

There are a lot of ways the people around us can help improve our lives. We don't bump into every neighbor, so a lot of wisdom never gets passed on, though we do share the same public spaces.

0:25 So over the past few years, I've tried ways to share more with my neighbors in public space, using simple tools like stickers, stencils and chalk. And these projects came from questions I had, like: How much are my neighbors paying for their apartments?

0:39 (Laughter)

0:41 How can we lend and borrow more things, without knocking on each other's doors at a bad time? How can we share more memories of our abandoned buildings, and gain a better understanding of our landscape?

1:05 Now, I live in New Orleans, and I am in love with New Orleans. My soul is always soothed by the giant live oak trees, shading lovers, drunks and dreamers for hundreds of years, and I trust a city that always makes way for music. I feel like every time someone sneezes, New Orleans has a parade.

1:26 (Laughter)

1:27 The city has some of the most beautiful architecture in the world, but it also has one of the highest amounts of abandoned properties in America.

1:35 I live near this house, and I thought about how I could make it a nicer space for my neighborhood, and I also thought about something that changed my life forever.

1:47 In 2009, I lost someone I loved very much. Her name was Joan, and she was a mother to me. And her death was sudden and unexpected. And I thought about death a lot. And ... this made me feel deep gratitude for the time I've had. And ... brought clarity to the things that are meaningful to my life now. But I struggle to maintain this perspective in my daily life. I feel like it's easy to get caught up in the day-to-day, and forget what really matters to you.

2:35 So with help from old and new friends, I turned the side of this abandoned house into a giant chalkboard, and stenciled it with a fill-in-the-blank sentence: "Before I die, I want to ...". So anyone walking by can pick up a piece of chalk, reflect on their life, and share their personal aspirations in public space.

2:58 I didn't know what to expect from this experiment, but by the next day, the wall was entirely filled out, and it kept growing. And I'd like to share a few things that people wrote on this wall.

3:12 "Before I die, I want to be tried for piracy."

3:16 (Laughter)

3:23 "Before I die, I want to straddle the International Dateline."

3:29 "Before I die, I want to sing for millions."

3:33 "Before I die, I want to plant a tree."

3:39 "Before I die, I want to live off the grid."

3:44 "Before I die, I want to hold her one more time."

3:50 "Before I die, I want to be someone's cavalry."

"Before I die, I want to be completely myself."

So this neglected space became a constructive one, and people's hopes and dreams made me laugh out loud, tear up, and they consoled me during my own tough times. It's about knowing you're not alone; it's about understanding our neighbors in new and enlightening ways; it's about making space for reflection and contemplation, and remembering what really matters most to us as we grow and change.

I made this last year, and started receiving hundreds of messages from passionate people who wanted to make a wall with their community. So, my civic center colleagues and I made a

tool kit, and now walls have been made in countries around the world, we've shown how powerful our public spaces can be if we're given the opportunity to have a voice, and share more with one another.

Two of the most valuable things we have are time, and our relationships with other people. In our age of increasing distractions, it's more important than ever to find ways to maintain perspective, and remember that life is brief and tender. Death is something that we're often discouraged to talk about, or even think about, but I've realized that preparing for death is one of the most empowering things you can do. Thinking about death clarifies your life.

Our shared spaces can better reflect what matters to us, as individuals and as a community, and with more ways to share our hopes, fears and stories, the people around us can not only help us make better places, they can help us lead better lives.