“Dying Is So Very Natural”

*I never saw a wild thing*

*sorry for itself.*

*A small bird will drop frozen dead from a bough*

*without ever having felt sorry for itself.*

(“Self-Pity,” poem by D. H. Lawrence)

Dying is as natural as breathing and eating. It is really the only way to make our exit from existing. We are born not by any merit or initiative of our own, and we die quite easily and swiftly at any moment when conditions are right. The true miracle is the life between birth and death. Breathing, eating, sleeping, thinking, talking, walking—it is all a miracle. How do we—well, most of us, that is—do it so effortlessly? For some, life’s activities require huge effort and assistance and are even bigger miracles.

When loved ones die, it breaks our heart. We do not want to lose contact with their body and mind, their liveliness. But what we are left with is their absence and their presence. We have memories of lived moments with them, yet they are absent. But they are present in our mind and heart. When someone we love dies, it can make us more compassionate and wise. When we truly know that everyone dies, including us, we can be more patient, more understanding, and more loving.

When my wife [of 35 years] died [in 2003], I was so very sad. Then, I was confused, then angry, then lost, and then filled with a sick feeling of sorrow like a never-ending bout of fever and flu. These are the natural stages of grief. We must fully live them, experience them, accept them, work through them, let them change us, and let them evolve into something new. Grief work is very important. We mustn’t hurry it, think it away, or shortchange it. It is healing us. It is giving rise to an increase of compassion and understanding of the mysteries of life and death.

Oh, but the hurt, the pain, the anxiety, the raw sense of loss. “Where art thou, my beloved? Where have you gone? Why did you leave me so soon? I miss you terribly. I love you so much.”

After my wife died, we corresponded, and it helped me a little. I would write her letters on the computer, and she would write back with words of reassurance, comfort, and love. It helped a little, even though I knew that it was me writing back to myself on her behalf, imagining her mind, heart, and words. It helped me feel her love, her kindness, her wisdom, and her desire that I continue with my life, my service, and my mission.

What a mysterious gift we are given, this life and death.

(Page 230, A Compassionate Civilization <https://www.amazon.com/dp/1546972617> )