addition to knowing them, growing up, I also spent time with seniors who were close family friends, watching TV together, eating and chatting, and I was able to visit some retirement homes a couple of times when I went to sing with the school choir and played with the flute group for them. I enjoyed eating snacks and talking to them after the presentations. It brought me joy to see their happiness in seeing us little kids visit them on those special days. Seeing some of them feeling lonely as we left made me sad.

I believe that there is much to learn from seniors and from the life experiences that they have. There are stories of joy and happiness, a sense of fulfillment and gratitude, companionship and love, successes and achievements, as well as frustrations and disappointments, grief and loneliness, unfulfilled dreams, illness

and trauma. So far in my life, I have experienced some of my own portion of joys and sorrows, as well as pending or unfulfilled dreams. But I believe that seniors are ahead of me and can teach me more through what they have learned and lived, the challenges they have faced in the past, and the ones they encounter now in the present. I like to keep in the forefront of my mind that I will someday be a senior too. Thus, I try my best to treat them with kindness, care, and respect, as I would like to be treated in the future. I draw this principle from what I have learned from Jesus' teachings and life shared in the Bible: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Matthew 22:36-39 – NIV).

Sharing and learning from a senior's story

As I like learning from the life of seniors, I'd like to share with you one story about a senior in particular. As confidentiality is key to counseling, this is not a client's story. This one is public as it was published online, and I only know this senior from afar, from her interview to a podcast and from reading her blog: her name is Fayrene Clark-Reese. I admire her and I believe her story is an inspiring testimony of the joy, sorrow and hope that we can have throughout our life's journey.

A couple years ago, Fayrene used to have a blog, in which she would call herself "The Optimistic Octogenarian." I first heard her story on the podcast of the ministry "Boundless" from "Focus on the Family" in 2017 (<https://www.boundless.org/people/clark-reese-fayrene/>), and I liked it so much that I started following her blog, where she used to post regularly. Sadly, a couple years ago, she announced that she would stop writing on her blog, and its website is no longer available online. But I remember and wrote some personal notes about her story since it was so remarkable to me, and I will be sharing them here.

The story of Fayrene Clark-Reese

Fayrene is an American missionary who served God in the US and abroad, especially in Belgium, Europe. Her story draws people's attention because she got married for the first time in her life at the age of 77. Her husband, Cecil, was 80 years old and a widower when they got married.

The beauty and power of their story lie first in the way they approached each other and decided to get married: Cecil, his wife, and Fayrene were long-term friends. A while after Cecil's wife passed away, as they continued their friendship, Fayrene was surprised when he showed interest in establishing a romantic relationship with her at the age that they were at. They got married and had their honeymoon in Hawaii.

As she talked about her story, Fayrene shared that looking back, she thought that God had said "No" to her regarding the dream of marriage. She had constantly had the desire to get married throughout her life, but she realized that, being a missionary abroad, the potentially available Christian men were very few. Also, she humorously described that she would read the Christian newsletters from the US, and whenever she saw that there was a new widower, she would wonder if she could be a potential new wife for him, only to receive very shortly after, another newsletter informing that this widower was about to get married soon. Fayrene lived until her late 70s to then find out that God's answer to her regarding marriage was actually "Wait", instead of "No". And she waited for over 50 years! She shared that her marriage to Cecil was a very happy one, with much laughter and companionship.

Secondly, the beauty and power of this story lie in the fact that after all these decades of waiting, the dream was fulfilled, and then quickly and sadly came to an end: Fayrene and Cecil's marriage lasted only 5 months and 11 days, as he passed away, after having some health issues and going under treatment for a little while. In her interview with "The Boundless Show," Fayrene said that she suffered deeply with Cecil's death. In her grief, she said that she talked to God, telling Him that she

had learned to live contentedly and independently as a single woman, and questioned why He had interfered in her life, and why He had not left her alone...

She came to a moving conclusion: she knew God and had walked with Him for 75 years. And knowing Him, whether she liked it or not, she had to trust Him, because He had never failed her. Her posture reminds me of the verses in Proverbs 3:5-6 (NIV): "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight."

So, little by little, as she continued to grieve, she began to feel better. She continues to miss Cecil and to value the story they lived together. At 80 years old, she started her blog, in which she shared stories of her childhood, family and life with Cecil, as well as reflections on current times. Fayrene was very humorous in her blog writings and had the optimistic trademark of concluding them all with the sentence: "The sun will come out tomorrow." Unfortunately, I couldn't find online new updates about Fayrene to share with you here, but I hope and pray that she may continue to be doing well as the "Optimistic Octogenarian".

Reflecting on Fayrene's story

I admire and learn from Fayrene's example as she learned to live with what she thought was the "No" answer from God with contentment and independence. In another episode of the same podcast "The Boundless Show", I heard once the teaching that instead of the common saying "The grass is greener on the other side", we could reframe and think about it in terms of "The grass is greener where it is watered". Using this analogy, we can think that even though Fayrene had and kept the dream of marriage in her heart, she learned to water the grass where she was at, which was singleness, making it greener, while at the same time longing to be on the grass of marriage "on the other side".

It also required some courage from both Fayrene and Cecil to be willing to start a romantic relationship and get married at the ages of 77 and 80. They decided to

continue watering their grass together, moving from watering the “grass on singleness” and the “grass on widowhood” to the “grass on marriage”. Looking at their story, I can imagine that they probably could anticipate that they would not be like other couples who celebrate many decades of marriage, but they still decided to move forward in this direction. It is admirable and it warms my heart to know that they were able to be happy together, love and offer companionship to each other during their time of friendship, engagement and marriage at their advanced age.

But also, that’s why it feels painful to know that, in terms of dreams and expectations, it all ended much sooner than I believe any of them would have expected. Especially thinking about Fayrene, after all those years of watering her “grass on singleness”, she was happily surprised with the fulfillment of her dream, to then have it taken away shortly after. It is admirable and comforting to see that Fayrene was able to be honest with God about her grief, sadness and suffering, talking to Him about these, and that she was also able to keep trusting in Him after wrestling with Him.

God – our comforter and the reason for our hope

It is comforting to know that God allows space for our grief and sorrow and welcomes us to be honest with Him about our feelings, as the Bible says: "You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book" (Psalm 56:8 – NLT).

I believe that as a missionary, Fayrene had her fair share of experiences with God, having walked with Him through ups and downs in life, so that, as she faced the deep loss of Cecil, she could remind herself of those memories, thoughts and feelings she had experienced with God in the past, knowing God and His character, and trusting Him for this life and for eternity. All those years of watering her “grass on singleness” helped her to know how to water the “grass on marriage” and now water the “grass on widowhood” too.

As I think about trust, I'd like to share with you a little bit more about who this God is. I believe that God is good, that He loves us to the point of sending His one and only son Jesus, who was born fully God and fully man, and died on the cross for the sins of each and every person in this world, resurrecting after 3 days. He did all this in order to have a relationship with us, since Jesus is the way for us to be able to reconnect with Him after the Fall, the moment humanity broke the relationship with Him. He is all-knowing, all-powerful, all-present, and He is gracious and kind, just and merciful. He is the provider and the protector, the creator of all things and all people, and the One who will make all things new, on a day when there will be no more pain, no more sorrow, and no more tears, when all who believe in Him will not perish, but will live with Him on these new heavens and new earth forever. As we wait for that day, what we seek to do in counseling is to journey with each person towards healing and restoration of some of the effects of the brokenness in this world that affects their lives, following Jesus' teachings.

Do you have any dreams? I hope Fayrene's story provided encouragement to you whether your dreams have been fulfilled, were delayed, or appear to be lost. Throughout your life you might have dedicated years nurturing dreams like being married, having a child, getting into a specific career or job position, or you may be currently living through a difficult marriage, facing challenges in parenting, grieving a divorce, enduring widowhood, the treatment of a serious illness or feeling more and more the effects of aging as you perform ordinary daily routines. Like Fayrene you may question if God has responded with "No" to your yearning when the response could really be "Wait."

Wherever you find yourself, I would like to remind you that your story is still being written, and you don't need to face your journey by yourself. Me and my colleagues at Herald Counseling Services are here to walk with you throughout your journey by providing care, compassion and comfort as we have received it from Jesus, our Lord and Savior, and the reason for our hope. You can read more about our team and request an appointment through our website: www.cchchouston.org

你有夢想嗎？（對一位老年人生活故事的反思）

Rebeca Luo 羅珮佳, LPC

我與老年人的故事

作為一名專業的輔導員，我有幸能聆聽並與我的客戶一起走過他們的生命故事。輔導提供了一個安全的空間，透過保密性為客戶和輔導員之間建立信任提供了環境。隨著治療關係的進展，客戶允許自己變得脆弱，分享一些最深的思想和情感、夢想和挫折。這是一個我們可以共同慶祝歡樂、一起走過困難、並一起哀悼失落的地方。在輔導中，我接觸過各個年齡層的客戶，但我對老年人有特別的關心。

我相信，從老年人以及他們的生命經驗中可以學到很多。有快樂和幸福的故事，有成就感和感恩，有陪伴和愛，也有成功和成就，還有挫折和失望、悲傷與孤獨、未實現的夢想、疾病與創傷。到目前為止，我的生活中也經歷了自己的部分喜悅和悲傷，以及一些未完成的夢想。

分享並從老年人故事中學習

因為我喜歡從老年人的生活中學習，我想與大家分享一個特別的老人故事。由於保密是輔導的關鍵，這並不是某位客戶的故事。這是一個公開的故事，因為它已在網上發布，我僅僅是透過她的播客採訪和閱讀她的部落格來了解這位老年人：她的名字是費琳克拉克-瑞斯（Fayrene Clark-Reese）。我非常欣賞她的故事，我相信她的故事是一個鼓舞人心的見證，講述了我們在人生旅程中可以擁有的喜悅、悲傷和希望。

幾年前，費琳曾經有一個博客，她稱自己為「樂觀的八十歲老太太」。我第一次在2017年透過「聚焦家庭」 ministry 的「Boundless」播客聽到她的故事

（<https://www.boundless.org/people/clark-reese-fayrene/>），我非常喜歡這個故事，以至於開始關注她的博客，那裡她會定期發布文章。可惜的是，幾年前，她宣布將停止更新博客，那個網站也不再在線。不過，由於她的故事給我留下了深刻的印象，我記下了一些個人筆記，今天我將與大家分享。

費琳克拉克-瑞斯的故事

費琳是一位美國傳教士，曾在美國和國外，特別是在歐洲比利時，為上帝服務。她的故事引起人們關注，因為她在77歲時才第一次結婚。她的丈夫塞西爾（Cecil）當時80歲，是一位鰥夫。

她故事的美麗和力量，首先在於他們相互接觸並決定結婚的方式：塞西爾、他的妻子和費琳是長期的朋友。在塞西爾的妻子去世一段時間後，儘管他們繼續保持友誼，費琳還是驚訝地發現他在這個年紀有了和她建立浪漫關係的興趣。他們結婚並在夏威夷度蜜月。

當費琳回顧她的故事時，她分享道，回想起來，她曾認為上帝對她關於婚姻的梦想說了「不」。她一生中一直渴望結婚，但她意識到，作為一名駐外傳教士，可能的基督徒男性非常少。此外，她幽默地描述道，她曾閱讀來自美國的基督教通訊，每當看到有新鰥夫的消息時，她就會想自己是否可以成為他的潛在新妻，但很快又收到另一份通訊，告訴她這個鰥夫很快就要結婚了。

費琳直到七十多歲才發現，上帝對她關於婚姻的回答其實是“等待”，而不是“不”。她等了超過50年！她分享道，她與塞西爾的婚姻非常幸福，充滿了歡笑和陪伴。

其次，這個故事的美麗和力量還在於，在等待了幾十年之後，這個夢想終於實現了，但很快又悲傷地結束了：費琳和塞西爾的婚姻只持續了5個月11

天，因為塞西爾在一些健康問題治療一段時間後去世。在她與「Boundless Show」的訪談中，費琳說，她對塞西爾的去世深感痛苦。在她的悲傷中，她告訴上帝，她學會了以單身女性的身份獨立且心滿意足地生活，她質疑上帝，為什麼祂干涉她的生活，為什麼祂不能就讓她一個人...

她得出了一個動人的結論：她認識上帝，已經與祂同行75年。無論她願不願意，認識祂後，她知道必須信任祂，因為祂從未讓她失望。她的姿態讓我想起了《箴言》3章5-6節的經文：「你要專心依靠耶和華，不可依靠自己的聰明；在你一切所行的事上都要認定他，他必指引你的路。」

因此，隨著她繼續哀悼，她逐漸感到好轉。她仍然想念塞西爾，並珍惜他們共同度過的時光。80歲時，她開始了自己的博客，分享她的童年、家庭和與塞西爾的生活故事，並對當前的時光進行反思。費琳在部落格中非常幽默，並以「明天太陽會出來」這樂觀的標語結束所有文章。不幸的是，我無法在

線找到關於費琳的新更新文章，但我希望並祈禱她能夠繼續以“樂觀的八十歲老太太”的身份過得很好。

對費琳故事的反思

我非常欣賞並從費琳的榜樣中學習，因為她學會瞭如何以滿足和獨立的心態生活，接受自己曾經認為是上帝的「否」答覆。在同一期「Boundless Show」的節目中，我曾聽過這樣的一段教導：與其說“對面草地更綠”，不如說“草地在哪被澆水，哪裡就更綠”。用這個類比來看，即使費琳一直在心中保有婚姻的夢想，她學會了在自己的單身生活中澆水，使那片草地更加綠色，同時她也渴望

著「對面婚姻草地」的存在。

這也需要費琳和塞西爾雙方的勇氣，在77歲和80歲時願意開始浪漫關係並結婚。他們決定一起繼續澆灌他們的草地，從澆灌單身的草地和寡居的草

地，到婚姻的草地。看到他們的故事，我可以想像他們可能預見到，他們的婚姻不會像其他夫婦那樣慶祝幾十年的紀念日，但他們仍然決定向前邁進。

這是值得讚賞的，它讓我心裡溫暖，知道他們在一起的時候，能夠開心、相愛並彼此陪伴，度過友誼、訂婚和婚姻的時光。

但是，也因為如此，得知他們的夢想和期望在他們的故事中結束得比任何人預想的都要早，感覺令人痛心。尤其是想到費琳，在她澆灌單身的草地多年後，她被婚姻夢想的實現所愉快地驚喜，然後又很快被帶走。看到費琳能夠真誠地向上帝傾訴她的悲傷、難過和痛苦，我感到非常欣慰和安慰，也欣賞她在與上帝掙扎後，依然能夠信任他。

神—我們的安慰者和希望的泉源

我們安慰的是，上帝為我們的悲傷和痛苦留出了空間，邀請我們向祂誠實地傾訴我們的感受，正如聖經所說：「你記錄下我的眼淚，把它們裝在瓶子裡；你寫在你的書上」（詩篇 56篇8節）。

我相信身為傳教士，費琳與上帝的經歷已經夠多了，經歷了人生的高低起伏，以至於在面對塞西爾的深切失落時，她可以回想起過去與神同行時的記憶

、思想和感受，知道上帝的品格，並在今生與永恆中信任祂。那些多年來在單身的“草地”上澆水的歲月，幫助她學會瞭如何照顧婚姻的“草地”，現在也能照顧寡居的「草地」。

當我思考信任時，我想和大家分享更多關於這位神的事。我相信神是好的，祂愛我們，甚至不惜把獨生子耶穌差派到世上，耶穌是完全的神也是完全的人，為世人的罪死在十字架上，並在三天後復活。祂這樣做是為了和我們建立關係，因為耶穌是我們能夠與神重新連結的道路。神是全知、全能、無所不在的，祂是仁慈和善良的，是公義和憐憫的，是供應者和保護者，是創造一切事物和一切人的神，祂是那個將使一切更新的神，等到有一天不再有痛苦、不再有悲傷、不再有眼淚，那時凡信他的人將不會滅亡，反而與祂永遠住在新天新地。在我們等待那一天時，我們在輔導中所追求的，是陪伴每個人走向生命的醫治與恢復，恢復這世界破碎帶來的影響，跟隨耶穌的教導。

你有夢想嗎？我希望費琳的故事能為你提供鼓勵，無論你的夢想是否已經實現，是否被耽擱，還是似乎已經喪失。在你的一生中，你可能花了許多年去培養一些夢想，像是結婚、生子、進入某個特定的職業或職位，或你可能正在經歷一段艱難的婚姻、面臨育兒挑戰、哀悼離婚、忍受寡居、對抗嚴重的疾病，或感受到老化的影響，面對日常瑣事。像費琳一樣，你可能會質疑神是否對你的渴望回答了“不”，但其實答案可能是“等待”。

無論你現在身處何處，我想提醒你，你的故事仍在書寫中，你不需要獨自面對你的旅程。我和Herald Counseling Services角聲輔導中心的同事們願意陪伴你一起走這段路，提供關懷、同情和安慰，正如我們從耶穌那裡得到的那樣，耶穌是我們的主和救主，是我們希望的泉源。你可以透過我們的網站了解更多關於我們團隊的資訊並預約：www.cchchouston.org。