



rejuvenation

by Andrea Ruggieri

Spring is a gratifying time of year. It promises the beginning of warmer weather, new life and rejuvenation. With refreshed energy and a sense of possibility, Spring offers hope for restoration in all aspects of life.

What came first, the chicken or the egg? Why ask the question? It is more important to simply contemplate the symbolism of life and renewal. This symbolism is present in many genres, but the metaphor of the chick emerging from its protective shell characterizes the uncertainties and possibilities that we all struggle and strive for.

We can all imagine the feeling of warmth and chick. There are times we all harbor ourselves. We stay warm and protected inside our shell, However, the fear of what lies beyond can hold

As with the chick, it is an instinct, or in our move forward and open ourselves up to new easy and can be a fear-filled process. What handle it? Will I still feel safe and loved?

As with any struggle, overcoming counteracted by rejuvenation and over the threshold of fear, you are possibilities and growth.

In doing this your shell of protection vulnerable. For every new step taken, again. We cannot avoid this. This is LIFE. can receive by being brave enough and new fulfilling experiences and love. You have incredible purpose and are capable of possibilities outside your shell.

So walk confidently forward, clasp hands with those who will support you, revel in the sun, feel the grass between your toes, enjoy the warm breezes of Spring and remember with every uncertainty there are gratifying rewards.



protection of being inside an egg like a baby from grief, guilt and making difficult decisions. avoiding what lies outside. It's comfortable. us back from undiscovered joy and happiness.

case a thoughtful decision that compels us to possibilities. Pecking through that shell is not is on the other side of that shell? Can I

these fears can ultimately be hope. Once you have taken that step giving yourself permission to new

must be shed, making yourself there is always the potential of being hurt Life is taking chances, but the gifts you strong enough to step forward is happiness, may find contentment in knowing that you existing with great happiness in a new world of



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hospice the anticipation of grief

by Carla Tanguay

Death is not always sudden. When a loved one has a serious or terminal illness, it can seem like you are watching them fade away right before your eyes. An extended illness often provides loved ones with the chance to say goodbye. It also carries a unique kind of grief, as you see your loved one lose abilities and perhaps even parts of his or her personality.

Grief does not wait for the last breath or the closing of the casket. It can come knocking as soon as we are aware of an impending loss. Anticipatory grief is the term that we use for feelings surrounding a future loss. Anticipatory grief often starts with a terminal diagnosis or a poor prognosis. We are now faced with the prospect of losing our loved one, and need to cope with both the current reality of caring for someone who is seriously ill, and the prospect of a future without him or her. Anticipatory grief can also be experienced by the person who is dying. It includes the feelings and reactions one may have to their own impending death and the many associated losses and changes.

Anticipatory grief is similar to the grief that comes after a death in many ways. It can include feelings of sadness, shock, anger, denial, bargaining, acceptance, and guilt, as well as the added strain of expectation, which can exacerbate feelings of stress and exhaustion.

When a family is facing difficult healthcare decisions related to end-of-life care, it is a complicated and challenging time. It is common to disagree on what is the right approach, the right treatment, or even whether or not to seek hospice services. The most important thing for patients and families to do during this time is to find a way to communicate and to really listen to each other. People with a terminal illness have many concerns, hopes, fears, and desires. Prolonging life is not always their priority. It may actually be spending quality time with family, avoiding suffering, being as alert as possible, being able to make decisions, or feeling connected with others.

It takes a tremendous amount of courage to have these conversations. When someone is seriously ill, he or she may be frightened and exhausted. Caregivers and family members are also likely stressed out and drained. Even medical professionals may avoid direct conversations about end-of-life wishes. But what is almost universal is the feeling of regret by people who avoid these conversations and face an end-of-life experience that does not reflect their wishes or values.

The best time to have conversations about end-of-life wishes is before you or a family member are faced with a health crisis. If that time has already come, it is important to have an open and honest conversation as soon as possible. Choice and control are a vital part of our perception of wellbeing, so think of this conversation as a gift- the gift of choice and the gift of a voice.

Things that may help the conversation:

- Find the right setting. A quiet, comfortable place that is free from distraction. Think about who should be present and set some ground rules if you feel one person may dominate the conversation.
- Discuss the range of options. This may include the option to continue aggressive, curative treatments. There may be an option to receive palliative care (pain and symptom relief) along with curative care, or to receive palliative care alone. Hospice is another type of care available to people whose physician has given them a prognosis of six months or less. It provides comprehensive services that address physical, emotional, and spiritual needs.
- Ask what is most important to them, and let them lead the conversation. You might be surprised that people's priorities change when they are seriously ill. They may have always been a "fighter," but now what they want to fight for is the ability to die at home, or they might have fears about what will happen after they die that you can help alleviate.
- If there are significant disagreements between family members about what should happen, bring in a professional social worker, chaplain, or spiritual advisor to help navigate these challenges. Having a neutral third party can help all those involved feel heard, bring clarity, and provide resolution.
- Recognize that hospice and palliative care do not mean "giving up." Changing or stopping treatments might mean letting go of the expectation of being cured, but it may open up the possibility of living in a way that embraces your loved one's current values and priorities. Palliative treatments can often be provided alongside curative ones, and studies show that hospice care can actually extend a person's life expectancy.

For more information about starting a conversation about wishes for end of life care, visit:

<http://theconversationproject.org>

revelations of a funeral home employee



by Andrea Ruggieri

I was struggling to find a job after a layoff. After many months of job searching, of all places I received a call to interview at a funeral home! First thoughts... "I'll get back to you!" "Do I want to work with weird funeral directors (because, of course... they ARE weird, why else would they be a funeral director?) "It's going to be creepy!" My lack of employment coerced me to think, "Is it possible I could make a go of this?"

I'd like to share my perspective first hand, as someone who works at a funeral home, and is not a funeral director. I think this is a very important perspective, as I too, carried the negative funeral home "stigma" in my back pocket. I formerly worked in a long-term care organization taking care, in my own way (Marketing), of the people who lived in assisted or long-term care communities. It brought me such gratification to know that regardless of my professional part in this organization, I was helping someone.

When I began working at the funeral home I admittedly struggled, feeling out of sorts, thinking "Is this where I should be?!" In fact, I spent the first month shouting this question in my mind! I'm not sure when it happened, or how it happened, but one day I was enlightened. I am working in an organization that helps people! I don't know why that simple fact eluded me in the beginning. I suddenly reveled in the fact that there was a place that you were taken care of as you transitioned from life to death, and more importantly, families and friends were being cared for too. My work was directed to a new form of care, a very important form of care. People who work in funeral care are coming to the aid of people when they are in the most need of support and comfort.

As I got to know the funeral directors that I work with, I realized with each day, how crucial their job is. I don't think you just "want to be a funeral director." It is a calling, a life commitment, comparable to being a doctor or clergy who are on call, at all hours. These guys and gals drop everything and often leave their own families in order to take care of someone else's family.

So next time you have feelings of unease when you think of funeral homes, remember these are havens where family and friends surround and comfort you. The funeral directors that work in them are incredible and real people, and are there to guide and help you through one of life's most difficult times with great care.



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why gardening ROCKS

by Andrea Ruggieri



healthy • soulful • nurturing • meaningful

The simple act of gardening is truthfully nothing but simple, and the benefits received can be far greater than the fruits of your labor.

For many of us Northern folk it's an opportunity to soak in that vitamin D we've been lacking during the grind of winter. For all, it's an opportunity to get fresh air, feel revived and connected to the earth we live on. Getting on our feet and becoming less sedentary gets the blood pumping and wakes up muscles we haven't used in awhile, making us stronger and more vital. There is scientific evidence that shows gardening reduces the risk of certain diseases, burns calories and helps maintain weight!

Gardening can activate hormones that will actually make you feel happier and less stressful. What a simple yet delightful discovery! Drug-free and all natural, gardening promotes the things we all strive for. It also gives us time to think... or not think in our crazy lives. It removes us from our daily travails and into the "zone" and feeds our soul.

So just how does it feed our soul?

Beauty. Whether you're surrounded by the beauty of flowers, fruit or vegetables it inspires gratitude and awe. The multitude and variety of flowers alone will get your endorphins flying! And for those who are talented

enough to tend carefully to fruits or veggies... you've created the opportunity to provide food for yourself and others. Whether you are the supreme creator or not, it brings incredible satisfaction to have been a part of nurturing that seed into a beautiful producing plant.

Relaxation. At the moment you take that turn into the "gardening zone" you can almost feel each muscle, one by one leaving the world of responsibility, decision-making and general angst. They breathe a collective sigh... Gardening frees your mind of all the grit of everyday living and at the same time gives permission to convert your negativity by digging holes, hacking down twisted dead vines or yanking weeds.

Control. When the rest of your life seems out of control, there's something about having the freedom to lay out your garden beds in an order that you decide and makes sense to you.

Responsibility. What a great way for all humans to feel genuinely responsible. Tending to living things and keeping them living is the ultimate duty. It takes time, energy and knowledge and hey, you might even learn something as you care for that new species of flowering vine. And what a great way for a child to learn responsibility, introduce them to the garden!

Being Present. It's a joyful thing to just be present in the moment. So often we get caught up in our over-scheduled days, not allowing this simple delight of just being present. Caring for living things in an almost maternal way grants focus that is unparalleled.

Feeling connected. How much more connected to earth and other living things can you get when your up to your elbows in dirt?! Mother Earth meant for us to get dirty and co-habitate with the trees, plants, insects and the occasional skittering rodent. Like our distant cave dwelling ancestors, we are supposed to commence with nature!

So, if you're a seasoned gardener or on the cusp of stepping in to the gardening arena, you may find it is the journey you've been waiting for. Spring is here, so get your seeds, pull on your gardening gloves and rubber boots and embrace the joys of gardening!

