

# FEARLESS

COMING FACE TO FACE WITH YOUR DEATH



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English 8A/102

Dear Oxygen Users,

Hello there! If you are currently alive you will die. That's just a fact, it happens. Is this truly a morbid concept? Perhaps, but truly it is inevitable. If this scares you or thinking about death makes you uncomfortable, you'd be a normal person!! However, this is me double-dog-daring you to continue reading, to not change the subject when someone tries to talk about death with you, to take a moment and think about what you really want done with *your* dead body when you die.

Then I would love to introduce you to the Death Positive Movement.

Whoa, wait what?? Why is that a thing? Who is she? Why would you talk to me about death, right in front of my salad?? I apologize to your salad there, however death isn't just for cheesy horror films or Halloween anymore. If you pay attention death truly is everywhere, it's natural and beautiful in ways that are hard to comprehend sometimes.

Every winter when the snow and temperature falls the grass in our front lawns turns brown and dies. Only for when the snow melts and temperatures rise back to levels that are suitable for human life the grass and surrounding plant life returns to its lovely green, lush, and alive state.

Please note dear oxygen users, that I am not asking you to go around and dress in black blasting My Chemical Romance and think about death all the time. That would be very extreme. What I ask of you is to have a moment and think about the reality of death. One day we will all be dead, the ones you love and yourself included.

I found this movement for myself after my dad died. I was devastated, it was a shock and I didn't want to believe it. I think at that time I needed something for myself that gave me a look into death, something to tell me that his death was inevitable and one day I would lose him.

I can hear you, "what is the death positive movement really though?" It's truly just something to break the stigma of death. Death has a bad reputation, when in reality it goes hand in hand with life. In plain and simple other words don't be shy of death. You can be scared of dying or your loved ones dying but prepare for it. Find out what they, or even you, want done after death so you can honor them, or they can honor you, after death.

Morbid subjects are hard not to completely laugh at and push aside after making a couple of jokes and a few jokes are good coping mechanisms to get through this subject completely. However, on the flip side, sometimes a serious conversation is just truly what everyone needs. Life's too short to not laugh and joke, just always take a moment to get comfy of the idea of being g o n e and *do not be afraid*.

Yours truly,  
Sabrina Earls.

Sabrina Earls

Mrs. Connolly

English 8A

25 April 2018

### **Deathly Enthusiastic**

In life two things are guaranteed. Death and taxes. Now, in the months of January through mid-April every television show, news outlet, and Buzzfeed article will be talking about tax season. Get in your W2's and get your refund and continue on, hopefully, with more money than you began with. However, every season is death season. Without fail, every single day someone is born and someone, somewhere, dies. But if death season is *so* much longer than tax season and life = death = taxes why are we so eager to change the channel the first sign of any conversation towards death? Let us take a moment to release the remote and wash away any previous bias toward the grim reaper and breathe. Hello, let's have a death conversation. *Do not be afraid.*

This conversation is uncomfortable. Talking about someone's own personal death is seen as morbid and "completely unnecessary" if that person is in perfect health. Talking about someone else's death, especially if that person is loved and the sheer thought of living without that person is even scarier. This conversation is taken and put up on the highest shelf in the kitchen, hidden behind those ugly pots that were an ancient old Christmas gift that have never been used. The ones that cannot be thrown away but should not, under any circumstances be used once. Until, a member of the family is sick, and dying and a small side conversation about their death needs to be had. "We're going to cremate her and put grandma right next to grandpa

in the family plot okay? Okay.” Done, shuffled past. The truth is no one should fear to start the death conversation.

It is important to always have a plan of what *you* would want to have done with *your* remains. That right there is what the death conversation is, simple but daunting. Death positivity, understanding what it is and getting over how incredibly spooky it sounds is the easiest way to reach tranquility about a death conversation.

Firstly, the fear of the death conversation is exactly what the death positive movement was “created” to combat. The death positive movement is the belief that hiding death behind closed doors and being secretive is harming our society, that we should all be more involved in handling our own death and the deaths of ones we love, it is knowing that a dead body poses no harm to you, that talking about death is not morbid, and that dead bodies should be disposed of in an eco-friendly way (Death Positive Movement). Being open and honest around death is one giant step in the right direction to change culture around death. Like many movements before her the death positive movement was coined by someone complaining about it online (1). Caitlin Doughty, also known as AskAMortician on YouTube, sent out a tweet on Twitter putting a spotlight on how the internet has branded several other “sex positive” websites, however where were the death positive ones? This began the death positive movement by giving the movement the name, in 2013 (1).

The grand one-million-dollar question is why does this woman Caitlin Doughty have any reason to be complaining online and why does she matter? People complain online, it is what the internet is. As her YouTube channel would suggest, she is a licensed mortician with her own funeral home Undertaking LA (Doughty 207). At the beginning of her trek to death positivity she was also afraid to speak out about it, cultural death denial is what she was trying to break, within

her community, the internet, perhaps the world (216). However, she did and thus the death positive movement have gotten people to speak up and out about their deaths, in a positive death conversation.

A death conversation does not under any circumstances need to be a sad solemn event. Using simple emails and sending out a death plan with a few friends and close relatives is all that is required. Add a personal flair, no fear, with no fear to crack a joke. All the power lies within the future corpse. A teacher named Meredith Minister makes jokes about death in her own classrooms (Minister 1). Minister teaches that, “Rather than treating life and death as opposites, the death positivity movement suggests that death is a part of life and the ongoing ecosystem.”

(1). The circle of life rather than a finite line that abruptly just ends when someone dies.

Death is frightening, with no way to experience death and live to tell about it all we as a culture are left with is an empty shell of a person we used to know being hidden behind closed doors. Locked in a box, why should we leave our dead alone, why should we *fear* to talk about it. Nothing scary about making a plan and speaking about a death plan. Draw the curtains back and get in there and be with the dead, flow with the grief and follow the death plan, because no one *feared* the death conversation.

Death comes to us all  
Some death quicker than others  
Prepare for the worst

Fear can cripple us  
death is scary and unknown  
When should we plan this

Positivity  
Make a plan for everyone  
In life and in death

That woman has died  
Her body lays still now there  
She cannot hurt us

To fear one's own death  
Is to fear a piece of life  
To live is to die

What makes a good death?  
Old and at home with loved ones?  
*Do Not Be Afraid*

## no fear

Waking up in a cold sweat my eyes wander around the room again. It's dark and every shadow looks like a ghost coming for me. Trying to give my eyes time to adjust, I focus on my breathing. In, out, in, out. Something simple to focus on rather than focus on my reoccurring nightmare.

I'm standing there over a grave, freshly dug. Looking down into it I see a wooden box. A coffin. All of a sudden, the box flings open and I am stuck staring at my own body. My own rotting corpse.

I cannot move. My arms feel glued to my sides as I feel cold hands travel up them. Glancing down at them they're skeleton hands. I tell my legs to run but they're glued to the spot. Terror fills my eyes as I feel a cold breath whisper over my ears.

"Not today, but one day we will meet again." The figure whispers into my ear in a sound that sounds like wind blowing through the trees. The bone figure takes a moment and then pushes me into the grave. "Need not to be afraid of me little one."

That's always when I wake up to the darkness of my bedroom. Taking deep breaths and reaching for a glass of water I whisper to myself in a quiet voice, "*do not be afraid.*" With a surge of reassurance, I'm not afraid.

## be not afraid

### playlist about death

❖ Saturn- Sleeping at Last

You taught me the courage of stars before you left/ How light carries on endlessly even after death

❖ Hospital Hymns- Corey Kilgannon

If this song is my final breath/ If I'm killed by the cancer in her breast/ Let me give the little I have left/ and die an honest death

❖ What Sarah Said- Death Cab for Cutie

But I'm thinking of what Sarah said/ that love is watching someone die

❖ Soldier's Poem- Muse

It's a shame we're all dying/ And do you think you deserve your freedom

**room number 8**

eight rooms in a singular row  
each identical in look  
and shape  
size  
off grey walls with white tile  
glass sliding doors separate them  
while a thin curtain separates them more  
I glide silently down the hall as to not disturb the peace

room number one's not for me  
a broken leg  
people fear my presence  
I don't peak in

room number two  
an old man and his wife  
they hold hands  
awaiting test results  
pale white skin with a thin line of sweat  
seconds that feel like hours go by with a loud tick  
they don't look good  
I'll be back later

three and four are empty  
which is rare  
but refreshing  
the rooms  
scrubbed clean  
no trace anyone was in there  
tears falling on the floor  
with a heart monitor  
slowly  
s l o w l y  
winding  
down  
d  
o  
w  
n  
until they took my hand

room five has a new mother  
she is holding her newborn  
gently cradling him as if he is fragile glass  
whispering gentle words with a slight kiss on the top of his little head  
the joy radiates like a nuclear bomb of happiness

happiness bounces of everything in its wake leaving behind a mini war path  
I peak in, the happiness masks my presence  
no fear

in room number six is quiet

a woman is alone

no family

friends

just nurses

I peak in and she looks up

at me

or just the wall

I tend to have that effect

seven is closed

locked away from the human eyes

prying to get a glimpse

to death

in real time

to them

I will come in time

room *eight*

I glide silently across the tile

into the room

they felt my presence

right away

the mother holding her sons hand

squeezed a little tighter

holding her son back from me

the sister ran out

swished against me

tears falling rapidly

like a miniature rain storm

to mimic the hurricane inside of her

the father remained silent

in the corner

stoic

staying strong for his family

in his eyes you can see the hurt

the hurt of a million different possible memories i am taking away

graduation

marriage

grandkids

no more making pancakes for his kids  
one single tear falls  
for his little boy

his friends are all macho men  
you can tell they're scared  
I scare them  
I'm big and scary  
they're too young to think of me  
but they have to now  
their best friend  
their first basemen  
the one who was taken by a car  
driven by a man  
who had too much to drink

I felt the family's pain  
it wafted off them in waves  
like a tsunami  
of pain and utter suffering  
sliding through I touched the boys cold hand  
“come with me”  
I whispered  
the boy took my hand  
without any complaints  
suffering has ended

I glided to the door  
taking him away  
from his family  
friends  
everything he has ever known  
I felt a tug  
reluctance

“I'm not ready to *go*”  
he whispered in a soft

*br*

*ok*                                   *en*

voice  
that's okay,  
no one ever is  
“*do not be afraid.*”  
for everyone fears me.

## How to Write Your Death Plan

### Step 1:

Pick a few trustworthy people, one of them needs to be the next of kin/ the person who is actually in charge of burying you. Have them in mind as you continue and make sure you have enough copies of the plan for them or have their email so you can electronically send your plan to them.

### Step 2:

Sit down and have the first serious look at what options you have for burial. You have many options and just simple embalming and cremation are not where those two end. Do a few internet searches and get into contact with a local funeral home if you are confused.

### Step 3:

As you swim through other options for your burial and other arrangements also find out that specific area's death laws. Know your rites and also find out what may or may not be legal. It may come as a surprise to many that most things that are seen as a taboo or dangerous are completely legal and safe to do. Know your rights.

### Step 4:

Write or type your plan out, in different places. Keep it safe to send to the trustworthy people in step one. This is *your* plans for after you *die* so there is no coming back to tell them how you truly wanted your last big party to really turn out.

### Step 5:

As you grow and live life change your death plans also. The people you will send them to will change as you develop through life and make new memories and new relationships. Also the funeral and death industry are always changing, new revolutionary ways of being cared for after death are always being created and you may want to keep your options open.

### Side Note:

Remember that this is your plan, write down what you truly want, if you want your ashes to be mixed with rainbow glitter and then sprinkled into a field of daisies go right ahead and find a place where you can and write it down. Don't shy away of not getting what you want in death as you had in life by being scared to talk about death and nervous of what your friends may think. *Do not be afraid*, go ahead and write down what you want, after all it is your body.

## The Man Without Fear.

They say in life being fearless is reckless, to look death in the eye is dangerous. That they'll get exactly what's coming to them. The people who speak up about death are morbid, they should be outcast. Far away from what the proper people speak about, taxes and garage sales, the latest blog entry and the children's beauty pageants. What they talk about is life. No dangerous talk of death, or a plan for when you die.

That is left behind for the reckless.

Is this man reckless, he didn't seek death no, but he never lived your simple lifestyle. When he was faced with death he didn't run away in fear. He shook death's hand like an old friend.

In these last few months he was struggling. To properly walk, to feed himself. Death was in the corner, and I was there to watch it.

I used to be like all of you. Suburban moms with their own perfect fantasy world. I refuse to live a lie anymore. I want to be more like this man, the man without fear. The man who lived life not in fear of death, but lived life in awe of it.

Knowing that it was intertwined with life, that getting in a car was a dangerous mundane act that could end his life and even with that in mind he still decided to skydive. I never knew his name, but this last week with him, at his bedside keeping him company while he struggled to breathe with every single word from his mouth a magical one, was a blessing. I've learned so much, my eyes are open and I can say without a shadow of a doubt that I am better for it. He was a man with no fear, and if he can be I too will be *unafraid*.



Why do we have to fear our own deaths? For me death was a fear, yes, but I also knew it was a fact of life. Something that happens when you get old and wrinkly. Something that should come to people who had lived full happy lives. Eighty-five year olds or older.

I was young and naive and this is not the truth. I was faced with death of a friend when I was a Sophomore. She was in band with me and I'd known her since I was in sixth grade. Abby was only seventeen. Too young to even think about death. Too young to die.

However, she did pass, I went to her funeral, even stood at her graveside and in that moment I was faced with the truth that no one is immune to death.

Later that same year I was faced with death. I went into what is called ketoacidosis, which is an extremely fancy word for almost dying a horrible diabetes related death. I was whisked over to Children's Hospital in St. Louis and spent a day in the ICU, where to be perfectly honest I don't remember most of it. I was unresponsive for most of the time while I was within the ICU. Once I came to I was taken over to a regular room and that's where I stayed for a good three days. I went home on December twenty-third, just in time for Christmas.

I was lucky but I looked death right in the face and I was like, "hey homie, how ya doing this fine evening." Which, I can laugh about now because I am okay but at the time I was terrified, and my parents were terrified and my brother literally told me never to do that again. As if I had a choice when I died. Death happens, and I wasn't cool with that.

I was especially not cool with the fact that on June 20th my dad passed away. He had been in the hospital for a while before he had passed but I was hopeful, when people come home from the hospital they're healthy. When I woke up, he couldn't breathe and, if anyone knows my father he hates the hospital and he told my mom to call an ambulance. I was scared and they took him away. However, every other time my dad had gone to the hospital he'd been okay.

Then I got the call from my mom, he had passed away.

Was I shocked? Yes. Was I upset? Yes. Was I ready? No. However, after his death I realized that his suffering was over and I was kind-of happy for him. He was ready to go I believe and that became a big part of me finding the death positive movement and me not being afraid of death any longer.

What is death except a fact of life, whether you're "old enough" it'll happen. Talking about death is sad, and scary, and ultimately very morbid but do it. Do whatever you need to do to start feeling comfortable around death. Whatever that may be, start the death conversation.

Seeing your own last name on a giant head stone was terrifying for me, I don't want to die. I know it'll happen someday and my name will be on a headstone and people will be sad for me. Being death positive doesn't mean you won't be sad, or feel lost for a period of time. Just be ready and ***do not be afraid***.

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## Abstract Notes

### **Dear Oxygen Users:**

*My dear reader I felt worked first, and I wanted to make it laid back and silly. Looking at my title page my topic seems scary, or strange. I wanted to open this paper on a silly note that also gets people thinking*

### **Deathly Enthusiastic:**

*Directly right after the dear reader I wanted to open with a little history. What is a death positive person, and that just seems wild. Grab their attention and then teach them something, maybe they'll be interested in a death conversation.*

### **No Fear:**

*Simple as it sounds, I gave this a little bit of thought but in general I let my imagination run away with the page. Small little blurb of writing creativity.*

### **Playlist:**

*I truly love these songs and they get me thinking a little of death and the ones I love.*

### **Room Number 8:**

*This is one of my favorite parts of this entire poem, It's told in the perspective of death as he walks down a hospital corridor to a little boy's room. He's collecting the little boy after a tragic drunk driving accident and I truly think this piece has emotion, it was probably the one that took the longest for me to write and prefect the way I wanted it.*

### **How to Write a Death Plan:**

*What is a death plan and how do you write it? Well here you are, simple guidelines the way I have interpreted them.*

### **The Man Without Fear:**

*A monologue of a woman who spent the last dying week with a man who had a very unique outlook on life and its partnership with death. This almost flows into stream of consciousness for me.*

### **Picture Essay:**

*I just started writing after I chose this photo. I let the words pour out of me and I am extremely pleased with this outcome. Sometimes the things you find you write without any rules turn out to be another one of your favorites and this is definitely that for me.*