

#DEATH TWEET

TIMOTHY TOSTA
FOREWORD BY MEGORY ANDERSON

140 Perspectives on Being a
Supportive Witness to the End of Life

BOOK 02

A THiNKaha BOOK

#DEATH **tweet** Book02

140 Perspectives on Being a Supportive Witness to the End of Life

Book Excerpt

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140 Perspectives on Being a Supportive Witness to the End of Life



Intentions and Limitations

Death, as an event or even a subject of discussion, usually is a source of discomfort. But there are times when, in the case of a loved one, family member, or friend, it cannot be avoided. You are called up to be of service—to render your love and support. This humble volume is intended to help you through that passage, to support you in addressing your fears and uncertainties in the face of another's pain and suffering, to reveal the extraordinary gifts you bestow through your companionship at the end of life.

I have tried to choose words carefully here. A supportive Witness has two attributes. Support is about empathy and compassion. This is more a job for the heart than the mind. It is a way of being rather than doing. This “beingness” is confirmed by the word “Witness.” For many of us, our principal pursuit in life, whether or not we are aware, has been to simply be “seen.” From the days of “Watch me, Mommy!” or “Daddy, look!” to the time of seeking recognition in career or public service or as a parent or friend, we know that having another

person truly see us validates our human existence. The great difficulty in the end-of-life process is that we are not sure that we now truly want to be “seen,” stripped of our camouflage, our pretense, our self-generated roles.

But from my years of experience in sitting with the dying, I have learned one thing—we all are worthy of truly being seen. We all are essentially good, generous, and loving beings. The opportunity for the Witness to support the Other in discovering and basking in this knowledge is the great work that lies before you.

I also have chosen the word “Other” carefully. It is intended to cover anyone at the end of life, irrespective of relationship. At the same time, it expresses the ultimate paradox for the Witness. At the end of life, the Witness and the Other often reach such levels of intimacy that the Witness and the Other become one.

Every perspective offered here, whether designated for the Witness, the Other, or simply “you,” fits all. Try out the perspective for yourself, share the perspective with the Other. It’s all the same.

There is one caveat to the perspectives of this book. For some, the end of life is not anticipated. An accident happens, a heart fails, a disease is detected, and life closes with great rapidity. The shared journey of Other and Witness seems too short. There is no time to contemplate or embody all of what is suggested here. But, perhaps, you still may access some insight from this small volume. Then, you will be better prepared for the next time.

140 Perspectives on Being a Supportive Witness to the End of Life



Foreword

Perhaps you are reading this book because Death is visiting your house. Or perhaps It has come already and taken someone from you. I hope with all my heart that you were able to be a Witness to that very difficult, yet profound, experience.

My life is centered around helping those who are dying. Like Tim Tosta, I have been present at the deathbeds of many, many people. There is a simplicity to being present, holding both space and the person himself, as the sacred transition happens before your eyes. There is life and then there is not. In that simplicity, however, there is a myriad of emotions and fears, wonder, confusion, and a deep, quick-to-the-bone knowledge that something profound and cosmic is happening around you. And you—you—are the honored Witness to that human/cosmic transformation.

When Death visits our house, we have to let Death in. But the good news is that we can learn how to be present when it happens. Once we do that, you see, we are never the same again. Death changes not only the dying person, but

I think even more so, those of us who act as
Witness to Its arrival.

I am so grateful that Tim has written this book
out of his own experiences and learning. I
have never met anyone who has such clarity
about the role of the Witness. He has taken his
own experiences and, in simple tweets, he has
captured the process and the inner cacophony of
what a living person goes through watching and
waiting with someone who is about to die.

Please spend time with each tweet. Savor it.
Listen to its cadence. Go inside the meaning.
Come back out again and see if and how
you are changed.

The next time you are asked to be the Witness,
I can guarantee that you will be changed yet
again. Thank you, Tim, for giving us these
words. And thank you, Witnesses, for honoring
the dying by staying present until
Death takes Its leave.

Megory Anderson

Author of *Sacred Dying: Creating Rituals for
Embracing the End of Life*

www.sacreddying.org



Section I: The Supportive Witness—The Hero's Journey



Section I

The Supportive Witness— The Hero's Journey

In *Hero with a Thousand Faces*, mythologist and writer Joseph Campbell describes the archetypal journey of the hero from the call to enter an unknown world, to the trials once the call is accepted, to surviving the challenge and achieving a great gift, to successfully returning the great gift for the betterment of the world.

The supportive Witness to the end of life is such a hero, called to awareness in the face of the Other's passing.

As a supportive Witness, you learn about yourself—your fears, courage, caring, generosity, capacity for love, and purpose in life. You reveal your true self to yourself and the world.

Section I: The Supportive Witness—The Hero's Journey

1

Your path, as a Witness, is a hero's journey. You leave known territory, overcome challenges, and return transformed.

2

As you witness the Other's pain, suffering, and sorrow, you confront your own fear and grief.

3

Being a Witness demands courage. On this journey, you confront mortality.

4

As a Witness, you embark on the ultimate path of caring and love.

Section V: Pain and Suffering—Knowing the Difference



Section V

Pain and Suffering— Knowing the Difference

Pain is not elective. It may be marginal or excruciating. It may be intermittent or chronic. Different people experience pain differently. It is subjective, interpreted through memories, emotions, and beliefs. However, through medication, biofeedback, or contemplation, pain can be greatly reduced or eliminated. Suffering is optional. Overcoming it is a process. It requires insight, practice, and perseverance.

49

Pain is a discrete occurrence.
Suffering is resistance to the
recurrence of pain. Learn to treat
each separately.

50

Suffering can exist entirely without
pain. It is a product of emotions.

51

Emotion manifests through the body. But strong emotion is not pain, it is resistance.

52

As you experience pain, stay with it. Does it loosen its grip? Note your resistance. Is resistance more painful than pain itself?

Section IX: Grief—Sorrow, Loss, and Renewal



Section IX

Grief—Sorrow, Loss, and Renewal

We are not strangers to grief. We know it from losses other than death.

Grief is nothing to be ashamed of or avoided. It is natural. It, too, is a journey to be experienced. Grief also is a great teacher.

115

There is no correct way or
time to grieve.

116

You grieve for the Other. You grieve
for yourself. At the heart of
grief is love.

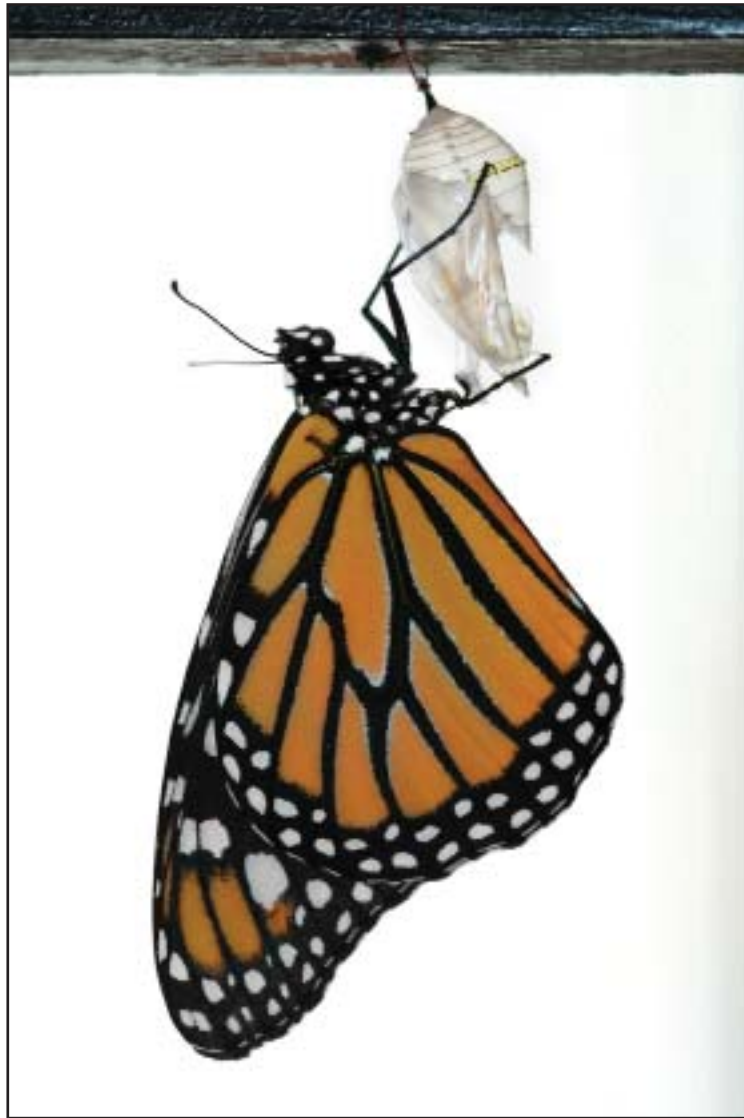
117

Grieving requires patience. It comes, then goes, then comes again. Each grief has its own imprint, as distinctive and unique as the Other.

118

Grief is not an event; it is a process. You live with it, in the foreground and in the background.

Section X: Meaning at the End of Life—The Heroes' Journeys



Section X

Meaning at the End of Life— The Heroes' Journeys

Two transformations have occurred. The Other has found freedom. The Witness has been given new life. Both have experienced the lush beauty of the present moment, the interconnectedness of beings, the boundless capacity for forgiveness, generosity, compassion, and love. The Other has physically departed, yet remains inextricably a part of the Witness. The Witness returns to the world bearing the gifts of the Witness' experience.

134

Your passage with the Other will
remain with you for the balance
of your life.

135

The meaning of life is to fully
experience everything with
compassion and love.

136

As a Witness, you learn about the nobility of being human. You learn that death is part of life and the pathway to freedom.

140

The only thing that lasts
forever is love.

Afterword

Following my mother's death in 2007, our family became aware that my father was experiencing cognitive failure. It probably began long before my mother's decline, but we missed it. He subsequently was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, and we moved him into an assisted living community.

Dad left us on November 18, 2010. As with my mother, the days preceding Dad's passing were gracious, peaceful, and loving. Before his passing, my work already had begun on **#DEMENTIA tweet**, because I believe we need new perspectives and less suffering in the presence of dementia. We can recognize that our loved ones are still here, despite the loss of memory and the accompanying behavioral changes. More than ever, in dementia, our loved ones need our awareness, support, compassion, and love.

I wish you the best on your journey. May you find peace and happiness. Please share with me your discoveries.

140 Perspectives on Being a Supportive Witness to the End of Life



About the Author



Timothy Tosta is a cancer survivor, a seasoned hospice volunteer, and executive coach to the legal and business communities. He also is recognized as one of California's leading land use and environmental attorneys. Tim is the author of *#DEATHtweet Book01: A Well-Lived Life Through 140 Perspectives on Death and Its Teachings*. He is a regular contributor to the *Daily Journal*, California's leading daily legal newspaper, and a frequent lecturer to legal and business gatherings on topics of human potential, fulfilled living, and conscious dying, as well as planning, development, sustainability, and the environment.

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<http://www.happyabout.com/thinkaha/deathtweet02.php> or at other online and physical book stores.

Please contact us for quantity discounts sales@happyabout.info or to be informed about upcoming titles bookupdate@happyabout.info or phone (408-257-3000).

#DEATH TWEET Book02

A Compassionate Approach to Supporting the End of Another's Life

"Without considering death, life is confusing and superficial. '#DEATH tweet Book02' delivers a compassionate message, offering critical support, wisdom and a genuinely helpful perspective."
Jack Kornfield, Author of 'A Path With Heart'

"We read from '#DEATH tweet Book02' aloud at a recent gathering of friends, coping with dying family and friends. Nothing can eradicate the pain, but sharing the perspectives from '#DEATH tweet Book02' was a cathartic experience that moved us all."
Diane Olmstead, Founding Partner, W3 Partners, Institutional Real Estate Investment Manager

"Tim's lucid and compassionate aphorisms are an inspiration, providing great comfort and confidence to those in the end of life experience."
Derek Parker, Director, Marin General Hospital; Internationally Renowned Healthcare Architect

Timothy Tosta, author of #DEATHtweet01-A Well-Lived Life through 140 Perspectives on Death and its Teachings, is a cancer survivor, a seasoned hospice volunteer, an evocative lecturer and writer, and an Integral Coach (www.coachingcounsel.com/blog). He also is one of California's leading land use and environmental attorneys (www.luce.com/timothytosta).



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