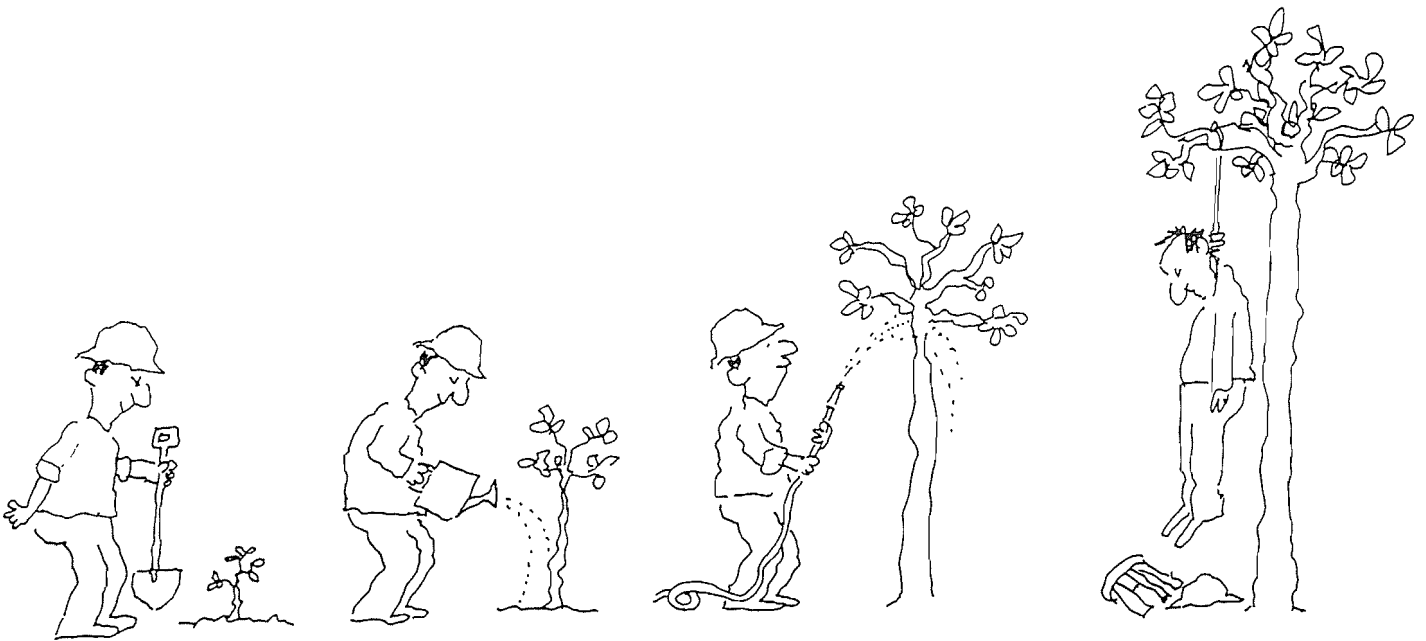


How to Survive Death

A must-have manual

by Harry Gans and Elizabeth Wagele



Includes special interviews conducted at the French Hotel on Shattuck Avenue in Berkeley.

How to Survive Death

By Harry Gans and Elizabeth Wagele

Drawings by Harry Gans

CHEER UP!
IT'S ALL PART
OF LIFE



Perhaps one doesn't think much about death.

Dying is, however, something that all living things do. Birth is the beginning, then life and learning, death at the end. Is it the end?

Some of us believe in an afterlife. Heaven where we will meet all others who have died. Shake hands with Elvis Presley, Michael Jackson, Harold Pinter. How nice! Some believe that animals go to heaven too.

OKAY! BUT I'LL
COME BACK AND
HAUNT YOU
'TILL YOU LOSE
ALL YOUR HAIR!



Is there a hell for animals?

We can believe, but we can't be sure. "Perchance to dream..."

Pleasant dream is heaven, nightmare is hell.

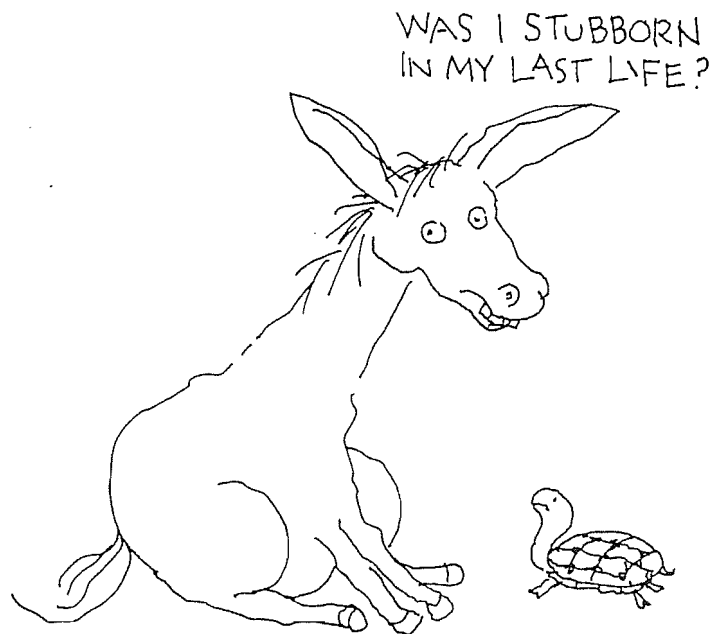
Some of us believe in reincarnation, to be born again and live a new life. There are folk who swear that they lived other lives in the past. Why not?

As one dies, one's brain sends out experiences, feelings, and opinions to living people who are receptive. The most receptive are children.

It would explain what many of us have experienced as a "déjà vu."

We actually do have experiences other people have had before. -

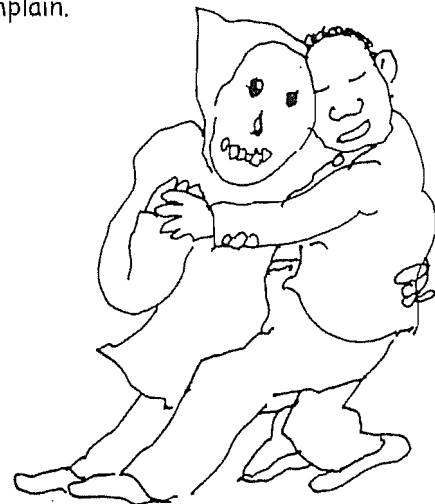
Vladimir Petrov



Death is really something we know little about,
but we all share. So far no one has come back to complain.

No record of a posthumous lawsuit.

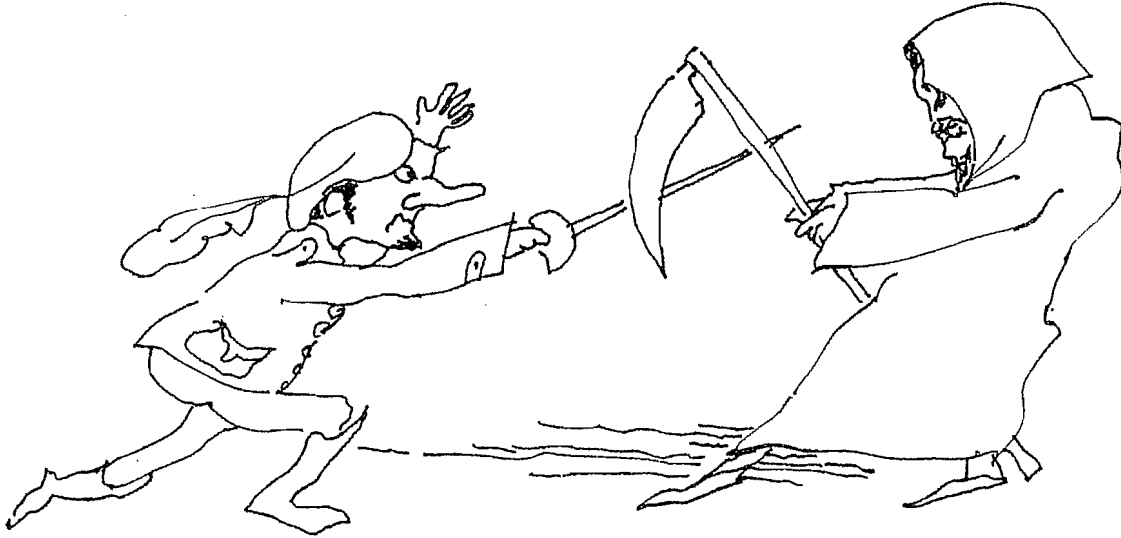
Since we know so little about Death,
let's have some fun with it.



1. Is the party over or just beginning?

"You can't take it with you." He was told.

"Yeah? If I can't take it with me, I won't go!"



Life does not cease to be funny when people die any more than it ceases to be serious when people laugh. - George Bernard Shaw



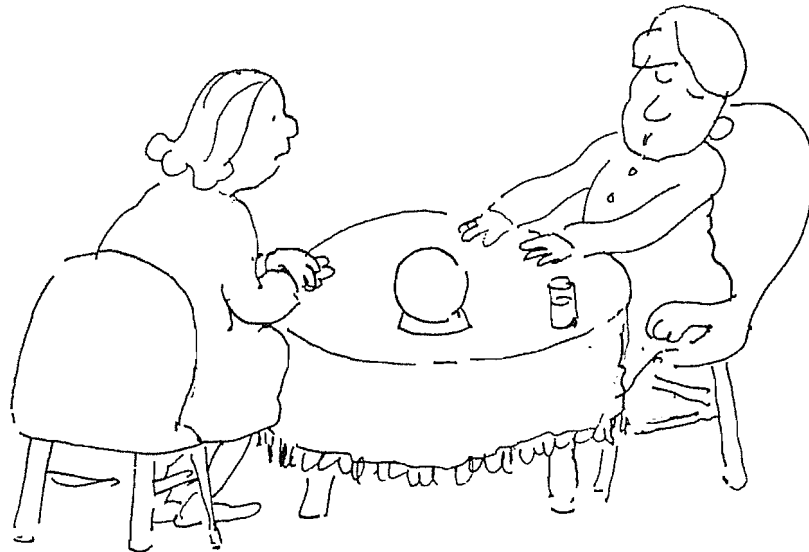
While no one can prove there's a Heaven, most Americans apparently believe they will go there when they die. Many religions say that only those of *their* religion will get to Heaven and people of other religions will go to Hell. Some believe Heaven and Hell are right now, here as we live our lives. Atheists believe religions are superstitions and that this life is all we have.

Muslim suicide martyrs are supposedly promised 72 virgins in Paradise. They're not told that they get 72 mothers-in-law too.

Scientists say there is a gene that controls certain chemicals in the brain making it easier for some people to believe in something like God or Heaven. Many of the religions of the world say our spirit is reincarnated in different forms, depending on how we do in *this* form.

We would like to be permanent because nature has built into us the fear of death. If we didn't fear death, we'd fall out of windows, walk into traffic, and sink to the bottom of our bathtubs. Some think they're happier *thinking* they go to Heaven even though they can't really convince themselves it's real. They say they'd get too depressed if they thought this was all there was - that it's better to have false hope of eternity than no hope at all.

FOR \$50 BUCKS MORE,
SAM WILL SPEAK TO YOU
WHILE I DRINK WATER...



What does the Dalai Llama say?¹ He was asked, "In American society, death is sanitized and hidden from sight. Is this healthy?"

He answered, "No. This attitude turns death into some kind of taboo. Sooner or later, death will come. Where there is a beginning, there is an end. This is reality. Sooner or later, I will die."

Q. Have you accepted that?

A. Of course.

Q. All of Buddhism is practice for death - is that correct?

A. It's not just Buddhism. The essence of Christianity involves something similar.

Q. But Buddhists believe in reincarnation. Does that help a person accept the inevitable?

A. For some people, the idea of reincarnation may be comforting. For others, the idea of a long rest in a coffin, a kind of respite, may be comforting: to await the final judgment, where God will judge you, will save you. That's simpler and very comforting.

Q. So you are saying, "Whatever works for you, that's good"?

A. That's what I believe.

Day of the Dead (Dia de los Muertos)

Unlike the Spaniards, who viewed death as the end of life, the natives viewed it as the continuation of life. Instead of fearing death, they embraced it - life was a dream and only in death did they become truly awake. - Carlos Miller²



This holiday is a mixture of Catholic and Indian traditions celebrated in Mexico and parts of the United States and Central America. In Aztec times, for at least 3,000 years, children and the dead were celebrated at the end of July and beginning of August. Falling on the ninth month of the Aztec Solar Calendar, it was celebrated for the entire month and presided over by the goddess Mictecacihuatl, the "Lady of the Dead," who was believed to have died at birth. The Aztecs believed the spirits of the dead would return as humming birds and Monarch butterflies. The Spanish tried unsuccessfully to end this day when they arrived. The resurrection of Christ became mixed into the festivities and the celebration became incorporated with All-Hollow's Eve and moved to the first two days of November.

"Don't take anything lying down - even death!"
Mexican expression

How the holiday is celebrated depends on the area and whether it is in the city or in the countryside. The dead are welcomed joyously back to their homes, where altars have been set up with photographs and other reminders. Families bring food the dead liked to eat to the little houses in cemeteries that mark their graves and fix up the sites by weeding, hoeing, cleaning, and decorating them with bright flowers. They dance, light candles, play their favorite music, have picnics on blankets, tell stories about the departed, and offer chocolate drinks, spicy food, sugar cookies, special egg-bread, toys for the children, alcohol, and cigarettes. All night long they will stay there. Candy is passed around in the shape of happy skeletons and skulls, a tradition from the Aztecs. There are brightly colored paintings and sculptures, also in the form of skeletons, and they wear and display wooden skull-shaped masks on the altars.

Children who have died are especially remembered on the first day. Adults are remembered on the second day.



The secret to eternal life

Sam, the junk dealer in a poor village, tells his wife, "The Rothchilds have everything except one thing - the secret to eternal life. I could give them that secret."

Sam travels to the Rothchild's mansion and knocks on the door.

The butler tells Rothchild that a ragged man at the door says he has the secret to eternal life.

"Let him in. What have I got to lose?"

Rothchild asks Sam, "How much do you want for this secret?"

"Ten Rubles," Sam says. Rothchild gives him the ten Rubles...

"So?"

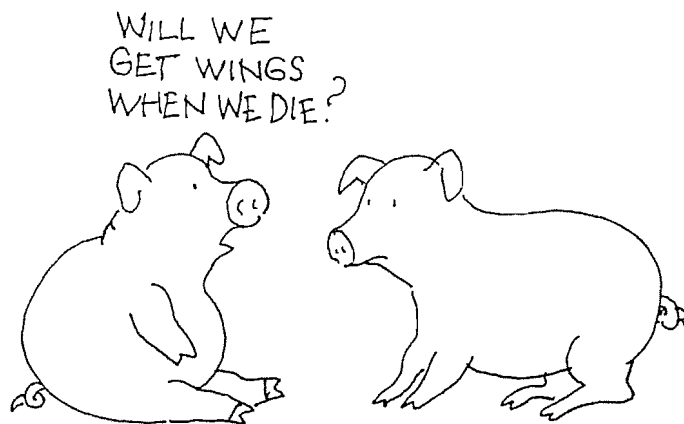
"Come live in my village. As long as it has existed, no rich man has died there!"

2. Where do you expect to go when you die?

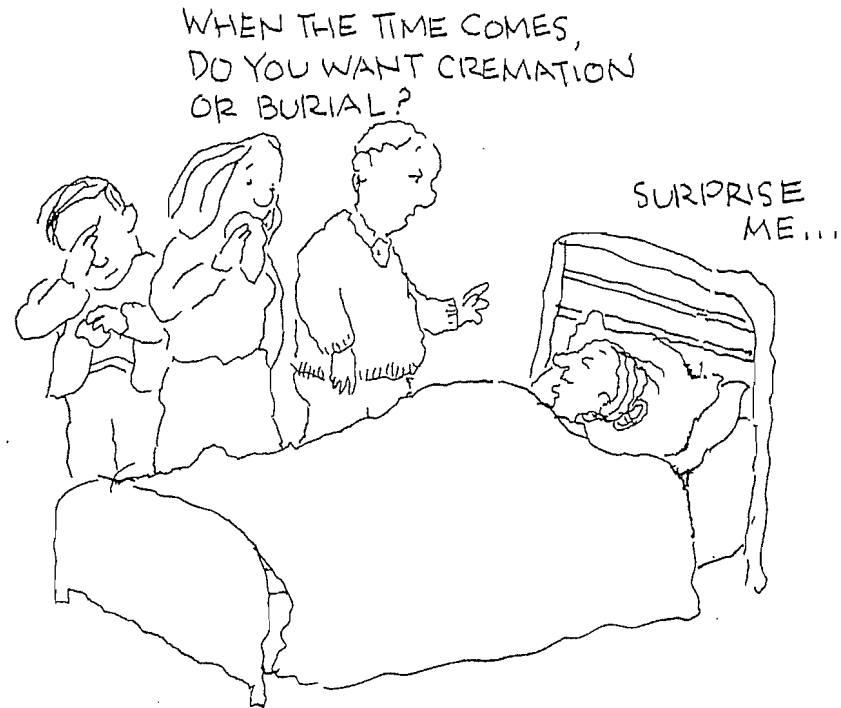
Some will not answer a question like this directly, but instead use happy euphemisms:

I will • join the heavenly choir.

- go to a better place.
- be with the angels.
- go to my reward.
- meet my maker.
- rest in peace.
- get my wings.



This is the part nobody can prove. But first, a note about the use of humor in talking about death. Humor can be used to deny suffering or balance it, or create more suffering by being biting or cruel. It can comfort us when times are difficult and help us talk about death more easily. When Woody Allen says, "I don't want to achieve immortality through my work, I want to achieve it through not dying," he helps us become more receptive, open, and relaxed. We hope "How to Survive Death" helps you feel better about what's natural.



Ron, a Catholic - "The spiritual world will be new and exciting. I look forward to death. I'd like to see my brother and father, but we'll be spirits without bodies."

Harry - "The afterlife that we can be sure of is in the hearts and memories of friends and family we left behind."

Mike Edwards, age 5, told his mother - "They dig a hole and put you in it and there's a long tunnel that you climb through and you see a light at the end of the tunnel and there's a man in a big chair and that's God."

Jean Weininger - "When you die you're dead. No euphemisms allowed. It's like that piece of meat you see in the supermarket. I don't believe in Heaven. I want to be cremated."

June Tilset - "I'm going to Heaven. It's a literal place. I'll be able to eat all I want and never gain weight."

Zachary Johnson - "Heaven and religion are superstitions. When I die, I will not go anywhere. I'll simply die."

Dorothy Wagele - "My hope as a Catholic and the Christian hope is that there is a Heaven and God and that the things that Jesus promised are true."

Orthodox Rabbi Maurice Lamm -
 "I long for the warm sun of eternity. My conviction that there is life after death is unshakeable but impossible to prove. It is to the soul what oxygen is to the lungs."



IF YOUR TIME HASN'T COME
 EVEN A DOCTOR CAN'T KILL YOU

Shirley Caputo - "After I die I will still be alive - in spirit. I hope I'll be able to meet up with loved ones that have past on, maybe my grandfather and great-grandparents I never met, and hug my parents. Once I'm out of my body, none of that may matter. Before I'm recreated, I'll probably figure out what I need to learn and choose a situation that will place me in the life where I can learn that lesson. Past, present, and future may be happening RIGHT NOW. Other parts of myself are alive and living experiencing different things. At some point my components will become one to make me whole.

I feel bad for people who believe that once you're dead, you're dead. I could not live with that. It's way too final. I don't believe there is a Heaven or Hell where people live the rest of their lives, but I feel if you've done wrong you are going to experience bad karma in future lives. If you're good you will experience good in the future. Death is fascinating. I'm not scared of it. But I would hate to die a very painful death. What a blessing to die in your sleep."

Kirby Olson - "Lutheran Surrealism (my one-man art movement) believes in the Nude Jerusalem. There is an amazing cubic skyscraper and it looks somewhat like the Times Square Marriott courtyard where the elevators shoot up and down thirty floors but in this scenario they shoot up and down 16 miles. The interior is made of burnished gold and there are a lot of wonderful shadowy feelings. Jesus lives there with us. We're all nude and clothed at the same time (diaphanous clothing made of very fine cotton). Everyone has an apartment that is magically designed by God to reveal to us exactly what we like, and there are tiny engravings all over the place to stimulate an interest in history and fine points of theology."

Robin Reiner - "I cannot specify a particular 'where' - a place - we go when we die. Rather, I think we return to become once again a part of the original source of our being. That individual spark, that makes each of us appear separate and unique to each other here, retains its individual identity but is reunited with its source.

Fred Isaac - "There are lots of responses from Jewish tradition regarding what happens after we die. I have no faith in the traditional 'life after death' scenario, and Heaven and Hell don't move me. I've read Dante and am unconvinced by either him or those who call on the rapture today.

My own sense of the reality comes from a version of the Kaddish, the Jewish prayer for our ancestors and friends. I remember it from growing up, though it isn't in current prayer books, as far as I know. It goes something like this: 'Those who have died are not completely gone. They still live with us, in the acts of goodness they performed, and in the hearts of those who cherish their memory.'

Jaki Girdner - "I think when I die all my atoms are spread out so I become part of sky and earth and trees and ocean and the rain and the wind and grass and plants and flame."

Karen McArdle - "Like with ether when I had my tonsils out, I was wondering what it would be like to have anesthesia and to lose consciousness. My eyes were closed. The first bit of consciousness I lost was my sense of color. Then everything collapsed down into one long line going through a gray blackness. I wondered if I could feel my hands and tried to feel them. A voice asked, 'Is everything all right?' I tried to say yes. Then the only thing I could think of was the line. It began to separate into dots. The dots got farther apart. There must have been a last one. I woke up in the recovery room, but I don't expect that to happen."

Reverend Karen Schnell, chaplain at UCLA Medical Center - When I visit with patients who are facing death, I ascertain the individual's faith. This will shape our conversation. Since many of people's ultimate questions are unanswerable, I try to assess their true needs, listening for what's behind their questions - the beliefs, fears, hopes, and emotions. Are they angry with or disappointed in God? I invite them to explore their inner landscape with me.

There's an element of mystery to the anticipated experience, because we don't get to talk to people who've gone before, nor do we get the opportunity during life to "practice dying". Depending on their faith background and my assessment, I may draw an analogy to being birthed - to consider that they survived birth, not knowing what lay on the other side of the womb. So, perhaps they can survive death, not knowing what lies on the other side of this world. I affirm that it can be scary, even with a strong faith, to go into what is not yet known by experience. It takes courage, which I understand to be an integral part of the path of faith and love.



THE RICH AND POOR
ARE EQUAL IN THE GROUND

Rock Ross - Yonderling (a song)

When I go
 I want to explode
 Beyond all hope of retrieval...
 Expand and release,
 Disperse and blend
 Into total oblivion.

Bye bye... to harps and wings!
 Bye bye... to pain and burning!
 Away, away yonder!
 Make me a Yonderling!

That vanishes... in the light.
 That swirls... through the stream
 That joins... the graceful current
 That flows through everything.

Just, a breath of air... singing!
 Just, a grain of sand... gleaming!
 Just, a drop of water...
 Just the astonishing..., seen and unseen

Fly!... without time,
 Drift..., without desire,
 Wander..., through splendor,
 Swim..., the ocean of fire,
 And, sail away, sail away, sail away, y'all,
 Away, further, yonder..., sail away...

Bye bye to harps and wings!
 Bye bye to endless burning!
 Away, away yonder!
 Make me a Yonderling!

Bye bye to crowns and kings
 Bye bye to eternal yearning
 Away away yonder!

3. Near death and suicide

• When I was five years old, I was run down by a truck. I have a vivid memory of feeling no fear or pain. I was above myself, watching my body being tossed and run over. My next memory was waking in the Hospital. - Harry

• At about the same age, I had been floating on a rubber inner tube in the public swimming pool when some older kids turned me upside down. I couldn't swim and was stuck there holding my breath not able to turn myself over. My lungs were about to explode. Just then my mother's friend came and put me right-side up. - Liz

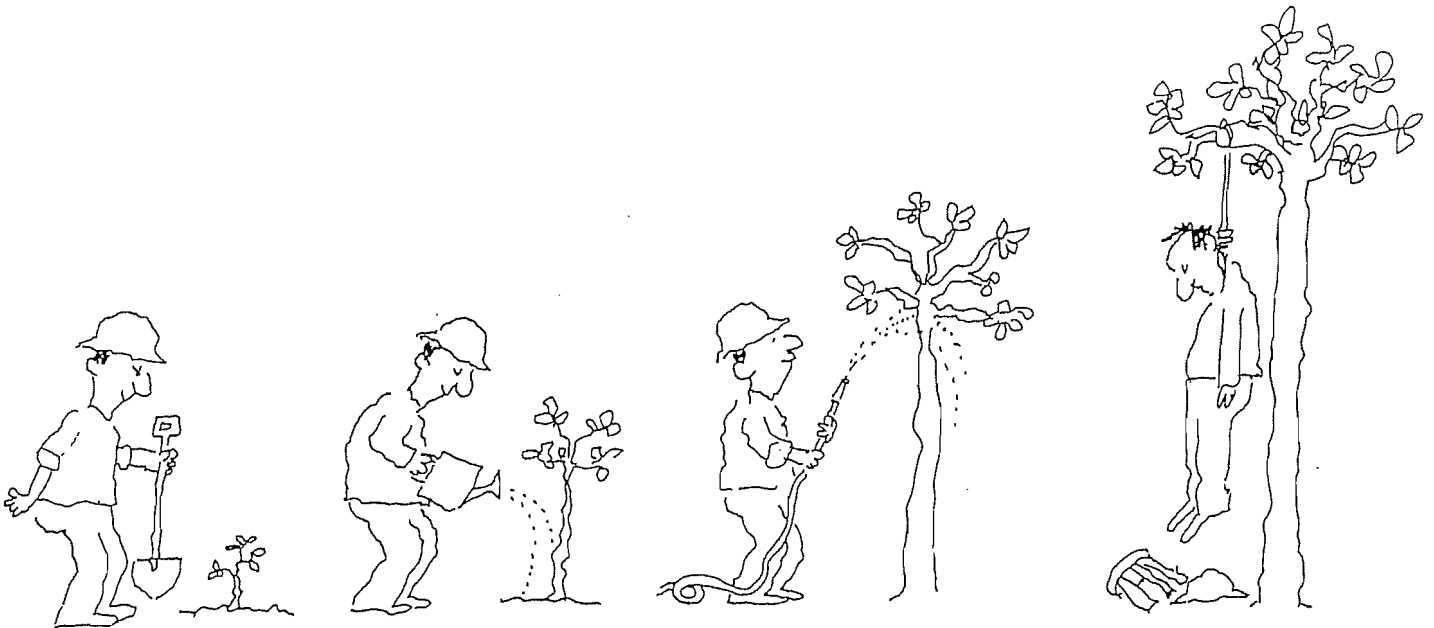
• My friend, Bob, was in a bomber shot down over Italy in World War Two. Half the crew was killed, others except him were wounded.

He was the only atheist.

Take care of your health -



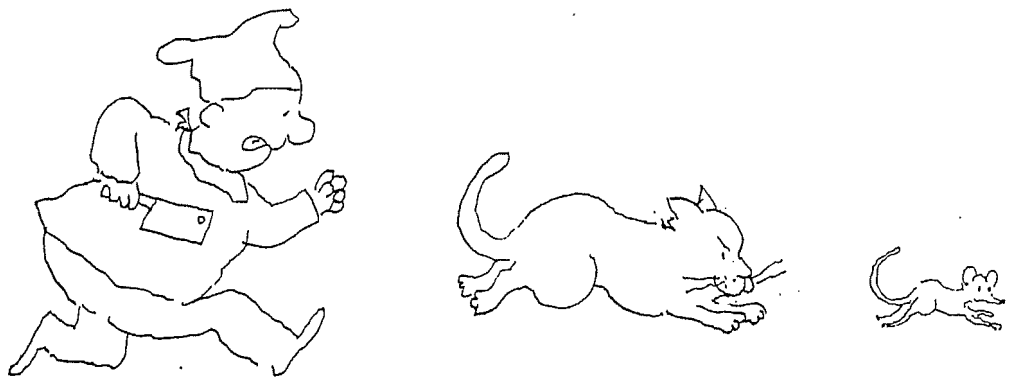
...you can always commit suicide later.





SUICIDE IS A PERMANENT SOLUTION
TO A TEMPORARY PROBLEM

*If vegetarians really had respect for preserving life, they would eat carnivores,
thereby saving the many lives of prey.*



4. Denial

*Far more crucial than what we know or do not know
is what we do not want to know.*

Eric Hoffer

IGNORE IT!
MAYBE IT'LL GO AWAY...



"Denial ain't just a river in Africa."

Ways of not saying the **D** word:

Cash in your chips.

Kick the bucket.

Bite the dust.

Croak.

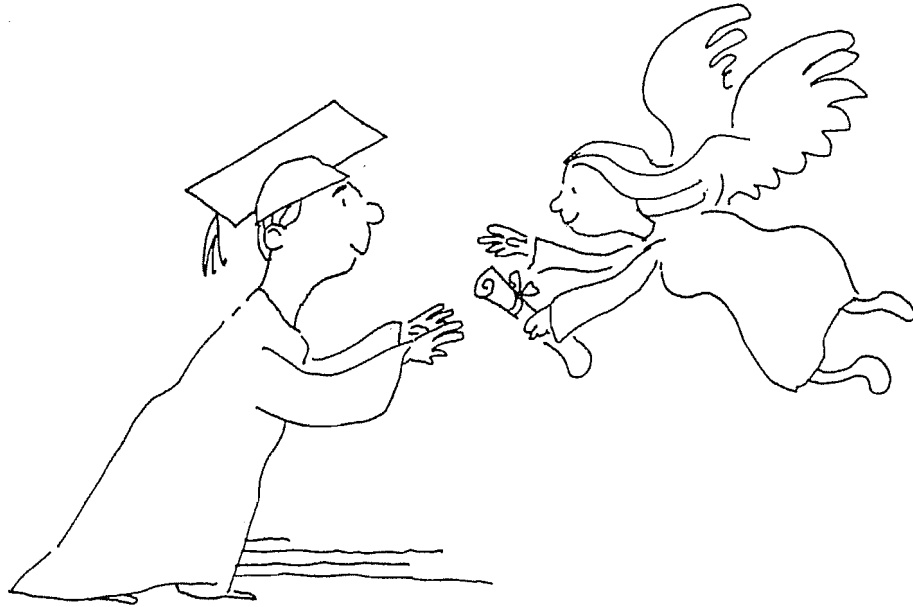
Buy the farm.

Cash it in.

Go west.

The anesthetic from which none come round. - Philip Larkin

"The only things in life that are sure are death and taxes. At least we might cheat on taxes." The rule is that everybody dies, eventually. But there are exceptions to every rule!



My older sister died in a care facility. When informed, I went to see her and was impressed by how she looked 20 years younger. All care gone. Death can be easier than life.

An elderly couple was killed in a traffic accident. They find themselves in Heaven, met by an angel. The angel shows them to their living quarters filled with furnishings they've always wanted. "Oh, how beautiful!" the woman cries.

"How much is the rent?" the man asks. "No rent. This is Heaven," the angel answers. "Downstairs you have a first class restaurant where you can order anything you desire, cooked to perfection. 24 hours a day." "Do they take credit cards?" the elderly husband asks. "No charge for anything. This is Heaven."

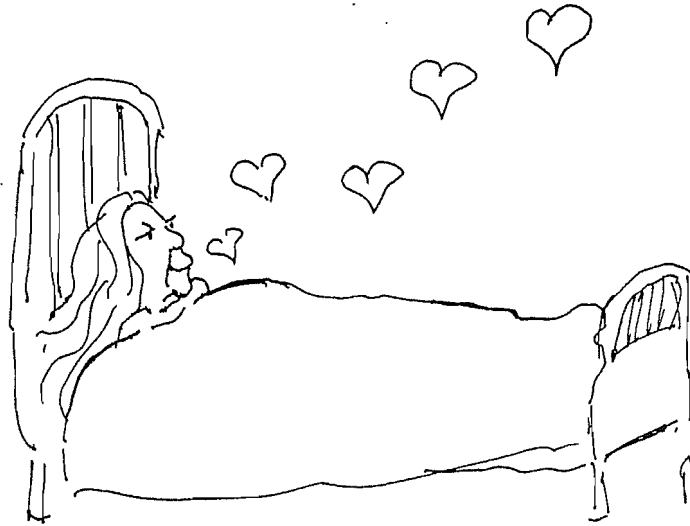
The couple is shown a beautiful golf course. "No waiting. You can play anytime." "How much for green fees?" "No green fees. This is Heaven."

The husband turns to his wife and shouts, "You with your low cholesterol diet, exercise program, vitamins! We could have been here 15 years ago!"



Denying death comes about from needing to control our anxiety about death. We have too much to live for, too much to learn, and too many feelings to express to want to see where death might fit into the picture. So we form defense mechanisms to keep the terror unconscious.

Accepting death means letting go, trusting in nature or our belief systems, and yielding to the comfort of sleep or oblivion.



5. Fear

For Humans, some fear death and some don't.

I'm eagerly looking forward to meeting Jesus.

Rev. Billy Graham

I don't mind dying. I just don't wanna be there when it happens.

Woody Allen

We have many euphemisms for death used for those we love or don't love...

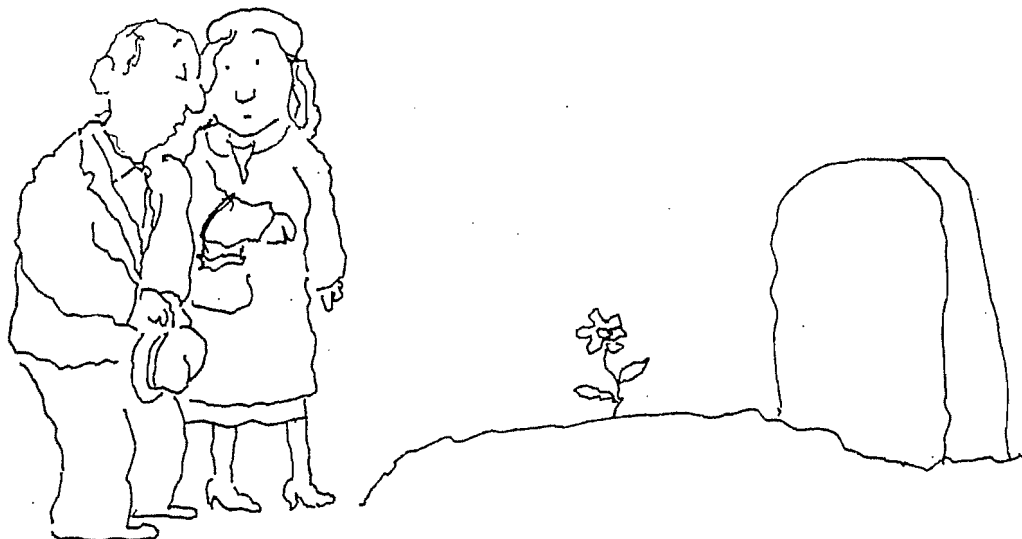
Wooden kimono.

Six foot bungalow.

Worm food.

Earth bath.

Pushing up daisies.



...LATE BLOOMER

Reading obituaries, one rarely sees "died."

The prospect of paradise, Heaven, should have us looking forward to dying. Yet Woody doesn't look forward to it. Graham does.

*

A soldier is not supposed to fear death. If he or she did fear death, he or she would not be a good soldier. One may "Die for the Country," "Die a Hero," or "Give his Life in a Noble Cause." Not fear death.

"When I get into battle, I'll shoot them, blow 'em up with hand grenades, and stab 'em with a bayonet!"

"What if they shoot you first?"

"Why should they shoot Me? They don't even know Me!"

*

I'm curious about the people I've known who wouldn't let go when death was near. Most people in this culture claim to be religious and believe they will go to Heaven when they die, but at the same time many are so attached to *this* world, that the thought of losing their body terrifies them.

The idea is to die as young as late as possible.

— Ashley Montagu



Personality also influences attitudes toward death. Those who are the most ambitious and intent on getting things done seem to fear life ending the most. The nature of the illness also influences letting go at the end. Those in the greatest pain usually have the least incentive to keep going.

Premature death is tragic. One is deprived of the loves, experiences, and learning that we reasonably expect to come with a full life.

Our society is mixed up about death. We don't want to think about losing people we adore, nor do we want to lose our precious selves, so we deny it exists. Living in a Disney and superhero culture, we like fun, thrills, and violence, but we don't like to be sad. Sad things seem to scare us more than scary things scare us. Maybe that's why we've never developed a national tradition for dealing with death. We'd rather concentrate on keeping ourselves forever young, happy, and excited.

The fear of death is more to be dreaded than death itself.
Publilius Syrus





• In the movie, "Little Big Man", the Indian village is raided by the cavalry and many Indians are killed. The Chief is in despair and declares that it is a good time for him to die. He and Dustin Hoffman climb a mountain and the Chief lies down, folds his hands over his chest and closes his eyes. He lies there for a while. It begins to rain, and a few drops fall on his face. He asks Hoffman, "Am I dead yet?" Then he slowly rises and says, "Maybe it isn't a good time to die." They go back down the mountain.

6. Befriending death



KEEPING AHEAD OF THE REAPER

- *Don't be caught dead without a burial plot*

Aunt Ella was a devout Catholic born in French Canada. In her 60's, she moved to Wisconsin and prepared for the inevitable by buying a burial plot.

Ella was not a land speculator, but when, in her 70's, she moved to another area, she bought another cemetery plot.

In her 80's, Ella moved again - to a retirement home in California. Yes, she bought another burial place closer to her new home.

Ella died at the age of 97 and was buried in her last purchase. The first two cemetery plots are available.



• By now he could not utter a word, he could understand nothing, and he imagined he was a simple ordinary man, that he was walking quickly, cheerfully through the fields, tapping with his stick, while above him was the open sky bathed in sunshine, and that he was free now as a bird and could go where he liked!

- Anton Checkhov, The Bishop

*• Cowards die many times before their deaths;
The valiant never taste of death but once.
Of all the wonders that I yet have heard,
It seems to me most strange that men should fear;
Seeing that death, a necessary end,
Will come when it will come.*

- Shakespeare, Julius Caesar

• Latke legacy

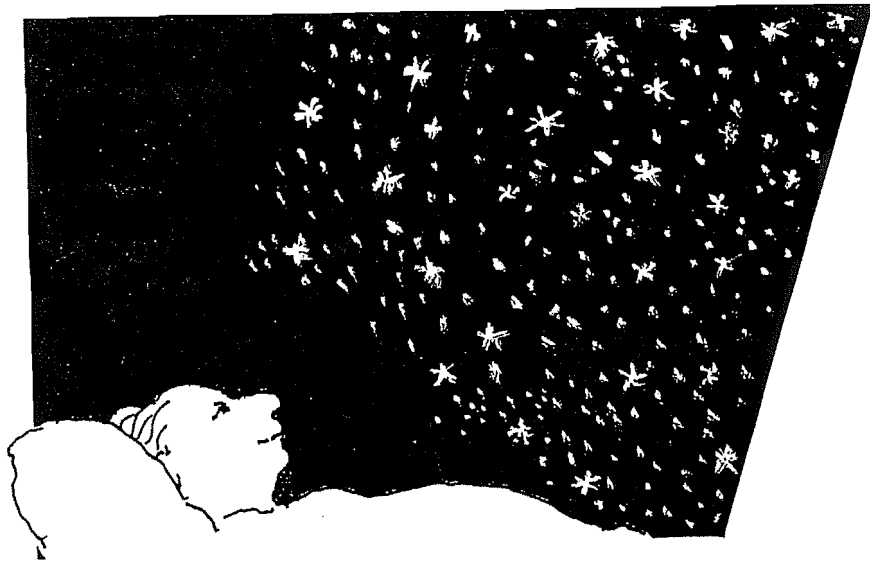


Larry Zaroff, MD, in the August 20, 2005, New York Times, wrote about his mother, who died at 92, determined not to cause her family any inconvenience. Two or three weeks before she died, she had traveled from her home near Washington D.C. to California to visit her newest great-grandchildren and to teach Larry's son "the secrets of her famous Jewish recipes." These lessons were all videotaped so her family now has two hours of precious instructions.

After her massive heart attack, she told Dr. Zaroff not to come, that she didn't want him to have to make two trips. "Her plan was to die as soon as she saw us, goodbye and funeral in one package," he said. He and his wife did come right away, however, and shortly after they arrived she died. As his mother wanted, they didn't have to make that second trip.

• *Uncle Wayne*

"Uncle Wayne was so jovial, his doctor missed how much pain he was in. As a result, his cancer wasn't diagnosed in time. He had big doors added to his bedroom so he could have his hospital bed rolled outside every night and he could look at the stars." - Jaki Girdner



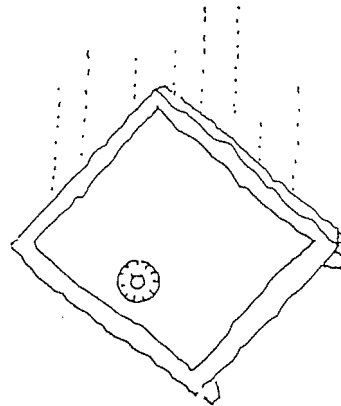
Death can be seen as a welcome respite. In life, anything can happen at any time. It can be scary. In death, all fear is gone.

Are we the only animal that is aware of awaiting death? Until we can communicate with other species, it appears that we are. No other animal has indicated an expectation of an after life. Life is just a natural flow until it ends.



• Dr. Livingston, the African missionary, reported this: "I was standing on a hill, looking on the countryside, when my companions started shouting. A lion leaped upon me and shook me like a rag doll. I felt no pain or fear. The men chased the lion off before it did me in. How benevolent a God to arrange for prey to feel thus when preyed upon."

7. Final thoughts



Death is caused by swallowing small amounts of saliva over a long period of time.

- George Carlin

Just as the prisoner was being strapped into the electric chair, the priest said, "Son, is there anything I can do for you?" The prisoner said, "Yeah, when they pull the switch, hold my hand."

- Dick Gregory

A person who has led an unchallenging, uneventful life, when approaching his demise, might choose to have someone else's life flash before his eyes.

The most pleasant feeling comes with being yourself. No anxiety, no pretence, just a relaxed being. Impending death removes worry. What is there to worry about? Living does impose assorted anxieties and constant adjustment to situations. With impending death, one could just let go.



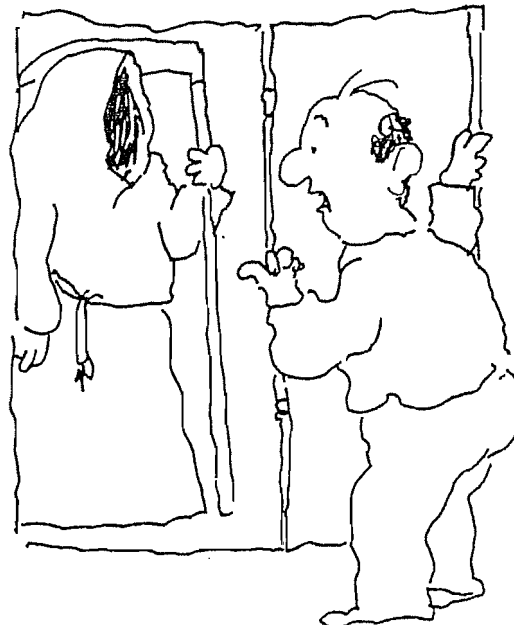
BEFORE



AFTER

Last words

I THINK YOU WANT
THE GUY NEXT DOOR!



Beautiful (in reply to her husband who had asked how she felt).

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

This is the last of earth. I am content.

John Quincy Adams, U.S. president.

That was a great game of golf, fellers.

Bing Crosby, singer/actor.

Go on, get out - last words are for fools who haven't said enough.

Karl Marx to housekeeper who wanted to write them down for posterity.

It is very beautiful over there.

Thomas Alva Edison, inventor.

I've never felt better.

Douglas Fairbanks, Sr., actor.

I've had a hell of a lot of fun and I've enjoyed every minute of it.

Errol Flynn, actor.

Either the wall paper goes -

Or I do.

Oscar Wilde.

Why not? Yeah.

Timothy Leary.

Don't worry, chief, it will be alright.

Rudolf Valentino

Now now, dear man, this is not the time to be making enemies.

(On Voltaire's death bed when a priest asked him to "renounce Satan.")

Walking on Earth

We have so many reasons to be happy. The Earth is filled with love for us, and patience. Whenever she see us suffering, she will protect us. With the Earth as a refuge, we need not be afraid of anything, even dying. Walking mindfully on the Earth, we are nourished by the trees, the bushes, the flowers, and the sunshine. Touching the Earth is a very deep practice that can restore our peace and our joy.

- Thich Nhat Hanh

Attachment without clinging

We are like children building a sand castle. We embellish it with beautiful shells, bits of driftwood, and pieces of colored glass. The castle is ours, off-limits to others. We're willing to attack if others threaten to hurt it. Yet despite all our attachment, we know that the tide will inevitably come in and sweep the sand castle away. The trick is to enjoy it fully but without clinging, and when the time comes, let it dissolve back into the sea.

– Pema Chodra

THE END

Notes:

1. In the AARP magazine of March&April 2006 issue.
2. The Arizona Republic, on-line.
3. p 25 Thick Nat Hanh "Touching Peace: Practicing the art of mindful living." *Parallax Press, Berkeley CA, 1992*
4. p. 26 Pena Chodra "When Things Fall Apart"

Harry Gans is a famous cartoonist, inventor, and champion lawn bowler. Harry and Elizabeth wrote this book in collaboration. In addition, Harry created all the drawings.

Elizabeth Wagele is the author or co-author of:

- *The Enneagram Made Easy* with Renee Baron
- *Are You My Type, Am I Yours?* with Renee Baron
- *The Enneagram of Parenting*
- *The Happy Introvert*
- *Finding the Birthday Cake* (an Enneagram book for kids)
- *The Beethoven Enneagram*, a CD of Elizabeth playing parts of Beethoven Sonatas and describing how the 9 Enneagram personalities can be heard in them.
- *The Career Within You*, with Ingrid Stabb, published January 2010.