



Path of a Warrior

Wildfires, hurricanes, mass shootings, politics, friends diagnosed with cancer – is it really possible to keep our hearts open when there seems to be so much pain in the world? I admit that the recent wildfires in Northern California which deeply affected people I know personally, impacted me more than the major tragedies not so close to home. Keeping our hearts constantly open to all suffering is impossible, yet the price we pay for avoiding contact with suffering is often unknowingly deadening.

Suffering arises and we have three possible responses. We can push it away, not feel the suffering directly. My brother David was informed of his terminal prognosis from metastatic pancreatic cancer in an after-hours email from his oncologist. You can probably feel compassion for David. Can you feel compassion for his doctor who had little or no training in compassion?

Secondly, we can get lost in suffering, overwhelmed, becoming totally identified with our emotions. The drama of our lives, of the circumstances in which we find ourselves, can be so compelling we simply become lost. Thankfully, there is a third possible response – compassion, the open heart meeting suffering.

A truly compassionate heart is never fatigued. The secondary traumatic stress that helpers and



caregivers occasionally experience is commonly called compassion fatigue. This stress is not the result of the open, compassionate heart meeting suffering, but, rather, arises from pushing suffering away or getting lost in it. Often when we sincerely attempt to meet suffering with a compassionate response, the fear of directly touching pain unconsciously subverts our good intentions. Can we train ourselves to let our fear inspire us to soften and open our hearts rather than automatically closing and defending? This path takes great courage and is the path of a warrior. The word “courage”

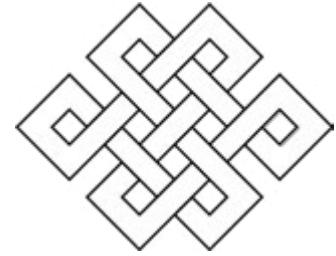
comes from a French root word *coeur* meaning heart.

The compassionate heart has several defining qualities: it is connected, warm, and spacious. A simple, yet challenging practice, is to go through the day focusing on the condition of your heart and choosing one of these three defining qualities to return to whenever you notice that aching contraction - a heart connected to God, to others, to self; a heart that is warm, melting in response to suffering; or a heart that is spacious, boundless as the sky. I personally love the practice of breathing the whole sky into my heart, so that even when the pain remains, it rests in such boundlessness that it ceases to threaten.

Compassion doesn't necessarily alleviate suffering in the moment, but an open heart makes it bearable, even workable, and creates the doorway to healing. In the boundless heart is a joy that transcends happiness and sadness, wellness and illness, life and death.

The most effective self-healing practice in my experience is to welcome with fierce honesty my deepest woundedness, without concept or storyline, and then to gently open my spacious heart of compassion for this part of myself. Even though we cannot constantly remain open to the suffering of the world, selflessly dissolving into our sky-like heart awakens and enlivens us. When "compassion fatigue" arises the antidote is true compassion for oneself, which invariably invites compassion for others. This is sacred work, the work of the warrior.

— Dale Borglum
Executive Director



The only choice we have as we mature is how we inhabit our vulnerability, how we become larger and more courageous and more compassionate through our intimacy with disappearance.

David Whyte

There is nothing more whole than a broken heart.

Hasidic saying



The place where you are wounded, there God can enter in. It is at the point of suffering where we can truly meet each other.

Marion Woodman

You take it all in. You let the pain of the world touch your heart and you turn it into compassion.

16th Gyalawa Karmapa

*We are the mirror as well as the face in it.
We are tasting the taste this minute
of eternity. We are pain
and what cures pain, both. We are
the sweet, cold water and the jar that pours.*

Rumi

Perhaps everything terrible is, in its deepest being, something that needs our love.

Ranier Maria Rilke

Saying Goodbye to Mary Beth



Mary Beth's journey has been shared for the last few years in the pages of the Living/Dying Project newsletter. Her death came at the end of last year, December 23, 2016, to be exact, which was around the time our 2016 newsletter was being mailed. Mention was made along the way that more than one volunteer from the Project had spent time with her but I'm the only person who shared on these pages my intimate experience with this remarkable woman. Another devoted volunteer, Travis Smith, spent a great deal of time with Mary Beth, much more, in fact, than I did. Dale and I thought it would be nice to share with readers her journey with the woman who became a dear friend.

In addition, a friend of mine, Norman Bayse, who has years of experience working through hospice, was willing to bring his skills with Jin Shin Jyutsu to Mary Beth's bedside. He worked with her as she approached the end of her journey. He too will share a bit about his time with her.

I'll begin with a brief piece I wrote the day of her death that first appeared on the website.

— Curtis Grindahl
Client Services Coordinator

Coda

We celebrated Mary Beth's birthday on December 17, 2016. Two friends from Los Angeles, Amanda and May, drove up for the occasion. Mary Beth's brother Joel drove down from Sacramento. As with the "dinner parties" held from time to time, everyone made a contribution of food and libations. We all appreciated how much our dear friend enjoyed a good party. They were always wonderful events filled with laughter.

Mary Beth, confined to her wheelchair, was using a portable microphone that amplified her voice so she could engage in conversation, though her energy was limited so the conversations were brief. There was wonderful food, good wine, cocktails, beer and a chocolate birthday cake. Mary Beth blew out the single candle, much to everyone's delight. She definitely seemed to be enjoying herself. Clearly she received much love from those present. Hugs and kisses were in abundance.

On Monday morning, Carolyn, her dear friend with whom she had lived since moving from Los

Angeles over four years ago, sent an email saying that Mary Beth had come down with pneumonia and was taking antibiotics as well as increased morphine to comfort her troubled breathing. The nurse from hospice visited, and a friend who'd recently joined the circle of supporters came on Tuesday and Thursday to do Jin Shin Jyutsu with her. It was sometime early on Friday morning Mary Beth took her last breath.

With Carolyn's alert that Mary Beth had died, a number of friends came to be with Mary Beth and with one another. For the next three and a half hours we surrounded Mary Beth's hospital bed, sharing our grief even as we spoke of the joy we experienced through our relationships with her. Travis had spoken with Mary Beth about rituals that might be performed after her death. I know from my own conversations with her about holding a memorial service following her death that this was not a subject she enjoyed discussing. But she offered Travis enough guidance that we did in fact attend to Mary

Beth this morning... applying oil to her feet and ankles, then washing hands, feet and face. Nico would at times join us. He picked up a wash cloth, soaked it with water, then touched his mother's face.

Travis told the story about showing Mary Beth a sari she'd bought in India, asking whether that might be suitable for a wrap after Mary Beth had been bathed. Mary Beth didn't especially like it until Travis said buying another would likely cost \$200. At that juncture Mary Beth said the one Travis had was just fine... we smiled at that, knowing Mary Beth as we did.

Five women washed Mary Beth's body and wrapped her with the sari. When I first saw her she seemed both at peace and remarkably beautiful. Mary Beth had asked Travis to take photos so Nico would have

a record.

An interesting aside is the fact Nico's cat Felix, who had been carousing for weeks, showed up the morning Mary Beth died. He soon found his way to her bed and lay resting against her leg.

Addendum — Mary Beth was cremated on January 4, 2017. Nico joined family and friends, watching as the casket was rolled through open doors of the cremation chamber. A memorial service was held on January 28 with friends and family from around the country joining in the celebration of this wonderful woman's life. She was much loved. She certainly would have enjoyed the party that followed the memorial service. It was exactly what she wanted.

Thoughts About Mary Beth One Year After Her Death



The invitation to write about my relationship with Mary Beth brings forth both dread and excitement. Such intensity! Dale always says our clients receive the benefit of our spiritual practice. My practice with Mary Beth was to find ways to make her life better – to be present with her as she was – and to enhance what I could. She wasn't a dedicated meditator. Her spiritual practice was simply love of life; her meditation was action meditation – ironically – since ALS pretty much stopped her physical action.

Mary Beth was passionate about life and loved with a heart that was huge, open and eager. She was fascinated with how humans are in the world, and wanted to know all the details. She enthusiastically enjoyed everything she could partake in, to the point that it was exciting to bring new things to delight her! She loved interesting food when it worked



for her digestion, and I love to cook. I remember making a ground lamb mint curry with spicy pan-roasted cauliflower. She had been having trouble chewing, so ground anything was easiest for her. And she loved exotic flavors! Well, she was wild for this food! And I was over the moon with having brought her such pleasure! After that I was making new exotic food for her several times a week. Soon her digestion started saying “no!”, but it was a good run while it lasted.

Another one of those moments was when we found places for MB to swim that had lifts to get her in and out of the water. Really, they were hot tubs, but she loved them!

My sense is that with her growing inability to move she felt more at ease in the water and more freedom in floating.

She often pondered her demise with curiosity and considered what was coming for her. She talked of

a fear that there might really be nothing she would experience after she died. Then we would chuckle about how, if there is nothing, there is nothing to fear! But when she talked about her young son Nico, she “knew” she would be watching over him and would be tracking his growth and development with pride! Her mind was so active yet she also spent times just being in her heart.

Mary Beth and I often talked about death and dying. In my other volunteer work, I assist folks nearing the end of their life create home funerals. MB was very curious about that work and asked lots of questions. One aspect of that practice is creating a ritual following death to bathe and bless the body and anoint it with oils. When I described this ritual to Mary Beth, she said, “Will you do that for me?” I, of course, said yes. We picked out a sari to wrap her body in and she chose oils she wanted used. She said, “And I want you to take photographs to use on your website!”

At the time of her death she had a wonderful young Tibetan woman caregiver who had lived in India. Tenzin brought a bottle of water from the Ganges to bless Mary Beth’s body. Some of her close women friends came together to wash her body and wrap her in the sari, anointing her with her chosen oils, all the while blessing her and saying our goodbyes.

My practice over the four years I’ve known Mary Beth, has been to open to falling deeply in love with her – with total abandon – and then to fall deeply into a fully broken heart when she died... to experience fully the joy, delight, frustration, anger, fear, pain, grief and love. And now to sort out what’s living, what’s dying and what’s love. What’s me and what’s thee and why am I here and what just happened and who am I anyway? As Dale says, the beloved can only be everything. If I meet what comes to me with an open heart, I can only be present, not perfect. Sometimes what comes is like a tsunami and sometimes it’s a gentle wave that brings in little sea critters who are fun to watch.

I feel Mary Beth in the warmth of the sun, in the gently moving trees, I hear her in the song of the birds... in the peacefulness of watching hummingbirds like we did together at my home in Bolinas. I don’t feel separate from her. I feel she is part of my breath, the images I see and the sensations I experience. And the love in my heart.

Thank you Mary Beth... for everything.

— Travis Smith
Living/Dying Project Volunteer

The Deep Silence of Healing

I met Mary Beth when she was close to death and found her to be a very vibrant person despite her severe disability. I had offered to work with her using a kind of energy healing involving touch and meditation called *Jin Shin Jyutsu* that I’ve used while working with people through hospice.

During our first session Mary Beth was having trouble breathing, which is not unusual for folks dealing with ALS. She responded very quickly to Jin Shin. This practice can be applied lightly for those having difficulty being touched or it can be used as a deep pressure technique. Mary Beth enjoyed both ends of the spectrum, though she especially welcomed deeper work around her spine where she held profound tension. In my experience, releasing tension is essential to preparing for the moment when a person releases her or his last breath.

Most of our time together was in silence, the deep silence of healing, so there isn’t a great deal to say

about what happened moment to moment. All I can say is we felt a deep connection. Mary Beth reported getting a lot out of our work together.

At one point she asked what I thought was on the other side of death. I’ve been asked this question surprisingly few times during my work with hospice clients. I told her what my heart of hearts knows. There is something, probably something special akin to what we experience when we are in our most expanded states of awareness. No one really knows the specifics. I simply know there is something. I believe it is good. I’m not sure whether this satisfied her, but my honesty did seem to deepen the bond we shared. I was glad to have spent time with this lovely woman. Our final session was the day before Mary Beth died.

— Norman (Nor) Basye
Living/Dying Project Volunteer

Project News

- We offer free-of-charge, volunteer-based spiritual support for clients with life-threatening illnesses in San Francisco, Alameda, Marin, Sonoma and Contra Costa counties. If you or anyone you know could use these services please call our office at **415-456-3915**. Volunteers are now providing support services at **Maitri AIDS Hospice** in San Francisco.
- Services that have been available only in-person in the Bay Area, are now available through our website. Training workshops to consciously support the dying are being offered online. This training includes live, interactive discussion, Q&A, and guided meditations. Those completing the training may wish to become a **Living/Dying Project Adjunct Volunteer** with access to ongoing interactive online support sessions. See the **Live Online Education** link on our website for more information: <https://www.livingdying.org/online/>. We have trained volunteers in Europe, Australia, and throughout Canada and the U.S.
- Dale will be facilitating weekend workshops/volunteer training programs in Santa Rosa, San Anselmo, and San Francisco in January and February of 2018. Please see the next-to-last page of this newsletter for details.
- If you are on our physical mailing list and not on our digital mailing list, please go to our website and sign-up on the digital mailing list. We print and mail only one newsletter per year, but a few times a year have been sending out email updates about the Project in addition to emailing a digital copy of the annual newsletter. These shorter emailings contain updates on events and activities, articles on the services the Project offers, and thoughtful and inspiring pieces on the spiritual path. Also, if you are willing to unsubscribe from our physical mailing list and thus forego a physical copy of the newsletter and receive only the email version, we would save money and trees.
- More useful material continues to be added to our website. George Ward has done a beautiful job of redesigning our homepage. There are some great new audio files of lectures and meditations. We are endeavoring to be the go-to website for anyone wanting information about the spiritual opportunities that life-threatening illness and caregiving can offer. Meditations, practices, audio and video files, and descriptions of the services the Project provides are all available.
- **Healing at the Edge** ongoing small groups are being facilitated by Dale. These groups meet Tuesday afternoon in Santa Rosa, Tuesday night in Sebastopol and Monday night in San Francisco. There is a new group co-facilitated by Samantha Fargeon beginning on Wednesday nights in Greenbrae. These groups are not focused on end-of-life issues, but on spiritual transformation, with an emphasis on meditation and on healing the psychological/physical imbalances that limit this transformation. More information is available at the **Ongoing Groups** link on the homepage of our website: <https://www.livingdying.org/ongoing-groups/>. There are a few spaces available in the Sebastopol group and there is space available in the group on Wednesday evenings in Marin. The other groups have waiting lists. If you are interested in talking with Dale about these groups, call him at **415-456-3915**.
- Dale now has his own video blog channel on the **Be Here Now Network** <https://beherenownetwork.com/category/ram-dev/>. There are interviews with many of his friends including Ram Dass, Donnie Nelson, Melanie Bien, Sandra Fish, John Fox, Anne Lamott and others. There are also talks by Dale on this channel.
- **Insight Timer** smart phone app found at <https://insighttimer.com> has lots of wonderful guided meditations and talks by meditation teachers including Dale. Now you can meditate anytime, anywhere!

The best form to worship God is every form. – Maharaji

PASSION AND COMPASSION CONSCIOUS LIVING / CONSCIOUS DYING

A WORKSHOP FOR CAREGIVERS, THERAPISTS AND ANYONE WANTING TO DEEPLY EXPLORE HEALING



Sponsored by the **Community Institute for Psychotherapy**, a workshop offered by the **Living/Dying Project**. Participants seeking continuing education as Psychologist, Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist and Licensed Clinical Social Worker are directed to **cipmarin.org**. Please select *Professional Development*, choose *Continuing Education for Professionals* and click on the course title. A flyer for the workshop may be found at the **Living/Dying Project** website at **livingdying.org**

Physical healing, emotional healing, spiritual healing, collective healing – the journey to wholeness takes many forms and has many starting points. Each of us is at a particular point on our healing path, confronting our next challenge, often without clearly knowing whether attitudes or practices we have been using to facilitate growth in ourselves or in our clients are becoming stale, without knowing which direction we should turn to create meaningful transformation.

In this workshop we will draw upon the wisdom of Buddhism, the diagnostic message coming from the connection between stages of early childhood development and energetic patterns in the adult body, as well as the softening and the passion of an open heart. Having explored these wisdom traditions during 35 years of being a guide to the dying, a clear and practical paradigm for the healing path has become apparent to me. Healing occurs through direct contact with the Sacred, through realization of our true nature. There are no shortcuts, but certainly neither taking unnecessary detours nor spending time spinning our wheels can inspire us along what is often a difficult journey to a life consciously lived.

During this workshop we will explore together a clear, concise and usable model of the healing process that can specifically diagnose and identify the next step that is transformational for each of us, even during crisis. Short, intensive guided meditations and other practices will be presented to create a healing experience that will lead to a life consciously and compassionately lived and eventually to a conscious death. We're all caregivers and all seekers of healing. These deeply uncertain times are an incredible opportunity.

Santa Rosa workshop will be held **January 27 and 28, 2018**.

San Anselmo workshop will be held **February 10, 2018**.

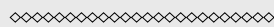
San Francisco workshop will be held **February 17 and 18, 2018**.

For information about locations and registration please contact the **Community Institute for Psychotherapy** or visit the **Living/Dying Project** website. Registration is handled through the **Community Institute for Psychotherapy** regardless of whether the registrant is pursuing continuing education or not.



Workshops will be conducted by Dale Borglum, Ph.D., who, with Stephen Levine and Ram Dass, established the Hanuman Foundation Dying Center in Santa Fe, New Mexico, the first center supporting conscious dying in the U.S. Dale directed the center until moving to the San Francisco Bay Area. He is founder and Executive Director of the Living/Dying Project and co-author of **Journey of Awakening: A Mediator's Guidebook** (Bantam Books).

Imagine facing death without fear. Imagine using a life-threatening illness as an opportunity for spiritual awakening. Imagine approaching the unknown with an open heart. We often resist change as a natural part of life. Strength and healing can be found in life's most difficult situations.

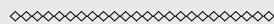


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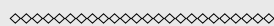
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Mission Statement

The Living/Dying Project offers conscious and compassionate support in the spirit of mutual exploration to those facing life-threatening illness and their caregivers. We also offer education and training in the practices of spiritual healing to those confronting life's most difficult situations and to anyone committed to spiritual transformation.

Supporting Us

We offer spiritual support free of charge to those with a life-threatening illness in the San Francisco Bay Area, as well as to their caregivers. As the first organization in the Western world whose mission is to cultivate conscious dying, we've offered these services for over thirty-five years. In addition to our local services, we offer support, training and educational services through our website, as well as by telephone and Skype, to people around the world. The mission of our work is healing, both the healing of that which blocks us from full aliveness, and the healing of our collective and individual relationships with death. Fear of death separates us from each other and from our own essential selves. During these divisive and troubling times, finding that which connects us rather than separates us is crucial.

Our operation is simple and our overhead is minimal. A significant proportion of our revenue comes from individual donations. We truly need your help again at this time and ask for your support, both financially and with your blessings and your prayers. This support allows us to continue the vital work of the Project. Please make a donation in the enclosed envelope (if you received the printed newsletter). You also can make a donation online using PayPal or credit card by visiting our website www.livingdying.org, and clicking the **Donate Now** link on our home page.

Our heartfelt thanks to all of you who have supported us in any way. May this holiday season and the year to come be filled with wisdom and blessing for you and for those you love.

— Dale Borglum



Credits

Layout and design of this newsletter was done by Curtis Grindahl, Client Services Coordinator for the Project. On page one is George Ward's photo *Dancing 3,000 Year Old Tree*. The photo of Mary Beth on page four was taken the morning of her death by her good friend Travis Smith who is a volunteer with the Project. Curtis took the photo of Dale found on page seven.