#DEATHtweet
A Well-Lived Life through 140 Perspectives on Death and Its Teachings

By Timothy Tosta

Foreword by Willie L. Brown Jr.
**Advance Praise**

“Like snowflakes, each tweet is unique, perfect. With death as a backdrop, the effect of their cascading one upon the other is breathtaking!”

**Megory Anderson, Author of ‘Sacred Dying’ and Founder and Executive Director of the Sacred Dying Foundation**

“In this beautiful book, the lessons are entirely about living—how to create happier, richer lives. Each tweet is lovely in itself and part of a fabric that moves me and makes me think differently about my own life.”

**Rick Foster, Co-author of ‘How We Choose to Be Happy’ and ‘Choosing Brilliant Health’**

“#DEATHtweet’ is haiku-like, plumbing great depths with few words. It captures the Zen essence of life and death with rare clarity. It is a shining jewel.”

**Suzanne Friedman D.M.Q., Author of ‘Heal Yourself with Qigong – Gentle Practices to Increase Energy, Restore Health, and Relax the Mind’**

“Tim opens his heart as a hospice volunteer at Laguna Honda Hospital. Through '#DEATHtweet,’ he shares his heart with the world.”

**Mivic Hirose, Executive Administrator, Laguna Honda Hospital, San Francisco**
“#DEATHtweet’—When I listen to another make sense of the wounded body, we both engage in an opportunity for healing and wholeness.”

The Rev. Will Hocker, Executive Director, Soujourn Chaplaincy at San Francisco General Hospital and Trauma Center

“Often we forget the importance of experiencing our lives. ‘#DEATHtweet’ is a poetic reminder of life’s tremendous meaning in and beyond the workplace.”

David Houston, Editor-in-Chief, Los Angeles Daily Journal and San Francisco Daily Journal

“These gems open the mind and heart with timeless wisdom. Whatever your concepts about death, savor this generous approach to being alive now.”

Roxanne Howe-Murphy, Author of ‘Deep Coaching’

“Tweeting about death is a provocative concept, but Tim uses this emerging literary form to good advantage. ‘#DEATHtweet’ is a thought-provoking, and ultimately inspiring, meditation on living well.”

Karen Janowski, Partner and Co-founder, EcoStrategy Group

“A thoroughly enjoyable read, filled with thought-provoking insights and profound observations about life and our relationships with those around us.”

Mohammed Kashani-Sabet M.D., Director, Melanoma Therapeutics Program, California Pacific Medical Center
“Extricating us from our daily vise of demands and chaos, ‘#DEATHtweet’ gives us the freedom to breathe deeply not only the life we live but the life we are capable of living.”

**Kurt Kicklighter, Managing Partner, Luce Forward**

“Each bite-size tweet speaks to that which is essential, in a vast topic, bringing us face to face with insight and an invitation to rich living.”

**Jim Marsden, Faculty Member, The Presencing Institute**

“‘#DEATHtweet’ powerfully and beautifully captures the complexities of what it means to be human: to love, to ache, to live, and, yes, to die.”

**Rev. Bruce Reyes-Chow, Pastor, Mission Bay Community Church, San Francisco**

“Ernest Hemingway wrote a short story in six words—‘For sale: baby shoes, never worn.’ ‘#DEATHtweet’ covers the tapestry of death and its approach in an equally provocative manner.”

**Bruce Spaulding, Senior Vice Chancellor, University of California, San Francisco**
DEDICATION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Nancy Martin, my spouse, has been my life partner, inspiration, conscience, and supporter for more than thirty-five years. None of what I do would be possible without her. Meredith, James, and Jillian—my extraordinary, unique, and talented children—give purpose and meaning to my life. My beloved mother, Barbara, and father, Alvin, have been my life’s support and models for everything competent, honest, and generous that I do.

My friends, collaborators, and colleagues are too numerous to name. To all of you, my most profound gratitude for making my extraordinary life possible.

Finally, to my many teachers, Dave, Eric, Frank, James, Joe, Manouso, Norman, Suzanne, Wendy, Willie, Michael, and so many others, I compliment your intelligence, compassion, generosity, and elegance.
#DEATH\:twet

**Why Did I Write This Book?**

My interest in death arose from a terminal cancer prognosis. That event transformed the past eighteen years of my life.

Over five years ago, I began working as a hospice volunteer at a public hospital.

My hospice experience and my further study of death led me to a simple, but profound, discovery which gave rise to this book.

Death is an extraordinary teacher. It teaches us how to live in our remaining time.

What I observe here is not the “truth.” It is what I believe, backed by some experience. You will have to decide what is true for yourself.

I try to live my life and conduct my legal career consistent with these teachings. But I also continue to explore and experiment. I expect to learn much more.

Please join me on this fantastic life journey.

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When I think about all the times Tim and I have strategized about law and politics, he never told me he knew so damn much about life. He walks his talk.

Willie L. Brown Jr., former Mayor of San Francisco (1996–2004) and Speaker of the California Assembly (1980–1995); Author of ‘Basic Brown: My Life and Our Times’
Birth and death bracket an extraordinary opportunity to live a life filled with purpose, meaning, balance, and happiness. Death is inevitable, and an essential consideration for a well-lived life.
Death is a certainty. Life until death is uncertain.

Death comes whether you are prepared for it or not.
3

At your death, your wealth, your power, and your loved ones cannot help you.

4

Truly living your life is the best preparation for death.
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A life without acknowledging death offers no framework to assess life’s meaning. A life lived in fear of death risks becoming a pointless distraction. Embracing death as an inevitable reality gives depth and meaning to life’s experiences.
While you are dying, there always are huge expanses of living available to you.

Each death follows its own unique path; every death offers the prospect of being a good one.
A good death follows a life of meaning. You can find meaning until your final breath.

Underneath all its noise and clatter, every life has meaning. Look for your meaning. It may be great or humble.
Your life’s meaning arises from you; it is not given to you by others.
Your awareness and curiosity lead you to your life’s meaning.
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11
As you maintain and nourish your curiosity, your life’s meaning evolves and deepens.

12
Your search for meaning involves your mind, your body, your emotions, and your spirit.
As you explore your life’s meaning, an amazing thing happens—your life comes into balance.
14

Your life’s meaning can become the sun around which your life orbits.

15

Balance is magic. You know your goals. You realize your intentions. You set your priorities.
In balance, you find happiness.

Happiness isn’t work; it’s non-work.
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Find meaning.
Find balance.
Find happiness.
19

Death has much to teach. Don’t leave its lessons to your final days. Embrace its teachings now and become truly alive.

20

It is never too late to consciously begin your extraordinary journey.
In my work with the dying, I witness common elements in the varied paths of transformation taken by those for whom I care. I have generalized these elements into lessons, which can help us live flourishing lives in our remaining time.
Death teaches you to live in profound change and to accept its inevitability.

Death teaches you to surrender to what you cannot control and to flourish in the abundance of what remains.
Death teaches you to abandon those perceptions that do not serve you.

Death teaches you to discover the beauty and meaning of the universe.
Death teaches you to see your inherent goodness and inextinguishable relationship to others.
Section IV
Living in Change: Riding the Waves

Change is a big deal. We delude ourselves into believing that stasis and stability are our goals. But the universe doesn’t operate that way. We cause ourselves untold pain and suffering by failing to embrace change as inevitable and welcome.
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By age 6, you create a narrative through which events in your world are interpreted and your actions are framed.
Absent a significant intervention, your narrative remains largely unchanged for the balance of your life.
Your childhood narrative finds expression as your personality.

During your life, change is constant and often imperceptible.
Dying is an accelerated, profound change. It challenges your narrative.
Fear of death can bias your memories, cloud your imagination, and color your mood.

Fear of death overrides your sense of self and awareness of your environment. You become lost without a map.
33

When you learn to find yourself, it won’t matter where you are. You can be here now!

34

Everyone experiences fear. You are not alone or unique.
Observe your fear. Make it the subject of your curiosity. The more you inquire into it, the less power it retains.
36

Use fear’s energy to create a plan for the balance of your life and to motivate you to follow it.

37

You have so much living to do. Why would you waste time on despair or hopelessness?
One problem with change is that you measure its magnitude and impact with a faulty device—your memory.

Your memories are not snapshots retrievable in the same condition as when you put them away.
Your memories are faulty because you attribute to them knowledge and emotions acquired after the fact.
You color your memories by where you choose to place your focus.

Your mood shapes your memories as your memories shape your mood.
Put your attention on memories that are uplifting. Find your best memories to evoke calm, eliminate boredom, and relieve pain.
Use your memories as a resource; let them enliven and support you. Let them lift your mood.

Remember that your survival is not about living forever; it’s about living consciously, meaningfully, and lovingly.
Anticipating change, such as death, is a problem because you rely on a defective device—your imagination.

Your imagination is not particularly imaginative, which is why the imagined future looks so much like the present.
Your imagination fails to recognize that things can look different, and much better, once they happen.

Use your imagination to explore new opportunities presented by the changes occurring in your life.
50
What extraordinary life can you plan, in the face of changed circumstances?

51
What will arise as you let go of your former life’s many obligations? Can you greet each new moment as a friend?
Can you make time expand if you are no longer governed by the clock?
When you no longer can change a situation, you always can change yourself.
Section V

Control: Accept, Surrender, and Flourish

Another obstacle that prevents us from realizing life’s fullness is our desire for control. On the whole, much of what we seek to control is uncontrollable and unnecessary. We can transform the energy we invest in our quest for control into seeking a more life-fulfilling purpose.
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You love to exercise control. Your desire to control is so rewarding that you often act as though you can control the uncontrollable.
In dying, you are awash in what you no longer control—driving, walking, eating, bathing, thinking, and breathing.

Can you accept where you are, surrender to what you cannot control, and flourish in the remaining abundance?
Strive for three things: spaciousness, awareness, and curiosity.
Spaciousness is created by quieting down your mind and body.

Yoga, meditation, Qi Gong, Tai Chi, listening to or playing music, walking in nature, all offer opportunities for spaciousness.
60

Awareness arises from the spaciousness that you create.

61

With spacious awareness, your entire being becomes alive to knowing, without thinking and without judgment.
Curiosity is how you put the gift of awareness to work.
Curiosity asks—“What is this moment teaching me about myself, about others, and about the world?”

Pain is a control issue. Pain is real. But it is magnified by fear.
65

Boredom and agitation are forms of pain.

66

You can become curious about pain. Observe it with detachment to loosen its grip.
When pain arises, breathe. Focus on your breath. Slow down.

Can you engage your painful situation as if you were learning a new skill? Can you become an exceptional performer?
69

Inventory your life’s resources. What has given you joy, energy, inspiration, and tenacity? Draw on these now.

70

If this part of your life were a sport, how would you get “in shape” to play?
Can you become the best performer ever in your life’s sport?

Think, analyze, and formulate a program. Break things down into manageable tasks and achievable goals. Allow yourself to succeed.
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Celebrate your successes. Count your blessings. Make another plan.
You may not be able to control a situation that causes you suffering, but you still can change your attitude toward it.
Section VI

Perception: Seeing the World through Many Different Windows

We view the world through the lens of our narrative. Our narrative is like a filter. It distorts and obscures life’s glory and creativity. Removing our filters enlivens our experiences.
Your life’s narrative circumscribes the nature of your perceptions.

Perceptions are portraits, not photographs. Perceptions reveal your artistry, framed by your narrative.
You can weave together a compelling tapestry of memory, imagination, and perception. But often it is very inaccurate.
Dying presents an extraordinary opportunity to shift perspectives.

Listen to your narrative. How are you perceiving yourself and the world?
80

Slow down. Engage your curiosity and ask of your narrative “Is this true?”

81

Have faith in your ability to perceive life anew, in its fullest dimensions.
Boundaries are lines that you draw to separate yourself from what frightens you. Beliefs and judgments are often boundaries.
You imagine that your beliefs and judgments protect you. But, they also distance you from yourself and the world.
84

How would your world change if you eliminated the beliefs and judgments that no longer serve you?

85

What wonders do you not experience because of your boundaries?
Drop the boundary between “you” and “your body,” particularly if you suffer from disease or disability. It only causes untold suffering.
Love your body in its current state. Become fully aware of its quality, complexity, subtlety, and mystery.
Your body is your receiver from and your transmitter to the world. Get to know it. Get to know you. Get to know the world.
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Section VII

Discovery: More and Better than You Ever Imagined

We spend so much of our life’s energy resisting change, maintaining control, and holding on to our perceptions that we fail to see, let alone appreciate, the wonder of our lives and the splendor of the universe. Transforming this energy into discovery admits us to a boundless, lush, and flourishing universe.
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Celebrate that you are choosing life over death today. Recognize that today you will live well, even under extraordinary circumstances.
90

Life is a path, not a goal. How will you adapt today to follow that ever-changing pathway?

91

How calm can you be? How aware? How deep can you wonder?
What can you invent—a technique, design, or strategy—to enliven your circumstance?
With awareness, you discover that there are as many different views as there are observers.

Suspend your judgment. You will discover new perspectives and realities.
Can you become open to all the world’s magnificence? Can you pray to all the majesty before you, even if you don’t have a God?
You have a unique opportunity to engage the wonder, beauty, and oneness of the universe. Will you accept it?
Can you make your life, at this time, so rich that you don’t need to be rescued?

Is it possible for you to find opportunity in adversity; to discover that setbacks are just a “reset” to replay the game?
99
You have the ability to rewrite your life’s narrative. How do you want it to go?

100
Can you find a way to see your current experience as an incredible gift?
101

Don’t forget the power of humor to open your eyes to new discoveries. What do you take seriously that is just silly?
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Time and again, the hospice residents confirm to me that it is only in relationship with others that life acquires meaning. It is so obvious, yet so masked by all the noise and clatter of our minds and bodies. You have to get quiet to make this discovery. You have to be aware. You have to be curious. You have to be generous.
As you transition through life, you always benefit from a community of support.
Every healthy relationship is mutual. As you receive support, you provide to the other the opportunity to give support.

Helping someone else is life fulfilling. It gets you out of yourself.
Support yourself by relinquishing self-judgment and offering self-forgiveness.
Forgive others.
Granting forgiveness frees you of your narrative and opens access to your meaning.
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People have perfectly good reasons for behavior you consider negative. Until proven otherwise, assume good intentions.
Feelings are facts to the person experiencing them. Don’t deny anyone that reality.

Suspending judgment offers you the opportunity to build relationships.
Search out those who enliven you. Be curious about those toxic to you.
111
Approach every human interaction with empathy and generosity.

112
You don’t build and sustain relationships by controlling others, but by changing yourself in relation to them.
Listening to others gives you the opportunity to see the world through their eyes, allowing potential for understanding and creativity.
Giving your attention and understanding makes others feel validated and valued.
Listening is an extraordinary gift that you give.
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Genuine listening suspends your narrative. You exist for the other person. The essence of good listening is empathy.
To listen, suspend your preoccupation with yourself and enter into the experience of the other.
To be an authentic listener, you must see your conversational partner as an equal.

Allow silence so that the speaker's deeper thoughts may surface.
In listening, you are most reactive to the things you secretly accuse yourself of. Listen to learn about yourself.
Most people won’t really listen to you until they are convinced you’ve heard and appreciated them.

It isn’t so much what you say as how you say it that determines whether or not you are heard.
Use stories to help you find your meaning. They deliver wisdom that surpasses logic.
124

A story is as close as you get to taking someone else for a walk in your shoes.

125

Another’s story might teach you something or allow the other to relinquish the story because you have heard it.
No one really knows you. They draw conclusions from their experience of you, your stories, and the stories about you.
Listen carefully—what story are you telling?

When you can truly listen to others and hear their stories, relationships are created.
A well-lived life is one filled with relationships in which you serve others.
As your relationships grow, you find more opportunities for your generosity.

Your generosity is always reciprocated by the world. You just won’t know how or when.
With each new relationship, you share a piece of who you are, and you receive a piece of someone else.
Through your many relationships, you contribute yourself to all of humanity as all of humanity contributes to you.
Through relationships, you become “immortal,” as your contributions are carried from one to another in an endless chain.
As your awareness grows, you are conscious of your every interaction. You give the world your kindness, compassion, and generosity.
Section IX

Death’s Five Lessons:
Coming Full Circle

By properly addressing change, control, perception, discovery, and relationship, we are offered an extraordinary opportunity to create a life that flourishes in the time available to us.
136

As you recognize change is inevitable, you are free to use elsewhere the energy formerly devoted to resisting it.

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As you learn that control is largely an illusion, you accept what is and flourish in its abundance.
As you learn that your perceptions are creatures of lifelong habits, you are released to pursue endless, creative opportunities.

As you discover memory’s distortions, imagination’s failings, and perception’s filters, you fall into awareness, appreciating the present.
As you live in awareness, pursue curiosity, and embrace generosity, you see life’s meaning arising from your relation to others.
Afterword

My favorite book on guitar instruction is ‘The Advancing Guitarist’ by Mick Goodrick. He develops the notion of the “unitar,” a single-stringed instrument, which you must fully master before proceeding to the five remaining strings.

THINKaha books are like the unitar, capturing something profound, like death, and attempting to convey it masterfully through a self-limited instrument.

By the way, I don’t claim any mastery. Perhaps, I’ll never achieve it. But I stand in awe of the mastery of concision, of flow, of profundity which is offered by the THINKaha book format.

‘#DEATHtweet Book 02’ will begin where this leaves off, giving guidance, perspective, and support to the loved one, caregiver, or friend of another in the end of life process. Like this volume, it is about life’s fulfillment. Death only offers a framework.
A Well-Lived Life through 140 Perspectives on Death and Its Teachings
About the Author

Timothy Tosta is a 61-year-young Santa Cruz native, now residing in San Mateo, California. He also is one of California’s leading land use and environmental lawyers. At the age of 41, Tim was given a two-year survival prognosis as a consequence of a misdiagnosed melanoma, which had gone untreated for six years. Then the parent of three children under the age of nine, Tim was determined to find his life’s purpose and to live consciously and conscientiously in accordance with it. He studied psychology, philosophy, religion, neuroscience, human and organizational development; undertook the practices of yoga, meditation, and Qi Gong; and eventually found his way into public service as a hospice volunteer, trained by the Zen Hospice Project, at ward C-2 of San Francisco’s Laguna Honda Hospital.
Tim is a very amateur musician, playing a wide variety of stringed instruments. He delights in entertaining his hospice friends with his own poor renditions of Tin Pan Alley, country, bluegrass, and folk tunes.

In 2006, Tim began writing about his hospice experiences and lecturing to legal, business, and community groups about the changes to his life and legal practice wrought by the hospice work. In 2007, Tim undertook training to become an Integral Coach through New Ventures West and received his certification in 2008. Tim coaches lawyers and business colleagues to live balanced, fulfilled lives.

Tim contributes regularly to the *Daily Journal*, California’s leading daily legal news publication, as well as to other magazines and journals. He is a frequent speaker before state and national conferences in the legal, real estate, and business communities.