Something was very wrong. A big pickup truck was off the road near the dark blue fence and tardis. A car was stopped on the road.

Why would someone leave crumpled bike parts on the sidewalk? People were milling around on their phones. An older white man walked away from the scene with his hand on his heart, shaking his head.

Then I saw the person on the ground. He wasn't lying there like people usually lie—his body was in a strange position. The fact that the vertical people were on their phones ignoring him made me think that he was dead. If he was alive, someone would have been kneeling on the ground by him, making sure he knew he was not alone in a time of incredible suffering.

"Oh my god, I just saw my first dead person," I thought. I knew the posture of his body by the roadside would haunt me for the rest of my life.

My spouse Ming is a street medic and Registered Nurse, so we decided to pull over. Ming turned right on the next street, parked, and went to the scene while I prayed in the car.

Beltane

It was Saturday, May second, the day after Beltane. Ming and I had done powerful ritual on Beltane near Reedsport, Oregon with the elk. Ming and I woke up Saturday and decided to go to farmer's market, so we were driving south to town.

We live in community on River Road north of the Beltline; driving to town is something I do almost every day. The dark blue fence and tardis are landmarks I enjoy along with the burger place where I order delicious sweet potato fries. Certain trees, blinking light crosswalks, and then the bridge which has been under construction for a year.

Ming went to the man on the ground, who we later learned was 61 year old David Morris.

"He's breathing," someone said with surprise, as Ming showed up.

Ming visually assessed the scene and looked at David. Ming knelt down to talk to David, but David was not someone who could have a conversation. Right then the cops showed up, and Ming walked away, as police "had control of the scene."

Although he was wearing a helmet, David died. We tried to drive by on our way home from the farmer's market a couple hours later, and River Road was entirely blocked off. A little tent-like structure was erected at the spot where David had lain on the earth.

Was his body still there, being blocked from view? Was the structure hiding the pool of blood? I guessed an investigation was keeping evidence in place for later.

responsibility

The next week was filled with conversation about death, responsibility, could Ming have helped, ethics of emergency care, and the role of spiritual care as someone is dying.

Ming cried. I called our chosen family member to talk about what happened. I encouraged Ming to call their best friend who's an Emergency Room nurse. He must see people die all the time. I held Ming while they cried on the phone.

"There's nothing you could have done," Ming's bestie said.

May is bike month here in Eugene, and the speed limit on River Road was reduced to 35 MPH the whole way just weeks before. Why did this happen, and how could we prevent it from happening again?

David

"Would he have died if the driver had been driving a little car like ours?" I asked.

Ming and I have a 2006 Prius we bought from an elder down the road.

"Maybe not," Ming said.

"Maybe we should get rid of big trucks," I said. "Maybe there should be incentives for small cars, so people only have big trucks if they need them."

When I was a school kid, David was hyped as the underdog. If I had a slingshot, one day I might go up against a Goliath and win.

David was also a poet in the Bible, and I'm a poet as well. Christianity was my starter religion, a way to learn mythology, experimenting with the Divine, and later a powerful system to push against.

prayer

These days Ming and I are interfaith, and spirituality is my life. We're members of the big tent synagog in town, as Ming is Jewish, and we're witch radical faeries as well. I did a sect of Hinduism for 28 years, and I was led out of the jungle by Jaguar when I almost died seven years ago.

Prayer and ritual are everyday life. I worship Parent Earth, the sun, Jagaddhhatri, Jaguar, water, Inanna, Harriet Tubman, Sri Sarada Devi, Mother God, Bhramari, gravity, Bunny. I'm protected by angels, grasshoppers, mason bees, butterflies, and my ancestors. My art is prayers, including my zines and essays. This essay is a prayer which I hope stirs truth and speaks to your soul.

Ming couldn't have saved David Morris' life. Physically, I'm prevented from kneeling by disability. But I wish I'd knelt by David to say, "I'm sorry you're in pain. I'm sorry this is a hard day for you. Help is on the way. Other people are here with you; you are not alone. People care about you. Your life matters."

Some would say it’s not important, if he was unconscious and couldn’t hear me. But I believe David’s soul was vibrating there, barely hanging onto his body. It might have enjoyed an attentive human nearby. I wish I could have helped David understand he was ok, even if his body was dying.

Everyone who drove by that morning and saw what appeared to be a dead body by the side of the road, lying there by itself, I apologize to you. I’m sorry David wasn’t supported as he breathed his last breaths. I’m sorry death is so scary and hard to face– including potential liability for doing the wrong thing– that it seems better to let someone die alone, than to show up for each other.

Just because Christianity is passé and we have countless varied ways of doing religion and spirituality, doesn’t mean we don’t have spiritual needs. I will hold hands and cry with you regardless of who we are praying to.

Thank you for holding me, as I hold you. We are not abandoning each other to die by the roadside. Love is real, and community is real.

Strawberry Pancake Fae Nopales is an art-witch anarchist who lives in community. Pleasure is berry’s favorite way to experience God. Find kin at listeningtothenoiseuntilitmakessense.com, ilikeyourstims.com, and on instragram as @xtrikeslutsx.