

parentingourselves

A column that addresses our own inner growth as parents
By Lela Iselin

Death and Dying

From the airport in North Bend, Oregon, to a seminar in Bandon by the Sea, I shared a limousine-like bus with a large black leather couch and lots of champagne glasses, with twelve businessmen on their way to a high-class golf resort. I was arriving a couple of days early, to do a personal retreat and to write for *byronchild*. The deadline for my article was up and I still had no question to answer.

After talking about what made golf so addictive (one guy said it was because everyone has moments of greatness while playing golf, different than tennis, where the moments of greatness are reserved for the pros,) I asked these golfers, all obviously well-to-do, fierce businessmen, if they had any questions concerning raising their children. They were so surprised and at first could not even conceive of having a question, let alone telling me about it. But the more we talked the more they became dads. One had a six-year-old, another a ten-year-old child he talked lovingly about and by the time the young man with the six-month-old daughter dared to speak up he could not hide the enthusiasm about how fast she was growing. The dads almost ended up indulging in diaper talk! They quickly caught themselves and switched right to discussing business.

Now they were all holding their trumps closely to their chests, they obviously all knew the right people in the right places. After a short while in the business battlefield they suddenly remembered that it was golf they were here for and so we were back at the beginning of our conversation again, just a touch more intimate this time. And what's best I had my question!

A few days ago my six-year-old daughter, noticing my greying hair, said with strong concern in her voice, 'Dad, you cannot get old! When you are old you die!' I picked her up and said laughingly, 'Don't worry, Lucy, I won't die just yet!' She smiled, but the worry in her eyes remained. How do I talk about

ageing and death to a little child who is busy learning about life?

Jonathan

The fact that you were gentle enough to notice that the worry was still in her eyes, even though you assured her that you were not going to die just yet, says much about your sensitivity and the depth of guidance you are able to offer your daughter.

The first question to be lived into is for you: How are you with ageing and death, especially now that your life means so much to a little Lucy? The answer you gave your daughter, although likely to be true, was still not all the way honest. What if you did die today? Not only would Lucy lose her dad, but also for her he would have turned into a liar.

There are many levels of life. The physical body will die, or at least change into something radically different: ashes. The emotional body will also dissolve. What into? Could it be that it melts into the hearts of the people we touched while we lived? The mental and spiritual body is probably what some call the soul. We don't need to focus on the latter two to answer the question. The answer lies in how you are with Lucy emotionally concerning her demand for you not to die.

Even though your daughter is busy learning about life, she can only do that by learning about death also. On the physical body level she is learning about that. How else could she have made the connection of greying hair and ageing? At the age of six her channels to other dimensions of life are probably still quite open. Likely, more open than yours because she has not yet had to defend herself as much as you had to. She is not yet aware of the world, where most people put themselves into a trance, trying to squeeze one experience after the other out of life in the desperate attempt to make themselves feel immortal. Lucy has almost certainly looked at dead beetles and wilted flowers without getting scared. She probably talks to them, just like she talks to the living ones.

When I was seven years old, the girl who had been sitting at the same desk as me at school died of leukemia. I remember going to the mortuary where her body was displayed in a small white coffin. It was a tremendous moment for me. She looked so immeasurably beautiful to me, like alabaster and silk. She was holy. At the same time I was so sad, that I would never be able to compare how she drew the bunnies we had to draw for homework or give her my apple at the break again. I remember deeply living into this paradox as I was looking at her still body.

My mother got noticeably uncomfortable and tore me away saying with a hysterically comforting voice: 'It's fine now, Lela, let's go! We have been here long enough! Everything is fine!' At that moment I saw that if I was to get any love from my mother, I was not allowed to feel anything that deeply. Being so shatteringly moved by life and death I really needed someone to love right then and so I shut down a major access to my true essence, awe, and became nice instead. My mother could relate to that. Had she just gently held my hand, though, had she let me guide her to this holy place for just a moment, we could have felt the grief together. This would have turned the very grief into a deep meeting place. It would have transformed it into a still, safe, rich moment with my mum with both of us saying a porous, tender goodbye to my school friend.

Remain emotionally available to Lucy in moments where ageing or dying shows up to be lived with. Take her little hand and let her guide you back to places you have had to close down, because no-one was around to feel them with you. You can pull out a grey hair and look at it together. Ponder about what it means. Take a little fantasy journey that gently includes life and death. And while she is guiding you, you remain her big, strong dad on the outside. Inside you both have a little secret. Namely, that life is not big and strong, but delicate, tender, transient and eternal at the same time.