

What To Do WHEN A LOVED ONE DIES



*A Practical and Compassionate Guide
to Dealing with Death
on Life's Terms*

by Eva Shaw, Ph.D.

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It is with deepest appreciation to all those who provided information, support, and encouragement with this updated and revised edition. My gratitude, too, must be given to those who have told me how my words and advice have helped and brought

comfort during a time of great sorrow, from casual acquaintances to good friends like Doris Engberg, Nora Lloyd, and Sally Mills. My love to all of you who are now facing the resolution of a loved one's death.

It is my simple prayer that the words found within these pages will provide comfort and assist you in a time of need.

May peace be with you all.

FOREWORD

By
Frank B. Stewart, Jr.

*Chairman Emeritus, Stewart Enterprises
(A Leading Public Death Care Provider)*



Facing mortality is life's most complex lesson. I believe it is only second to accepting and understanding the physical loss of a loved one.

Human mortality is really physical mortality. The true and everlasting existence is our spiritual life, which is what we humans believe will never end but endure forever.

As a 69-year-old death care provider, I have spent decades serving men and women at a time of loss, at the separation of the physical and the spiritual life. It has also been the time of reflection, relief, rejoicing and most times, there has been sorrow. Based on my experience in attending thousands of funerals and burials over these years, along with the experiences life has offered, I am encouraged to share my earthly personal observations influenced by some of the greatest theologians, people who might be perceived as the most common human beings, as well as those who have carved out success, fame, and notoriety.

The advice of Eva Shaw, Ph.D., will help and hasten the healing process of our resultant human feelings of grief. This is a practical “how-to” book and with the thesis based soundly in “why to.” One can immediately gain some helping tools, review the sidebars or find answers to issues overlooked or

buried for some time. Hence, this book can help, whether one is moving toward accepting an imminent death of a loved one or even one's own death or recovering from the memories of a painful and unforgettable long-ago loss of someone who was loved. For those now suffering the open-wounded freshness at the recent passing of a beloved's life, this book is manna from heaven.

The book, *What to Do When a Loved One Dies*, as shown in the index, captures and communicates this vital topic in a format that provides a comprehensive resource of information and knowledge to be utilized by all. Dr. Shaw shares practical and thoughtful in-depth advice with compassion and experience that, I believe, can be applied to everyone willing to face life's realities and mandates. *What to Do* will increase confidence in our inevitable decision-making process. Reading the book will provide satisfaction and peace of mind for our emotions to bring physical and spiritual reassurance, along with calm at a time of loss, fear, and doubt.

Because I believe so completely in the thesis of Dr. Shaw's work, I will kindly ask your permission as I attempt to explain my philosophy of life and death. I believe that to understand and accept "death," one must first understand LIFE, EXISTENCE, and OUR OWN NATURE. Life, as we know it, is half physical and half spiritual. We humans primarily equate with "physical" existence, as "spiritual" existence is problematical to fathom.

Most of us truly believe or want to believe that in the beginning, life and all existence originated by an act of an Almighty Source and a Power, referred to as God, Deity, Creator, or whatever one's perception is of an origin or a beginning that has no limit, neither time nor space. In describing creation, time and space are the two words in our vernacular that have no beginning and no end.

As for the origin of physical existence, those who do not want to believe in an Almighty Source or Creator, or who call themselves atheists and secularists, reason that life is the result of a cosmic explosion or just a physical consequence of "chance." Yet, earthly laws dictate otherwise. For anything to

be physical, to explode or to exist, it first requires pre-existence of something.

“FATE” is the origin of spiritual existence and is an act of our Creator, our “origin.” Fate, from our perspective, is God’s plan; it is the creation of a spirit. “Fate” is being in 1) the right place at the right time, 2) the right place at the wrong time, 3) the wrong place at the right time, or 4) the wrong place at the wrong time. Regardless of our belief to the contrary, we have nothing to do with our fate! No one chooses their mother and father, or one’s timing in existence. Why was I born in 1935 in lieu of 1900 or 1999? No one chooses their birth environment, gender, race, opportunities, role models, personality, and on and on. Fate is God’s choice for us to earn our eternal salvation. All we have to do in life is to be the best “you” you can be.

I believe the origin of existence can be described as “absolute perfection.” In our language, the key word is absolute. Most words can have various meanings, thus we must define our understanding of the words we use for clear communication in each context. Let us now focus on the definition of the essential word absolute and what it means to you and me. To me the word absolute means:

The be all and the end all
The beginning and/or the end
None other like it
The one and only
Unconditional
Unlimited
Complete unto its self
Self-existing
Free from imperfection
Free from restriction
Free from limitation

If one now accepts the meaning of the word absolute in this context, it is possible to move on and assume the word perfection speaks for itself. Perfection is perfect, meaning

without failure or flaw. Now our understanding can then go on to explain the perception of GOD, or THE ORIGIN OF ALL EXISTENCE. It will also become easier to comprehend not only the “how” and “why” of physical death, but also physical death itself, with all of its associated, existing consequences.

How could a good and almighty Creator have allowed death, evil, or man’s inhumanity to man to exist in a world or universe that He created? This question needs to be answered by each of us. For more than thirty years, I have been troubled by this concept. That thought often made me question my own faith. I believe our existence was truly intended to be as perfect as our Maker. However, it is not! The real question is how could an almighty, all loving, all knowing, all perfect Creator have allowed imperfection and evil to come into existence?

It is my belief all humans were given almost everything possessed by our Maker, including and especially FREE WILL, but without the almighty power and the ability to re-create a spirit. However, we do have the ability, in most but not in all relationships, to physically create through conception a new human life and existence by our own choice in an ACT OF PHYSICAL LOVE. Yet, even in that context, the gift and privilege of creating a new life is not as perfect as that of our Maker. How can identical twins conceived at the same moment by the same parents (cells and genes) come into this world looking exactly alike, yet possessing totally different personalities or spirits? This proves the two-fold existence of spirit and physical.

In my opinion, all of this is true because of the simple and logical reason that if God (the origin) is “absolute perfection,” and “absolute perfection” is defined as “perfect love,” and “perfect love” can only be defined as “the desire to share,” then one must conclude that God, the origin, decided to share His/Its/Her existence with another. We are the “other” and He chose to give us the gift of life in His own image and likeness, with the key exception being that He could not make us the “Maker” or the “Origin” ourselves; yet, He gave us free will.

Consequently, it is logical that we were created in the image and likeness, and were intended to be as perfect as God, but we are not, nor can we ever be, as perfect as He. Even though He wanted us to be as perfect, we are one degree or one ion less than our Maker. Our problem is we awoke convinced we are in fact equal to God. We don't feel the necessity to say to our origin: "Thank you," "I'm sorry," or "Forgive me!"

However, God will never stop trying to bring our spirit back (redeem us) into absolute perfection! I believe He started existence first through angelic existence, then through the material universe, then through mankind in His incarnate son, and now in the continuation of His perfect love for us to be part of Him.

Although God desired us to be equally as perfect as He is, even God could not re-perfect Himself in absolute perfection with almighty power. Hence, he would not be "ABSOLUTE." By logic and by the very definition of the word "absolute," one must see that ONLY GOD IS ABSOLUTE.

ONLY GOD IS ONE. Yet, to those who believe Christ to be the Messiah, God is a triune God. God is father, His son, and Holy Spirit, all in one perfect trinity. Even faiths that do not accept Christ as God's son or as our redeemer still accept His existence as monotheistic, the source of all being.

Most of us accept the premise that once spiritual life is ordained to exist, it is eternal and forever in salvation or otherwise. Unlike animals that function on instinct rather than intellect, we humans are blessed with intelligence and the ability to differentiate right from wrong, along with a desire or appetite for the pleasures of existence. Nevertheless, we are not, nor can we ever be absolutely perfect. Our original sin is the fact that when we awoke, we thought we were perfect in ourselves and that we were equal to God, our origin and, therefore, our own Creator.

Humanity's original sin, in my opinion, can be defined as "EGO." EGO occurs when we Ease God Out of our lives and feel we are God, without the necessity of thanking Him, asking

forgiveness, or being respectful. Men and women with “ego” problems, I believe, are the causes of all wickedness, sin, and humanity’s unwillingness to accept an almighty source of goodness and power as our Creator.

Regardless of one’s beliefs in the hereafter, many of us have first-hand experience with man’s “will power.” Try to move your finger and it moves. Where did that brainpower come from? The “will and desire to live” is a powerful force! Even the most high-tech medical procedures and the world’s best doctors cannot come close to understanding or duplicating this “medicine.” Further, I believe, God has instilled in every spirit that will to live on in one form or another. Those suffering physically or emotionally often opt to live on in a spiritual way. This is the only way to accept and understand why a human can and would commit suicide.

Man has a desire for eternal existence. If this were not so, history and experience would have no meaning. Therefore, one must also conclude that the future has a value and a meaning in the eternal process of existence and the generations to come. “Evolution” and unending growth in physical life is a reality and we must accept it as a “truth.” The divine plan--that of our origin or Creator’s actions, is the key to understanding life and its consequence,--namely, death; but death, as we know it, is only a physical experience! The divine plan takes on greater depth and meaning when contemplating our spiritual life’s destiny.

The “death care experience” is a process in this modern physical world and is essentially not unlike the practices, of pre-civilized man’s actions in the very beginning of mankind. Humans have always buried their loved ones’ physical remains with respect and dignity, as “life” is a sacred existence and the body in which it dwelled is also sacred. In all my years, I have never met a man or woman who amounted to or accomplished anything or who fulfilled a purpose in being who honestly did not have a desire to be remembered as having been “significant.” Please understand “significant” does not mean powerful, influential, or wealthy. Rather significance translates to mean: Fulfilling one’s purpose in being. Something within

us asks that we be remembered, hopefully, for having pursued our mission and our purpose in this physical life of existence. Discovering our vocation and achieving God's plan and intention for us will set our spirits soaring. Yes, the spirit does live on!

We are all creatures seeking long-term survival on this earth. However, we must face our life's motive, as a way to comprehend existence, both physically and then spiritually, which we believe and hope will never end, but be eternal. "Death" is a reality. We face it at our own time and in our own manner. In fact, each one of us wants to be remembered in our own way.

We only bury our body, not our spirit. Yet, our body is the sacred vessel, the tangible matter of substance. It holds the spirit. If we preserve physical objects in life, which have meaning, such as those artifacts filling our world's museums, we must conclude that the remains of our physical existence should be treated with reverence and respect. People of all nations travel the world over to visit the cathedrals, historical relics, pyramids, and shrines, which were constructed to honor and remind us of the individuals and the events that had a tangible meaning to our civilization, along with our own.

Please think and meditate on these thoughts before reading on!

Imperfect as we are, it is vital to know that death and life have practical sides. There are many options and alternatives available in facing the traumatic occasion of the physical loss (separation) from a life we love. It is in everyone's best interest to prepare and plan in advance of need for the inevitable event, especially so when we are planning for our own mortal ending.

With Dr. Shaw's practical style, one may browse through the table of contents or the index and find immediate help. One may read it to gather reassurance, comfort and information when preparation is the concern. As she writes, and as I often explain when consulting and meeting with families in pre-planning, or meeting with the bereaved at a time of loss,---there are three separate physical acts necessary

in Death Care. These three components take place in every transition of life from physical living on this earth to spiritual existence in the hereafter.

They are:

The Funeral Service: Call it a ceremony, ritual or tribute. It is a celebration of a life that lived. The funeral service provides a time when the bereaved express feelings and grief to the living about the deceased. Family and friends are never relieved of their need to provide consolation until meeting those left behind in person so that visual, verbal, and physical contact can be made. Letters can be written, flowers given, contributions made, cards sent, but nothing will substitute for personal direct contact, a hug, a touch to the hand, a sympathetic pat on the back. If the funeral ceremony and visitation are held at a convenient time and location, the funeral service provides the opportunity for 70 to 80 percent of those who want to express their sympathies in person to do so. If a private funeral is desired, rather than one open to the public, or just for family, friends, colleagues and neighbors to attend, it will not be possible for the larger circle of friends to communicate their feelings of sympathy. Hence, omitting the funeral experience or making it private tends to act against the intention of returning to, as Dr. Shaw explains, the “new normal” of life and happiness. If the funeral is omitted, people will seek you out in the future to express their sympathy and condolences, socially or at business encounters, just when you are returning to some normalcy. This is true no matter what letters, flowers, contributions, and so on are sent.

The Cemetery Component: Our body is physical matter that cannot and will not disappear. It can be buried traditionally in a grave in the earth; or it can be placed in a vault above the ground in a mausoleum crypt. In every cemetery, there are countless arrangements available from which to choose. Alternatively, it can be cremated. Many families often misunderstand cremation and the actual process that takes place. The result of cremation is not ashes and gases, as most individuals believe. Our body is reduced to a cubic foot of calcium in the cremation process, after the maximum

time allowed for incineration. Basically, our remains are reduced to a skeletal frame through this procedure, after which the skeletal remains are mechanically reduced to cremains. This physical matter is then placed in a permanent monumental urn, or placed in a less permanent container that can be buried or used to transport the cremains for traditional burial, burial at sea, or scattering at a designated and approved location.

The drawback to the scattering process is there is no place for the remaining or future family members or friends to equate with the physical location of the vessel that once held the spirit. Most people only feel the presence of the spirit when visiting the resting place of the physical temple that held the spirit. In any form, our physical remains are sacred material that once held the spirit. They should be treated with respect and dignity, no different than the millions of meaningful artifacts we preserve in museums, our homes, and public places.

The Monumental or Memorial Component: This is the memorialization, remembrance, or footprint of existence that validates we lived, or that our loved one lived and did inhabit this earth. People yearn to be remembered as having been significant. This is accomplished through a footprint in the form of a monument, inscription, or some private memorial according to the wishes of the individual and the family. As I have mentioned, this is evident by the fact that tourists travel the world visiting and viewing the resting place of those who meant something to them in life. The desire for memorialization is provided for family and friends with the chosen memorial, along with its location and aesthetics.

All three components of death care are a result of our human choosing and basically, I believe ceremony, cemetery, and memorialization are a way of fulfilling and honoring the one whose life is being commemorated.

This foreword is to commend Dr. Eva Shaw's magnificent summation of knowledge: to introduce, to instruct, to give comfort, and to give compassion when one needs to know what

to do. I end with my own planned personal inscription for my own place of burial.

Those who reflect on the message, in which I believe, will know I am not in the grave, but, - -rather, my spirit is in a far better existence. My inscription will read:

“I HAVE APPRECIATED EVERY MINUTE,
EVERY SECOND,
EVERY INSTANT OF THIS LIFE- -
ESPECIALLY NOW.”

Frank B. Stewart, Jr.
Chairman Emeritus, Stewart Enterprises, Inc.
A Leading Public Death Care Provider

INTRODUCTION



In 1971, my mother died in my arms. It wasn't inspirational; it was terrifying. I felt completely helpless, sick physically and emotionally.

Being with a loved one at the time of death may not have been right for you—it may have been impossible. But looking back I wouldn't trade that time for any of the holidays, celebrations, or successes I've had. I'm very glad I was there. It was right for me. I no longer grieve for my mother, but I still miss her and miss other family members who have died, the close friends who are no longer here, and the loss of family dogs with whom I relaxed, shared secrets, and took long walks. The shock and grief for those who are no longer in my life have turned to memories. If someone you loved has just died that might sound preposterous, but it will happen *with time*.

After working months and months on a book about what to do when a loved one dies, what strikes so profoundly is not death but the miracle of life. Now I stare at babies and see precious, perfect human beings bawling to make their tiny selves heard. At children running and screaming and jumping and making noise. At young people strutting their stuff like tropical birds. At people “my age” with a deepening sense of value, acting as if they've suddenly found all the answers. And at old people—those well up in their eighties—wrinkled with lines of life. Once again, for the millionth time, I realize that this is the reality of life, the cycle of death, and the scheme in

which we're all involved. As journalist Jack Anderson said, "I look at the universe and I know there's an architect." This is what writing a book about death has meant to me.

Intellectually, we know death is all around. However, when death comes close, over time, we forget it, ignore it, deny it. Perhaps like you, when I started to write this book, my own death and the death of those whom I love rarely entered my mind.

If someone you loved has recently died, you know it's not possible to prepare for the death. Yet with this book and the information within these pages, you should be able to handle the situation. In a difficult time, this book can help.

Within the pages we'll talk about how to manage during situations that are uncomfortable, new, and often heartbreaking. We'll discuss options for funerals and memorial services, what to do should the death become a media event, and the procedures when death occurs out of the state or country. We'll cover costs, discuss how to get your "house" in order, explain wills, hospice, and grief, and explore the issues of suicide, stillbirth, and AIDS. At various intervals throughout the book are sections called "Where to Get Help." These sections recommend self-help books and detail how to contact support groups or organizations that can be of assistance during this difficult time. Sometimes the help you need is as close as calling in a neighbor immediately after the death of a loved one, as recommended in chapter 1, Immediate Action. In another circumstance, you may need to call a representative of the United States Department of State, for example, if a loved one has died while traveling overseas.

Often after a loved one has died, survivors begin to understand the need to inform the public regarding the specifics of the death. While it might not seem remotely possible that you will want to bring a message on the circumstances of your loved one's death or be able to fathom how it might be presented to television newspeople, journalists, or a room crowded with men and women, this often happens. That's what Candy Lightner thought after the

drunk driver killed her daughter. And yet from this horrendous event came the birth of Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), which has become an international movement saving countless lives. Because survivors often become activists against the cause which has snatched the lives of loved ones, we've included a section on how to prepare for and give interviews.

Some of those who contributed to the book take a warm, caring attitude toward the transition that we call death. Others look it squarely in the eye and refuse to mince words, as illustrated by interviews with an American Baptist minister, Rev. Diana Cole Veazey, and Rabbi Maurice Lamm.

When reading the interviews and essays, you'll find a full range of expressions and euphemisms others prefer instead of the word death. Some of the terms sound more like a commercial for Kodak film or Hallmark: "She's with the angels" or "We lost him last year." However, within the text, we'll talk about death in plain terms. This is not done to be heartless, but so that you can understand clearly what has happened. If words such as death, dead, and dying offend you or you cringe at the term deceased, feel free to substitute words that you are more relaxed using. Personally, I like the euphemism of "passing on." It mirrors my personal philosophy of my loved ones moving from this dimension into another.

Throughout the book we will be talking about and referring to "family." Family in this context includes anyone who loved the person who died. One does not have to be related by blood or marriage to accept this term. While I have a small blood-related family, perhaps like you, I'm also "family" to dear friends, and often feel closer to many of these men, women, and children in my immediate circle than the distant relations I haven't kept up with in years. We have also attempted to avoid any sexist references. If there is anything you find offensive, it is unintentional.

With this revision, the contact information you'll find throughout the pages for self-help groups and other resources

has been verified. It was decided that Web addresses (also called URLs) would not be included since they change, as do telephone numbers and addresses. Most self-help groups have Web sites, and you can contact the organization for newsletters and other materials that can help in a time of need.

Reading and applying the material can help you get through the experience of death and perhaps make the road a little smoother. With the information you can get a “handle” on the pain, but any death hurts, including that of a cherished family pet as we’ll discuss in chapter 10. Additionally, my hope is that this book will help you understand what’s going on “inside,” as well as how to cope with and work with the external changes brought on by the death of someone you loved.

Let this book be your guide. It tells you *What to Do When a Loved One Dies*.