

Transforming Dying and Death into life?

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Introducing the need for transformation

Death of your life, our culture, species, our future is closer than you think.

So far we have been living longer with the increasing technological reconstruction of what it means to be alive. The earth response to our death dealing culture through climate volatility is bearing down on our future. The near future looks like it will reverse life expectancy while changing what it means to be human.

Increasingly we don't honor our ancestors nor believe in an after life. So it is more important that how we die helps this life to live more fully. Citizenship for each of us can be empowered with being conscious of death and it's service to life. Death and dying is radical to life. It's potential is transformative as it confronts us individually and collectively to step outside of our taken for granted daily life and projected future.

We are in denial of mortality. The death of our own person and those we love, the death of our culture as we know it and our economy of growth, radical inequality, and mega is good and greed is necessary. We are equal when we are born and when we die irrespective of how dressed up we are.

Talking to aged Americans they say they don't expect to die, and get a real shock when it's their turn. Thereby wasting the opportunity to enrich life by including death into every day life. These denials deprive us of opportunities to change without revolutionary pain. Pain that we can't use but just have to suffer. Our own death and meeting it well before we die is a great resource for change for life enrichment. How many times do you hear of people radically changing their life style, their worldviews, their ways of being after a near death experience of cancer or an accident, divorce....

Why are we in denial? Is it the loss of control when dying over a cliff, others pain, your own. Don't have to confront ones end until it happens and then won't know if so drugged out.

Can dying and our death become life saving? We need death in the light to help us transform our death dealing society that is so smug in its present life extension capabilities. Our dominant culture is destroying our future for our children and for other species. How through death and it's threat can we paradigm shift our suicidal culture, and help it become life saving. And yet life is too precious so we can't confront death. The paradox is that in our society we are so ready to take life in futile wars and so blindly destroy the life of other species and the prospects of life for the next generation.

Eco footprint of the dying

Death is for the Living. Even in dying and in death we need to make a contribution verses be a cost. I.e. through how we die and are buried. This for

both society and the ecology. I.e. to die when our life is over and to be buried and ritualized in a ways that contributes to and sustains life. Raising the profile of death and dying as a resource helps our culture to reconsider meaning and what matters.

While we need to honor cultural diversity there needs to be limits to pluralism. Such as, burning bodies is a biological waste and an expense to the planet. In western culture it can contribute to diminishing honoring the person. By disposing of the body in a quick, efficient smell free way without getting ones hands dirty! So quickly we forget our ancestors.

Public cemeteries are basically privately controlled and are no security as there are pressures to reuse sites. Privately owned land is also vulnerable. Cooperatively owed land may have a better chance especially if locally recognized and legally covenanted.

The high costs ecologically and economically of keeping people alive who want to die needs to be confronted. The law is such that their friends are deprived of helping them. Burning bodies is a waste and an expense to the planet and discounts honoring the person. So quickly we forget our ancestors. Green burials are not about disappearing without a mark or marker rather being honored in a way that nourishes life in its ecological sense.

We now need to earn our right to life especially a long life by the contribution we make over above the demands we make.

Advocacy for Natural Death

Because the formal, grey matter of formulae, legalistic funerals that go through the motions inside sterile factory places for disposal of bodies and the burning of lives. Leaving feeling more hollow than sad, angry at the waste of an opportunity, and the losses of community connections and the loneliness of dying and meaninglessness of some people's life's. Just because one had a long life doesn't mean it's been worthwhile for you or for others. The being present because you should, suffering because of what wasn't rather than what was. The accounting for life not lived, not allowed, not supported.

Ideally natural death is when society honors death as part of every day life and draws on it to enhance life, community, family. It is a time when one is not alone, Natural death is one where we are not fully in control, conscious yes but not directing; where decisions are shared, so that the dying person is not consumed by their need, so freer to be in the experience.

Natural death is one that is in harmony with our ecology, part of not separate from and makes a contribution to life. It is not rushed nor is it priced pushed. It is a dying experienced in and with family and community.

What kind of dying experience to work towards? In a process where one is known, honored and transparent. A process whereby one is able to give over too being part of a larger universe, into the unknown, uncontrolled or directed experience: A slow enough process to be in it with a heightened verses

diminished or a lost consciousness.

We as an advocacy network are working to bring life to death and into everyday life. With rituals that use humor, the truth of whom the person was, from different voices and stories that honor without denial. Maybe we should be advocating for neighborhood burial grounds so people are buried in place as part of local street parks.

Natural burial of one's body connects with our heritage of death. Instead of going up in a puff of fire and smoke it is slow. Having a space that fits the body. Which when buried last a long time. Even after 50 years there are still bones i.e. more than half a life time. Not so easy then to forget and more easy to remember. It gives energy verses uses it, adds life verses pollutes. Finally it connects the family and community to place, to our larger ecology.

A time to be more held than smothered so if possible we can still be "born again" via embracing our dying, death experience. A powerful experience, rich in meaning. With an openness to truth knowing and sharing. A time of letting go, of forgiveness, of intimacy and spirit.

There are choices to be made early before one is deep in the journey especially if to create opportunities to allow nature to take its course. Choices that protect death as being natural and for the person to be within community, in partnership with the rest of nature. Such early choices helps to prevent a death which is too often experienced as unplanned; a sudden, painful, messy, and conflicted while being alone and powerless. Sometimes the pain is too hard to bear; physical, emotional and spiritual.

Choosing ones time of death is a poor second to being fully present to its experience, to what it offers, allowing verses directing its process for yourself, for others who matter. However it is a choice that some need and can become more natural once it is legalized. For one it will eliminate the need for a death alone. Ideally professionals are mere servants in the background. Active intervention to choose the moment of death is a last resort when our body is out of sync with spirit and mind for too long.

This aspiration is often not fully available and neither is natural birth or even natural burial. It may be, can only be for many a good enough death.

Our task as an advocacy group is to campaign for the natural death aspiration, for creating a culture that moves in this direction, that names opportunities to enable better dying and deaths and challenges the vested interests within each person and society undermining the desire and possibility for a natural death.

Our task is also to join with others in campaigning for the renewal of family and community so that we don't die alone nor live a life devoid of the richness of intimate social life.

Exploring biographies for death and dying:

My own experience of near death for myself and death and dying of those close to me.

Before my own direct losses there is consciousness of its power for my father who lost his sister at 19 from disease and his anguish at not being able to save her. This drove his dedication to a life as a natural alternative healer renowned for his diagnostic brilliance and innovative left fields treatments as dietician, naturopath, and osteopath. And how his tradition has been carried on through 2 generations.

Friends

Early childhood of feeding a horse wheat that it loved, but it killed it from bloating. As a young adolescent of losing my dog. It had to be put down because it had come from our farm and frightened the neighborhood because to her, the street was her territory. Another unexpected animal loss was my horse being sold because dad did not consider it really mine.

There are so many friends and colleagues who have died or nearly died from long ago. A school friend finding a body hanging in a tree. While at university a fellow student was shot in a hunting accident with my gun and nearly died. A trauma still with me today, a guilt, a story with deeply felt humor and relief. Humor that masked my sheer panic of being beside him lying there in silence waiting for such a long time for help to arrive, of me praying and calling out I will never use a gun again and to him, please don't die.

Gentle Brain Wilkinson died at 20, a close if not best friend, out of the blue. Shock still present. 40 years later meeting his sister the unspoken loss was between us, a missing yet vague presence that bonded us in silence. His loss was never fully acknowledged by me, grieved over or my deep unconscious friendship socially acknowledged. I didn't have a role at the funeral with no space for me on stage not even a minute. I couldn't have asked for this as I was too bewildered and stunned.

From my experience once emotionally bonded and the person dies their loss is always there. Life goes on, feelings are stored and they are part of the emotional texture of myself: A rich, sad, mellow depth.

Being by the bedside of Plum my mentor, in communal vigil while she died. The richness of social bonding that came out of a group of her family and friends committing to being a vigil group during her dying process. This was especially enhanced by making with a dear friend a recycled floor board coffin and debating how rough it would be and working together to find ways of honoring her special place in our lives. It's so vital for the rituals to be crafted uniquely that can so richly picture the person and their community of persons. This was my first deeply experienced dying and death that enhanced my living.

Others are: Seeing my psych friend Peter's coffin being carried 500 meters down the dirt road to his burial site from his house in the back of his old Ute.

Parents

My mum dying while over working in her garden, half composted. She died from a stroke after having been turned away from emergency after waiting hrs for her searing head ache. Her ashes are buried under an oak tree she gave me for my forty's birthday. Kept in a pot because where we live we can only plan natives. Her celebration held under an old river gum in her back garden in bright sunlight dappled only by gum leaves. My father's grief taking me aback as they had been divorced for a long time. I didn't know that just because your divorced doesn't mean you're still not emotionally attached or that a long marriage has somehow been buried.

My dad finally deciding to come to my place to die and a few days before saying he had found god and him being administered to by a doctor friend and member of Moora Moora community. This experience so touched me as it healed such an unfilled need for joining with and feeling close with Dad. This was achieved by being able to administer to him daily, to put my hands on him to ease his pain and him to settle. His healing hands were mine too. Little was said it didn't have to be. I was fully totally with him, whom I now know, made it difficult for other members of the family to enter and visit. I was his guardian. I understand more now how family members who become carers can be so taken over by their being so present to the other and needing others to help them have time out.

I spoke at his funeral as the family rep but my truth telling in public wasn't appreciated by some. Honoring the dead isn't occurring if all we can acknowledge are the positives, strengths without the humanity of each person's limitations, even failures. Maybe we all need more positive affirmations during life and a bit less afterwards.

My other parents, my in-laws died together over a long period. Years apart and yet together. First Mary after a long alive experience with a stroke. It was expected she wouldn't live and did without speech yet with a generous open warmth of being. Uncluttered by talk allowed for direct openhearted meeting. Cared for by her husband and daughters diligently and staff at the Lorne nursing home. Both are remembered with a small plaque in a tiny memorial nook of the Uniting Church grounds at Lorne. Alongside others which were part of their lives of that service giving generation.

There were my accidents with cars and tractors that nearly killed me. The fear and panic of lying under a tractor, its wheels spinning, engine roaring, pinned under in searing pain screaming at people not to move the tractor but try instead to move me for fear of being crushed. Vivid pictures, traces of the emotions still present. My personality traits highlighted of being a reckless risk taker and eventually brought consciousness that I'm not bullet proof. My risk taking wasn't courage as it was before fear that hadn't been honored.

The shock of the unexpected death loss is especially so if violent, self-inflicted and young.

My dying and death

By being prepared for my death takes away its sting at least for me. Looking now more and more at life through the lens of my death has already released me from much death anxiety. No longer bullet proof as a young man and yet no longer fearful of death as an old man. How to be prepared? Planning conversations with those that matter and have responsibility. Sharing the planning. Deciding on what I want, need with contingency.

Let it be. Without artificial support when meaning and future is but a dream. Pain relief yes, professional control no. Sandra, Michael Cock and or Marika to be my agent, free to decide what I would want, married with what they would decide. Their meanings matter as well. It is hoped to be a shared, transparent journey, with no lies or false hope. Them to protect me from professional or technological excess.

I don't dread or fear death and sometimes see it as a relief from presence, of future knowing not desired. My warrior days and burdens let go. The pain of failures lost in the midst of death. I accept that living life is never complete, always more to be done, capabilities to be developed or discarded. Shifting, making whole I have always struggled with.

My body to be placed whole in the ground of Mt Toolebewong. My last warrior action carried out by you my children, even if so doing remains illegal. Just do it and let them come and exploit them for all its carry and so help to change the law and break a monopoly.

Those who matter to me to be freely and openly invited to participate in any ritual beyond the above requirement.

I'm proud of my children, trust in their shared wisdom. I am especially grateful for those who loved me: no easy task.

We have allowed a monopoly of cooperation's and professions of the death business to take over. This is because we leave it until it's too late and we are in the midst of its grief as someone we love or ourselves is dead or dying. Overcome with our grief we hand over decision-making and diminish it's meaning.

Great funerals are wonderful experiences for coming together, owning suffering, celebrating lives that matter to us and confronting what matters and what doesn't. A time of forgiveness.