

To the Graduate Council:

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THE EFFECT OF DEATH AWARENESS ON THE PROTAGONISTS
OF SELECTED ADOLESCENT NOVELS

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Education
Degree
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Mary Lord Beasley
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DEDICATION

This study is lovingly dedicated to the memory of my father, Allen Edward Lord, whose untimely death in 1971 created a need in my own life for a better understanding of the topic of this study.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was twofold: to determine if contemporary novels of adolescence were depicting death in realistic rather than romantic or idealistic terms and to determine the role that death played in the maturation process of the adolescent protagonists in these works. The purpose of this study rested on three assumptions: (1) that a realistic acceptance of death is a necessary step in the adolescent's maturation process; (2) that adolescent novels which portray death realistically can serve as useful models for adolescent readers; (3) that a study of such adolescent works would help teachers and researchers in this field by providing them with specific insights into the psychology of death and dying in relationship to adolescent maturation.

Based on lists suggested by experts on adolescent fiction, the following works were analyzed in terms of their treatment of the death and dying theme: Paul Annixter's Swiftwater, Paul Zindel's Pardon Me, You're Stepping on My Eyeball, James Lincoln Collier and Christopher Collier's My Brother Sam Is Dead, Richard E. Peck's Something for Joey, Lois Lowry's A Summer to Die, Judith Guest's Ordinary People, John Gunther's Death Be Not Proud, Doris Lund's Eric, Norma Klein's Sunshine, and Gunnel Beckman's Admission to the Feast. For purpose of analysis, these works were divided into three categories: books dealing with the death of a parent, the death of a brother or sister, and the death of the adolescent protagonist himself.

As background preparation for this analysis, the author researched and presented a broad overview of the following areas:

(1) adolescent literature as a genre, (2) the general subject of death, (3) adolescent novels with a death theme, and (4) death education for adolescents in the school.

From the analysis of the ten works of adolescent fiction, the following observations were made: (1) there seemed to exist a definite correlation between death acceptance and personal growth on the part of the adolescent protagonists; (2) repressed fears of death and dying tended to surface in other ways; (3) religious or philosophical support systems could help in some families; (4) support was given through extended families; (5) training in altered states of consciousness and symbolic confrontations with death helped some of the protagonists deal with the death experience; (6) many characters were able to share the death experience with the dying.

Adolescents in these novels faced quite an array of problems. In some cases, for example, the death of a brother or sister caused feelings of guilt over past rivalry or over surviving. In other cases the strain of the day-to-day witnessing of the dying process and final death of a family member was devastating for the survivors. Adolescents, who themselves were dying, faced a multitude of problems such as the lack of communication with family, friends, or medical staff.

The conclusion was reached that the death experience is being handled openly and honestly in works of interest to adolescents, as witnessed in the ten accounts analyzed in this study. The suggestion was made that since adolescents need vicarious experiences and are

intellectually and emotionally, for the most part, ready to have these experiences, death education should be a part of the English curriculum.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

William Hugh Agee, in his dissertation on the adolescent initiation theme, observed that in modern Western society there is no formal and satisfactory initiation rite through which adolescents can safely pass into adulthood and maturity. One purpose of adolescent novels has been to provide, although vicariously, a variety of identity crisis situations from which the adolescent reader can draw insights that might help him in his own struggle for growth and identity. In trying to pin down specific factors indigenous to the maturation process of adolescents, Robert Havighurst listed the following eight conditions: discovery and adjustment to culturally acceptable sex roles, development of new and satisfactory relationships with peer groups, achieving an easy relationship with member of opposite sex, acceptance of physical change in the body, changing relationship with parents, earning money, finding their life's work, and becoming aware of their own values. Richard Abrahamson has added to this list the exposure to and acceptance of death as being of extreme importance to the adolescent's struggle for adult maturity. Today more than ever, psychologists are arguing that a realistic coming to grips with death and dying is an essential element of mental health, not only for adolescents, but for all of us. All too often, the subject of death has been swept under the carpet, but repression of the subject does not really do away with the problem. Psychologists have pointed out how our repressed fear of death may surface in other ways and how the repression leaves us unprepared for the reality of death that faces all

of us sooner or later in one form or another—the death of a friend or a relative or the prospect of our own death when we become seriously ill. Psychologists such as Kubler-Ross have argued that a more mature attitude toward death is incumbent upon those of us who wish, above all else, to live a full and rewarding life.

For the adolescent, in a death struggle of his own, a kind of struggle in which the child within is dying even as the adult struggles to emerge—to such an adolescent, an understanding and an acceptance of death are absolutely essential if he is to become a self-fulfilled and mentally healthy human being capable of taking on the tasks of adult responsibility in today's complex and challenging society. Therefore, writers of adolescent fiction should be including in their work a realistic treatment of this all-important subject of death.

The present study proposes to examine the role of death in the maturation process of certain contemporary adolescent protagonists. An assumption is that a realistic and holistic acceptance of death (as a natural part of life) is necessary in order for an adolescent to grow and develop as a human being. By contrast, the inability to face and cope with the reality of death is regarded as a serious stumbling block on the adolescent's road to maturity. Put another way, the purpose of this study is to answer the following question: What, in the contemporary adolescent novel, is the relationship between the adolescent's perception and awareness of death, on the one hand, and on the other hand, the adolescent's manifest ability to grow and achieve meaningful personal identity?

Another question might be, "Why study death in literature rather than in social or medical sciences, or in religion or philosophy?" Religions and philosophies have probed the mysteries surrounding the meaning of life, trying for answers to basic questions of why we are here on earth and why we die. Comfort comes in many forms—preparation for a grander existence in an afterlife, reincarnation, Valhalla, Nirvana, Heaven, Process, Nothingness. Literature has its place because it has always shown us how to die. We need concrete examples to guide us, to let us vicariously experience our own deaths. Antigone showed us how to die for a cause greater than ourselves. Though violence was performed offstage, the Greeks provided many violent models: Medea murdering her children, Clytemnestra killing Agamemnon, Achilles' friend Patroclus' body being desecrated. Modern literature examines self-inflicted death in Sylvia Plath's The Bell Jar and Albee's Zoo Story. Community ritualistic death unfolds in Jackson's "The Lottery," or Miller's The Crucible. Our modern children are capable of causing death in The Lord of the Flies, or they can suffer from the death of another as in To Kill a Mockingbird.

Antigone is not the only one who has a cause to die for. Many die in the struggle for a better way of life, as the homesteaders in Giants in the Earth and the Okies in The Grapes of Wrath. Many Romantics died fighting for freedom, as in many Hemingway stories (A Farewell to Arms). While some heroes "rage, rage," others "Go Gently" as did Billy Budd. One of the most detailed experiments in death is Raskolnikov's murder of the pawnbroker in Crime and Punishment, an experiment in living above the law, an experiment that

tells us who has the right to decide on the right to live of individuals in a society, the right to live above the law. Many heroes suffer through the death of a loved one, causing high romance as in Emily Bronte's Wuthering Heights, Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby and Hemingway's For Whom the Bell Tolls. The Existentialists show us the absurdity of death in The Stranger or The Plague. Poe shows us the bizarre in the way we die. The list is endless and the makings for a book in itself, but the point has been made. Literature gives us models that we need, and the adolescent finds his models in his own literature. Swift's struldbuggs (immortals) live forever in Gulliver's Travels, but the readers do not. They look for ways to accept death and dying, therefore making their lives more meaningful.

Research for this study will be drawn from three areas: literature on the definition and evolution of the adolescent novel; literature on the general topic of death and dying; and literature dealing specifically with the death-and-dying theme as it has been treated in the adolescent novel.

The novels used for analysis in this paper were suggested by three authorities in the field of adolescent literature: Dwight Burton, Alleen Pace Nilsen, and Robert Small. From their suggested lists I have taken the following ten works: Paul Annixter's Swiftwater, Paul Zindel's Pardon Me, You're Stepping on My Eyeball, James Lincoln Collier and Christopher Collier's My Brother Sam Is Dead, Richard E. Peck's Something for Joey, Lois Lowry's A Summer to Die, Judith Guest's Ordinary People, John Gunther's Death Be Not Proud, Doris Lund's Eric, Norma Klein's Sunshine, and Gunnel Beckman's Admission to the Feast.

The death of the father is central to the theme of Swiftwater and Pardon Me, You're Stepping on My Eyeball; the death of a brother is central to My Brother Sam Is Dead, Something for Joey, and Ordinary People; the death of a sister dominates A Summer to Die. Parents record the deaths of their children in Death Be Not Proud and Eric, whereas young people themselves speak of their own deaths in Sunshine and Admission to the Feast.

The research plan for the study is as follows: Chapter I will introduce the topic and explain the rationale of the study; Chapter II will contain an overview of related literature; Chapter III will contain an analysis of specific novels in which the death of a parent is the key factor in the adolescent's experience with death; Chapter IV will examine specific novels in which the death-and-dying theme hinges on the death of a sister or brother; Chapter V will probe the protagonist's anticipation of his or her own death, and Chapter VI will contain a brief summary of the study's conclusions as well as suggestions for future research on the topic.

CHAPTER II

A REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Our society has created the adolescent and suspended him in time, waiting for the availability of his place in the sun. Since older people are living and working longer, there is no space for the adolescent in the adult world, and he is made to wait until a later age than did his forefathers to assume adult roles and responsibilities. He also remains a responsibility of the adult community, having few choices or experiences to make for himself. His suspended position occurs at an age when "he wants to know," but since he is not allowed "to know" or find out many things first hand, he must satisfy his curiosity through vicarious experiences, many of which are provided for him by current adolescent literature whose topical themes catch his attention.

G. Robert Carlsen in Books and the Teen-Age Reader defines the adolescent novel as:

. . . a book written by a serious writer for the teen-age reader. The writer tries to evoke through his use of words the feelings and emotions, the triumphs and failures, the tensions and releases, that people in the age group of twelve to twenty normally experience.¹

In the introduction to Young Adult Literature in the Seventies: A Selection of Readings, Jana Varlejs, after asking what adolescent literature is, provides a broad definition:

¹G. Robert Carlsen, Books and the Teen-Age Reader (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, Inc., 1967), p. 45.

It is not necessarily adolescent, nor—with some rare exceptions—is it literature in the strictest sense. Definitions vary from the narrow one of "junior novel" to the inclusive one of "anything kids read."²

William Hugh Agee, in his dissertation, "The Initiation Theme in Selected Modern American Novels of Adolescents," states that, according to James W. Johnson, the twentieth century invented the adolescent protagonist. He quotes Johnson:

It is the unique achievement of the twentieth-century writer to have attained the perspective of the adolescent mind, an intellect lacking both the innocence of childhood and the pragmatic acceptance of adulthood.³

According to G. Robert Carlsen (who defines the age of late adolescence as the period between the ages of sixteen and eighteen), the reading interests of this group reflect the need to know more about what it is to be an adult, for the reading interests include the search for personal values, the socially significant theme, the strange and unusual human experience, and the transition into adult life. According to Carlsen:

As the young reader matures, he seems to have an almost insatiable hunger to find out exactly what a human being is capable of, especially under unusual circumstances.⁴

²Jana Varlejs, Young Adult Literature in the Seventies: A Selection of Readings (Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1978), p. vii.

³William Hugh Agee, "The Initiation Theme in Selected Modern American Novels of Adolescence" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Florida State University, 1966), p. 43.

⁴Carlsen, p. 30.

During this period of suspension, adolescent literature, according to Louise Rosenblatt, can help the adolescent become "assimilated into the cultural pattern":⁵

Just as the young child and the adolescent acquire images of behavior and ways of thinking and feeling from the actions and lives of the people about them, so they may assimilate such images from the experience offered by books—from sharing the emotions and ideas of the poet, from participating in the lives of the people created by the novelist, the dramatist, or the biographer. The child and the adolescent often learn from books the culturally appropriate emotional response to types of situations or people.⁶

Since his direct experience may be limited because of his dependent role, the adolescent may find he is offered "a release from the provincialism of time and space"⁷ through his reading. He may have a variety of vicarious experiences through literature that help him transcend his family, place, social and economic situation, for ". . . literature offers an important source of awareness of possible alternatives."⁸

Since his vicarious experiences during this period help provide much of his knowledge of the adult world, the adolescent needs books that deal openly and fairly with his interests:

. . . today, the need is not only for challenge but also for the frank treatment of themes that may lead beyond rejection toward affirmation of new and more satisfactory attitudes.⁹

⁵Louise Rosenblatt, Literature as Exploration (New York: Noble and Noble, Publishers, Inc., 1968), p. 187.

⁶Rosenblatt, p. 187.

⁷Rosenblatt, p. 193.

⁸Rosenblatt, p. 193.

⁹Rosenblatt, p. 209.

Whether or not these themes should be offered through adult or adolescent literature, the classics or popular literature, depends on the intellectual and emotional readiness of the reader:

. . . the test of what books the child or adolescent should read is his intellectual and emotional readiness for what they offer. The classics will be more appropriate than some esoteric contemporary author, but in many cases comparatively recent works will speak more profoundly and constructively to the boy and girl than will much "greater" works of the past.¹⁰

Just as the adolescent has his own music, his own uniform, and his own language, so, too, does he have his own literature—mainly paperbacks on topics that appeal to him. This adolescent literature can provide rich emotional experiences, present a variety of attitudes toward and treatment of serious topics, show various serious alternatives in given situations, and map out cultural pathways, acceptable or not, into our culture. Such literature can satisfy the adolescent's need to know and hone his perception of the world.

According to Kenneth Donelson and Beverly Haley, the English teacher needs to read adolescent literature, especially if the teacher is going to criticize it. They also point out that adolescent literature has produced some well-written books, and recommend using this literature in the classroom because it is familiar to the students, because it is useful and usable, and because it is fun and fast reading.¹¹

¹⁰Rosenblatt, p. 222.

¹¹Kenneth L. Donelson and Beverly A. Haley, "Adolescent Literature: You Mean That Garbage Written for Kids Who Can't Read?" Young Adult Literature in the Seventies: A Selection of Readings (Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, 1978), pp. 3-8.

A problem of a different kind appears even after we decide to take adolescent literature seriously, for many present-day reading lists show few, if any, of the popular adolescent novel titles. Margaret Mann's The Reading Habits of Adults, published in 1977, even shows several titles that suggest that young people do not need adolescent fiction. George W. Norvell in The Reading Interests of Young People, published in 1973, the American Library Association's "Outstanding Fiction for the College Bound" list and "Suggested Precollege Reading," published in 1970 by the New England Association of Teachers of English, show few popular adolescent novel titles. Help in finding a list of adolescent novels can come from the authorities in the field of adolescent literature, authorities such as Dwight Burton of Florida State University, or from a list of titles in such books as Simmons, Shafer, and West's Decisions About the Teaching of English (1976), Daniel Fader's The New Hooked on Books (1976) or Robin L. Carr's Death, Children, and Books. Other sources include the Alan Review, classroom book club lists, such as that provided by Scholastics, or paperback publishers' catalogues. Once such sources are discovered, a world of information can be found on any topic to be explored in the adolescent novel.

Frank Ross recommends the Scholastic book clubs as well as the books grouped by theme put out by Scholastic, Bantam, and the American Book Company. He states:

As education historians in years to come look back for the culprits of change, they're going to have to beat a

path to the doors of paperback publishers, paperback distributors, and imaginative teachers, as well as the assertive students.¹²

Since adolescent literature provides vicarious experiences for its young readers, it becomes a valuable medium for opening up thoughts on a serious subject—death and dying. Reading about various ideas on this topic will help the young person broaden his perception and show him alternative views, but it mainly opens up a previously taboo subject for him to think about. According to Rosenblatt:

Vicariously experiencing the life of a character in fiction or participating in another's emotion expressed in a poem may enable the reader to bring into consciousness similar elements in his own nature and emotional life. This may provide the basis for a release from unconscious fears and guilt. (p. 201)

Frequently literature is the means by which the youth discovers that his own inner life reflects a common experience of others in his society. He finds that the impulses and reactions he feared are "normal," that they are shared by many others in our society, and that there may merely be a convention (or a conspiracy) of silence about them. In this way, a particular poem or an autobiographical novel may provide liberation from blind fears or guilt.¹³

An interesting reminder comes from C. Carmichael in the Arizona English Bulletin: "When speaking of the subject of death in literature for young adults, we are not dealing with a strictly 'vicarious' experience, but rather one which is an inevitable reality!"¹⁴ Victor

¹²Frank Rose, "The Paperback Revolution," Young Adult Literature in the Seventies: A Selection of Readings, p. 402.

¹³Rosenblatt, p. 204.

¹⁴Carolyn Carmichael, "The Last Taboo in Literature for the Adolescent Reader—Gone!" Arizona English Bulletin, April 1976, vol. 18, no. 3, p. 83.

Hugo, John Langone reminds us, said, "All men . . . are condemned to death. It is only the date of execution that is uncertain."¹⁵ As stated earlier, themes must be treated openly and fairly in adolescent literature. One study on the treatment of death in children's literature by Lawrence A. Bailis found, in a review of children's books dealing with death, that death was presented directly, but, "A majority of books present death as temporary, while no book expressed the view that death is the end of all existence."¹⁶ Richard P. Abrahamson, in "The Ultimate Developmental Task in Adolescent Literature," lists eight tasks described by Robert Havighurst seen necessary to be performed by the adolescent as he passes into adulthood. Abrahamson adds a ninth task, the ultimate one as he sees it, that of "an experience that deals with death and the acceptance of that death."¹⁷ He later goes on to say that "The acceptance of death appears to be the ultimate developmental task in literature for the adolescent."¹⁸ He feels that the adolescent who cannot accept the reality of death remains a child.

Though there are few books on adolescents and death, there are many books dealing in general with death. Many start with a definition

¹⁵John Langone, Death Is a Noun: A View of the End of Life (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1972), p. 51.

¹⁶Lawrence A. Bailis, "Death in Children's Literature: A Conceptual Analysis," Omega, vol. 8, 1977-1978, p. 299.

¹⁷Richard F. Abrahamson, "The Ultimate Developmental Task in Adolescent Literature" (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of HEW, Educational Resources Information Center, Eric Report). A study originally prepared at the University of Houston, 1978, p. 10.

¹⁸Richard F. Abrahamson, p. 11.

of death itself and then give an explanation of the definition since this, itself, is a controversial issue. John Langone in Death Is a Noun discusses three types of death: organic, cellular, and death of the being (spiritual death). The biologist Lyall Watson in The Romeo Error also discusses various types of death but goes further in his investigation by stating: ". . . the differences between life and death are blurred by our current inability to define either state with any clarity."¹⁹ Later, he elaborates:

What we have called death is merely a change of state, often temporary and sometimes curable. Death on its own has no clinical, logical, or biological reality and exists only as a construct with validity in interpersonal relationships.²⁰

Watson concludes his argument with this fascinating statement:

To the scientist and mystic alike, life is divisible. It consists of the dynamic processes of generation, growth, degeneration, and death in matter, all according to the established laws of thermodynamics as they apply to normal space-time. But it also consists of other processes that do not necessarily obey the same laws.²¹

Finally, two interesting quotes from Alan Watts may show a different approach to the definition of death: "Death is a tremendous release from monotony."²² And, "To live we need space, and space is a kind of nothingness, and death is a kind of nothingness—it's all the same principle."²³

¹⁹ Lyall Watson, The Romeo Error (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1974), p. 18.

²⁰ Watson, p. 84.

²¹ Watson, p. 220.

²² Alan Watts, Death (Millbrae, California: Celestial Arts, 1975), p. 35.

²³ Watts, p. 51.

After trying to define their topic, writers like Langone and Hendin, both medical journalists, discuss various issues such as the actual occurrence of death, abortion, capital punishment, murder, suicide, transplants, euthanasia, and the Cryonics Society.

John Langone reminds us, rather poetically, that

Death comes to everything that lives. Of that we can be sure. . . . Death is a part of life, and one cannot be without the other. It is the other side of the coin, the other bank of the river, the only medicine for the fatal illness we know as life. . . . It is the sentence that hangs over man's head from the moment he is born.²⁴

Not only is there absolute death itself, but there are various types of death, such as partial death and social death. Robert Jay Lifton in Living and Dying describes partial death in this way:

When a new formulation of self and world is not attained (and is perhaps not attainable), life constricts; sensitivities dull and become numb. Such psychic numbing is itself a form of death, a partial death that protects one from a reality too hard to face and too chaotic to formulate.²⁵

Not only existential zeroes come to mind with this definition, but people whom the world has beaten down, people whom we personally know, those who fear, unlike Ulysses or Hemingway's Santiago, to go beyond bounds, those who cannot learn to swim because they cannot let go the side of the pool, the ones who would rather watch the parade than be a part of it. Time once named the middle class American male who goes to work each day of his life and returns home to suburbia each night as the new hero. One wonders if he, too, is partially dead.

²⁴Langone, p. 11.

²⁵Robert Jay Lifton and Eric Olson, Living and Dying (New York: Bantam Books, 1974), p. 123.

Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, in Questions on Death and Dying, discusses social death and gives examples of it, such as some cases of elderly people who are released from the hospital to a nursing home. Not returning to the familiar home environment can be death for these people.²⁶ Those older people who give up their homes and move to safe public housing or to a warmer climate may also suffer social death. Joan Baez captured the lack of joy and the alienation of old people in her song "Hello in There" from her album Diamonds and Rust. Unlike nature, represented by the oak that grows stronger and the river that grows wider as they grow older, the old couple of her song stagnates after moving to a city apartment. Their children are scattered or dead. It does not matter why their son was lost in the Korean War any more, and the news simply repeats itself for them. They have degenerated to the point of being happy when a stranger walking by speaks to them—not much to live for.

Whereas the definition of death, the topics discussed in connection with it, and the types of death are interesting, the vital issue in the problem of this subject seems to lie in our fear and denial of death. John Lagone observes:

The denial of our own deaths is the same kind of denial we summon up when a loved one dies. Grieving, we lean on euphemisms, and we say things like "He's passed away" or "She's with the angels" or "She's sleeping." We might comfort ourselves and others with such remarks as "It's

²⁶ Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, Questions and Answers on Death and Dying (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1974), p. 146.

all for the best" or "His suffering is over" or "She lived a good life, even though it was short."²⁷

Ernest Becker begins his discussion of death in The Denial of Death by stating:

. . . the idea of death, the fear of it, haunts the human animal like nothing else; it is a mainspring of human activity—activity designed largely to avoid the fatality of death, to overcome it by denying in some way that it is the final destiny of man.²⁸

The first question in a discussion of this fear and denial might begin with "why." Becker describes two opposing viewpoints. One side feels that such a fear is innate. William James, Max Scheler, and Becker himself belong to this group. The opposing group feels that the human being is taught fear of death. If a child has good nurturing, he will not fear death, for, according to Lyall Watson:

This fear is manifest only in adults and older children, and then only when they have time to think about it. There is absolutely no evidence to suggest that such fear is a natural and inevitable part of our dying behavior.²⁹

Langone would also agree, as he sees our fear of death depending on "our cultural and religious beliefs, our attitudes toward life and the living, and our general emotional health. . . ."³⁰ How religion helps the individual deal with his fears of death, according to Langone, depends on the individual's personal makeup.³¹ A belief in an afterlife does not necessarily mean a serene death.³²

²⁷Langone, p. 44.

²⁸Ernest Becker, The Denial of Death (New York: The Free Press, 1973), p. x.

²⁹Watson, p. 65.

³⁰Langone, p. 41.

³¹Langone, p. 41.

³²Langone, p. 41.

Whether innate or learned, the problem remains and "why" has many answers. Lifton thinks that "Our lack of meaningful rituals and beliefs makes dying the more desperate and fearsome, and impoverishes life as well."³³ And as a note on our denial of death, Lifton quotes Arnold Toynbee: ". . . death is un-American,"³⁴ and Freud: ". . . man cannot imagine his own death,"³⁵ and LaRochefoucauld: "One cannot look directly at either the sun or death."³⁶ Elisabeth Kubler-Ross would agree with Freud. In On Death and Dying she argued that, ". . . in our unconscious, death is never possible in regard to ourselves. It is inconceivable for our unconscious to imagine an actual ending of our own life here on earth. . . ."³⁷ She also pointed out that we deny death today because it is "more lonely, mechanical, and dehumanized. . . ."³⁸

Langone states that among living things, man alone knows that he will die. Langone thinks that because man knows he will die, he, therefore, fears death, but what man fears most is the dying itself, "the relentless process in which he passes into extinction, alone and helpless and despairing."³⁹ Man, according to Langone, denies his death and will not discuss its possibility, but he tries desperately to control it;

³³Lifton, p. 11.

³⁴Lifton, p. 19.

³⁵Lifton, p. 25.

³⁶Lifton, p. 25.

³⁷Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, On Death and Dying (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1969), p. 2.

³⁸Kubler-Ross, On Death and Dying, p. 8.

³⁹Langone, pp. 11-12.

Unable to bear the thought of ceasing to be, he comforts himself with thoughts of a pleasant afterlife in which he is rewarded for his trials on earth, or he builds monuments to himself to perpetuate at least his memory if not his body.⁴⁰

In Western and Eastern thought, there seems to be a dramatic difference in the respective approaches to death. According to the Grofs in Beyond Death, Westerners have not always denied death. They were alienated from "the fundamental biological aspects of existence"⁴¹ by the Industrial Revolution. Before the Industrial Revolution there was a religious or philosophical system that helped people transcend death. There was training in altered states of consciousness and symbolic confrontations with death. The authors state:

The approach of death is faced in the nourishing context of the extended family, clan, or tribe, and with its support—sometimes even with specific and expert guidance through the successive stages of dying.⁴²

The authors, in their continued discussion of the Western approach to death and dying, claim that, because of a lack of a holistic approach to life and death, the dying are seen as losers. The authors continue:

Contemporary medicine has been indulging in technological wizardry and over-specialized body mechanics, and has lost the holistic point of view characteristic of healing. Its approach to the dying is dominated by a determined effort to conquer death and delay its advent at all cost. In this struggle for mechanical prolongation of life, very little attention is paid to the quality of the patient's remaining days, or to his psychological, philosophical and spiritual needs.⁴³

⁴⁰Langone, pp. 11-12.

⁴¹Stanislav Grof and Christina Grof, Beyond Death (London: Thames and Hudson, Ltd., 1980), p. 5.

⁴²Grof and Grof, p. 7.

⁴³Grof and Grof, p. 7.

The Eastern approach, as represented by The Tibetan Book of the Dead, is one of awareness. Fear is recognized, but denial is not. The Tibetan Book of the Dead considers telling the sick that they are dying an act of trust, whereas lying to the dying is considered hypocrisy.

As previously stated, the importance of being aware of death is to make life more meaningful. Langone tells us that "An empty, unfulfilled life will end, almost inevitably, in a meaningless, despairing death."⁴⁴ He quotes Leonardo da Vinci: "As a well-spent day brings happy sleep, . . . so a well-spent life brings happy death."⁴⁵ Kubler-Ross agrees:

. . . once you have faced your own finiteness and have accepted it, you will see that life becomes much more meaningful and more valuable.⁴⁶

Our life can also determine the intensity of the death experience. Langone tells us that W. C. Fields quipped on his deathbed, "Well, it's better than being in Philadelphia,"⁴⁷ and Sam Rayburn said as he lay dying, "This is the damnest thing that's ever happened to me."⁴⁸

Much of what is being written on the topic of death today is material that will help people prepare for death. A great part of preparation seems to be learning to share the experience of dying, an act important to both the living and the dying. First, on the importance of sharing the experience, Langone says:

⁴⁴Langone, p. 50.

⁴⁵Langone, p. 51.

⁴⁶Kubler-Ross, Questions and Answers on Death and Dying, p. 21.

⁴⁷Langone, p. 50.

⁴⁸Langone, p. 50.

It is now apparent that when physicians, nurses, family or friends refuse to talk about death to people who are dying, the feelings of helplessness and isolation that gnaw at the dying patient are magnified. These feelings, in many cases, are harder to bear than the threat of death itself.

The fear of dying alone is greater than any other fear, it has been said. How the dying person handles the situation he finds himself in depends, in large measure, on the attitude of those around him. Someone must share his pain and fear while he is allowed to cling to some small piece of the world he has known.⁴⁹

The message of Elisabeth Kubler-Ross's books is to share the death experience and to use the dying as our teachers. When once asked how she would tell her family of her own death, she responded:

I would sit with each one individually and would tell them that I am seriously ill and then listen to their questions and answer all of them openly, frankly, and honestly. Since we are not always "privileged" to have a fatal illness, and thus time to prepare our family, we should raise our children to be prepared for a death in the family at any time. We should live each day as if it were the last one and enjoy every moment we have together. Along with the appreciation of having fully lived, memories are the only real gifts we can leave our children.⁵⁰

Kubler-Ross, by sharing the experience of dying with many of her terminally ill patients, finds that "one of the most productive avenues for growth is found through the study and experience of death."⁵¹

Through her personal experience she has learned that at some point in the process of death, the living must allow the dying to "wean off in

⁴⁹Langone, pp. 32, 33.

⁵⁰Kubler-Ross, Questions and Answers on Death and Dying, pp. 170-171.

⁵¹Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, Death the Final Stage of Growth (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1975), p. 117.

order to find his own inner resources and peace."⁵² She also finds that patients know when they are dying and often can convey this knowledge quite accurately to the medical staff.⁵³

Another way of preparing for death is to become keenly aware of its presence and to recognize one's own fear and denial of it. James William Worden and William Proctor in Personal Death Awareness have created several exercises to help people face the reality of their own deaths. People are asked, for example, to draw their life lines and to write their own obituaries. In a seminar I attended on death and dying, the participants drew a variety of designs to show their life lines, from spirals to labyrinths, ascending and descending straight lines, and circles going nowhere or everywhere, according to the participant's life view.

Alan Watts in Death tries to tell his reader not to be anxious about death. His answer to such anxiety lies in his honest perception of death rather than playing games about it:

We say the only things certain are death and taxes. And the death of each one of us now is as certain as it would be if we were going to die five minutes from now. So where's your anxiety? Where's your hangup? Regard yourself as dead already so that you have nothing to lose. A Turkish proverb says, "He who sleeps on the floor will not fall out of bed." So in the same way is the person who regards himself as already dead.

Therefore, you are virtually nothing. A hundred years from now you will be a handful of dust, and that will be for real. All right now, act on that reality. And out of that . . . nothing. You will suddenly surprise yourself.

⁵² Kubler-Ross, Death the Final Stage of Growth, p. 32.

⁵³ Kubler-Ross, Death the Final Stage of Growth, p. 34.

The more you know you are nothing the more you will amount to something.⁵⁴

Hendin in Death As a Fact of Life expresses the feeling that sharing is not for adults only:

In general, wise parents realize that children should not be excluded from sharing grief and sorrow any more than they should be from sharing joy and happiness in the course of normal family relationships.⁵⁵

Kubler-Ross agrees:

. . . preparation should start much earlier and that we should teach our children and our young people to face the reality of death.⁵⁶

She tells us how to begin teaching the children as well as ourselves to face this reality:

It should start in young life by visiting nursing homes, chronic disease hospitals, and terminally ill patients, by contemplating your own death, by making your last will, and by discussing such matters with your family long before you are sick. Children should be allowed to visit patients and to attend funerals. We should also take down the signs in our hospitals and nursing homes which say, "No children under age 14 are allowed to visit."⁵⁷

Whatever our degree of acceptance of death, how we share the experience with others, or how we work through our fears and denial, we all grieve.

On how to handle the problem of grief, Langone states the following:

Grief manifests itself in many ways. The mourner may become preoccupied with the image of the dead person. He may feel guilty for not doing enough for the deceased

⁵⁴Watts, pp. 59, 61.

⁵⁵David Hendin, Death As a Fact of Life (New York: Warner Books, 1973), p. 123.

⁵⁶Kubler-Ross, Questions and Answers on Death and Dying, p. 3.

⁵⁷Kubler-Ross, Questions and Answers on Death and Dying, p. 110.

during life. He may become angry at the doctor who might have helped, or even at the deceased for "deserting" the family.⁵⁸

Again, sharing the experience helps those who mourn. Langone encourages the mourner to share his feelings, to release his emotions at this time.⁵⁹ He poses conflicting views on death rituals. Some feel that they help us face death: "They let us release tensions and readjust. They are as much for us, the living, as for the dead." Whereas "Some people believe that death customs and rituals build up more tensions than they release."⁶⁰

Anyone who saw the film "All That Jazz" will probably never forget Kubler-Ross's five stages of acceptance of death—denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance—as explained in On Death and Dying and referred to in Questions on Death and Dying. These stages do not always happen in order, or one at a time. Many patients or mourners never work through all the stages either. In Questions on Death and Dying, Kubler-Ross says: "Most of my patients have exhibited two or three stages simultaneously and these do not always occur in the same order."⁶¹

Others have also studied the stages involved in dying. Lyall Watson in The Romeo Error reports that Albert Heim surveyed people who had survived mountain falls as he had. He found that they had gone through three distinct phases of dying. First, they fought back. Next,

⁵⁸Langone, p. 45.

⁵⁹Langone, p. 47.

⁶⁰Langone, pp. 47, 48.

⁶¹Kubler-Ross, Questions and Answers on Death and Dying, p. 3.

they accepted death with detachment following, and last, they entered a mystical state.⁶²

The Grofs in Beyond Death report the findings of Russell Noyes, Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Iowa, who saw three successive stages of dying—resistance, life-review, and transcendence. In the first stage there was the "recognition of danger, fear of death, struggle to save one's life, and finally, acceptance of death."⁶³ In the second stage the person "relived important memories or experienced a condensed, panoramic replay of his entire life—trajectory."⁶⁴ In the final stage ". . . the experience was one of mystical, religious, or 'cosmic' states of consciousness."⁶⁵

Since this study deals with the death awareness of young people, it would seem important to know the various levels of death awareness in young people. Watson thinks that, "It is possible that our first direct deathlike experience is being born."⁶⁶ He finds that:

Human children are to a certain extent prepared for their first death contact by a variety of on-off experiences very early in life. Cycles of light and dark, patterns of waking and sleeping, games of hide-and-seek, all introduce the contrasting notions of being and not-being.⁶⁷

Lifton finds that the child's concept of death ". . . is built gradually on the basis of inner imagery that the child apparently has at birth and that is developed and made concrete in relation to the child's experiences."⁶⁸ Like Watson, he sees the awareness of opposites as part of the death awareness. He states:

⁶²Watson, pp. 62-63. ⁶³Grof and Grof, p. 9.

⁶⁴Grof and Grof, p. 10. ⁶⁵Grof and Grof, p. 10.

⁶⁶Watson, p. 72. ⁶⁷Watson, p. 50. ⁶⁸Lifton, p. 29.

We can understand the child's earliest imagery of life and death as organized around three sets of opposites:

connection—separation
movement —stasis (lack of movement)
integrity —disintegration.⁶⁹

Hendin states that children from the ages of three to five or six see death as a temporary situation,⁷⁰ and Watson says that ". . . very young children, less than five years old, do not recognize death at all."⁷¹ Lifton believes that between the ages of five and nine, a child is aware that death is final and inevitable.⁷² Watson states: between the ages of five and seven they negotiate a compromise and start thinking and talking about death as a temporary state."⁷³ He continues:

Then under further relentless pressure to conform, children between the ages of about seven and nine give up their childish notions of harmony in life and death and seek an adult refuge in the personification of death as a skeleton or bogeyman. At about this time, too, a child starts trying death on for size by acting it out in games like cops and robbers that involve playing dead.⁷⁴

Watson, in The Romeo Error, states: ". . . by the age of about nine most children have finally reached the point of accepting death as 'the permanent cessation of all vital functions.'"⁷⁵ Further, Hendin says that by the age of ten, the child can formulate realistic concepts of death.⁷⁶ In the U.S. Department of HEW pamphlet, Talking to Children About Death, this statement was made:

From 9 to 10 through adolescence, children begin to comprehend fully that death is irreversible, that all living things die, and that they too will die someday.

⁶⁹Lifton, p. 30.

⁷⁰Hendin, p. 122.

⁷¹Watson, p. 50.

⁷²Lifton, p. 32.

⁷³Watson, p. 51.

⁷⁴Watson, p. 51.

⁷⁵Watson, p. 52.

⁷⁶Hendin, p. 122.

Some begin to work on developing philosophical views of life and death. Teenagers, especially, often become intrigued with seeking the meaning of life. Some youngsters react to their fear of death by taking unnecessary chances with their lives. In confronting death, they are trying to overcome their fears by confirming their "control" over mortality.⁷⁷

As to adolescents, Lifton says that from twelve to fifteen is a critical age when there is a flare-up of death imagery. Of this period he finds that, "Adolescence itself is a death and rebirth experience; one dies as a child and is reborn as an adult."⁷⁸ He also states:

Adolescents struggle most to avoid deadness and to seek life. This pursuit can mean an emphasis on energetic creativity, tireless action, or the contemplation of grand visions. . . . Awareness of death leads to questions about the meaning of life, and to a search for ways to⁷⁹ relate oneself to the larger human historical project.

William Hugh Agee states that in the initial phase of the initiation ritual is that of separation.⁸⁰ Separation for the novice is achieved in several ways, one of which is "by the symbolic death of the novice in a mock attack."⁸¹ Agee continues,

Actually, any method of separation may be viewed figuratively as ritual death in the sense that the novice dies in the old life (childhood) only to be reborn later into a new life (adulthood).⁸²

The writers of the HEW pamphlet Talking to Children About Death report:

Some mental health experts believe that children are not mature enough to work through a deeply felt loss until they are adolescents. Because of this, they say, children are

⁷⁷U.S. Dept. of Health, Education, and Welfare, Talking to Children About Death (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1979), p. 6.

⁷⁸Lifton, p. 38.

⁷⁹Lifton, pp. 40-41.

⁸⁰Agee, p. 91.

⁸¹Agee, p. 91.

⁸²Agee, p. 91.

apt to express their sadness on and off over a long period of time and often at unexpected moments.⁸³

A last area to be explored on the subject of death is immortality in its various forms. The word itself causes controversy since it delves into mysteries of religion and philosophy. Freud and Alan Watts denied its existence. Lifton reminds us, "Freud saw the idea of immortality as supreme among civilization's false hopes."⁸⁴

Alan Watts argues against immortality this way:

That's what death does for us: It wipes the slate clean and also, for looking at it from the point of view of population and the human organism on the planet, it keeps cleaning us out! A technology which would enable each one of us to be immortal would progressively crowd the planet with people having hopelessly crowded memories.⁸⁵

Two different viewpoints on the subject come from Lifton and Jeffrey Mishlove, the first defining immortality differently, and the second seeing the search for immortality as more important than finding the answer. Langone states:

. . . given what we know of life on this planet alone, one cannot reasonably expect that it will suddenly quit, never to appear again. The joke, in the last analysis, is on death. For the victory of the grave is a hollow one that does not turn any tide nor repel any invader. Life is the true victor, for it is a progress and not an end, and in that is immortality.⁸⁶

Jeffrey Mishlove, in The Roots of Consciousness, states:

Whether or not we come to any conclusion at all about ghosts, spirits, reincarnation, or any other form of survival after death is actually less important than our willingness to look closely at the evidence for these

⁸³Talking to Children About Death, p. 15.

⁸⁴Lifton, p. 56.

⁸⁵Watts, p. 49.

⁸⁶Langone, p. 188.

phenomena. For the great by-product of the search for the life beyond is an extraordinary enrichment of our understanding of the life within.⁸⁷

Whether there is such a thing as immortality, Lifton notes that our sense of immortality is expressed in five categories: "biological, creative, theological, natural, and experiential."⁸⁸ By natural he means maintaining a continuity with nature, as in "dust to dust," and by experiential he is referring to the experience of illumination or rapture attained as time seems to disappear ("mythic time").

In concluding this section, the reader finds that, like salt and pepper, you get both living and dying even though you ask for just one. All of which brings us to the point made continuously by the writers on this subject—that death makes life meaningful. Lifton quotes Freud, ". . . Freud said explicitly that 'the aim of all life is death.'"⁸⁹ In the last section of Death the Final Stage of Growth, Dr. Kubler-Ross expresses her thoughts on the importance of death for the living:

It is the denial of death that is partially responsible for people living empty, purposeless lives; for when you live as if you'll live forever, it becomes too easy to postpone the things you know that you must do. . . . When you fully understand that each day you awaken could be the last you have, you take the time that day to grow, to become more of who you really are, to reach out to other human beings.⁹⁰

The above information on the various aspects of death has been reviewed in order to help the reader to know what to look for as the

⁸⁷ Jeffrey Mishlove, The Roots of Consciousness (New York: Random House, Inc., 1975), p. 175.

⁸⁸ Lifton, p. 60.

⁸⁹ Lifton, p. 28.

⁹⁰ Kubler-Ross, Death the Final Stage of Growth, p. 164.

adolescent protagonist faces the death of someone close or faces his own death. Much of this information has been used by secondary teachers in the English classroom as they have taught units or courses on death and dying.

One question these English teachers have had to answer is whether or not death education belongs in the school curriculum. Sound evidence that it does belong can be found in research, not only by educators, but by other professionals. One medical doctor, L. D. Hankoff, states,

The theme and concept of death relates importantly to every thread of adolescent development. The adolescent's emerging neuro-psychological organization and abilities for conceptual and systematic thinking provide him with the necessary cognitive equipment for a full grasp of the meaning of death. His developing time sense and concern about the passage of time are closely related to the adolescent's development of a life plan with its ultimate end of death.⁹¹

Dr. Hankoff also states that, "Among the achievements of adolescence is the formation of the psychological apparatus for the direct emotional reaction to loss."⁹²

Robert A. Hogan, in "Adolescent Views on Death," finds that, "Late adolescent subjects appear to be realistic in their conception of death, although many stated that they were too young to die."⁹³ One adolescent girl who participated in Hogan's study described death as

⁹¹L. D. Hankoff, "Adolescence and the Crisis of Dying," Adolescence, vol. x, no. 39, Fall 1975, p. 385.

⁹²Hankoff, p. 386.

⁹³Robert A. Hogan, "Adolescent Views on Death," Adolescence, vol. 5, no. 17, Spring 1970, p. 64.

"unique":

She stated that death must be different for each person because perception of death, and experience of death, is dependent on past learnings, heredity, and the special circumstances of the individual.⁹⁴

Many educators have written on the necessity for the inclusion of death education in the school curriculum. Death and dying can be included, not only in English classes, but in many other areas: psychology, sociology, anthropology, health, art, and music. John W. McLure, professor of secondary education at the University of Iowa, suggested that it be included in the humanities course or inserted in a "block-of-time organization."⁹⁵ With its inclusion, he did foresee some problem areas, such as whether to include the supernatural, the extra-sensory, or the occult.⁹⁶ Other problems he felt might come when discussion touched on theological positions and on guilt feelings, especially as experienced by survivors of a family suicide.

Another study showing that death education belongs at school, conducted by educators Charles R. O'Brien, Josephine L. Johnson, and Paul D. Schmink, and reported in their article "Death Education: What Students Want and Need!" concluded,

The percent of students who think about death frequently or sometimes and who express value in discussing it, as well as the number who term death "frightening" after having

⁹⁴Hogan, p. 65.

⁹⁵John W. McLure, "Death Education," Phi Delta Kappan, vol. 55, no. 7, March 1974, p. 484.

⁹⁶McLure, p. 485.

experienced the loss of someone close to them, suggests that schools are acting appropriately when they initiate death education programs.⁹⁷

They also warn teachers that such courses should not place a "disproportionate emphasis . . . on the informational aspects." Emphasis should be "on the exploration of attitudes and emotional reactions to death."⁹⁸

Leon Hymovitz, a Pennsylvania high school principal, has written several articles dealing with the importance of the home, school and community working together in helping young people deal with death. In his argument for death education, he says.

In an era enamored of the "basics," death and dying are the most fundamental truths we can impart. What could be more basic than the "facts of death?"⁹⁹

In "For the Children . . . Does Death Education Belong?" Hymovitz reminds the reader,

In America, adults generally shield children from the inevitable and avoid discussions about death in their presence. Highly sensitive and controversial, the question won't quit. It is a tough but incontrovertible fact that death is the constant handmaiden to the present and lady-in-waiting to the future.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Charles R. O'Brien, Josephine L. Johnson, and Paul D. Schmink, "Death Education: What Students Want and Need!" Adolescence, vol. xiii, no. 52, Winter 1978, pp. 732-733.

⁹⁸ O'Brien, Johnson, Schmink, p. 733.

⁹⁹ Leon Hymovitz, "Death as a Discipline: The Ultimate Curriculum," NASSP Bulletin, vol. 63, no. 424, February 1979, p. 103.

¹⁰⁰ Leon Hymovitz, "For the Children . . . Does Death Education Belong?" American Secondary Education, vol. 10, no. 2, June 1980, p. 54.

Our attitudes are changing about teaching death education, but, as Dr. Nina Ribak Rosenthal, in "Death Education: Help or Hurt?" warns us, teachers must be prepared to teach the subject, know their subject matter, and handle the emotional problems in the classroom that may be a result of the teaching. She continues,

Teaching about death requires more than reading one "How To Do It" book. Self-awareness, information and communication skills are essential for death educators.¹⁰¹

Death education courses take many shapes, and, as stated earlier, they can be incorporated into many subject areas. Here we are more interested in English courses, though good ideas from other areas can be adapted for the English courses. One lesson, for example, by art teacher Constance DeMuth Berg, would work in the English class. Ms. Berg's art lesson using the human skeleton followed by the writing of statements on the theme of the drawings, was very successful. She found that

. . . adolescents relate to subject matters that confront them with uncertainties, for they are faced with inconsistencies and change in their own development and search for meaning in life. . . . Because the human skeleton encompasses the significance and symbolism of both life and death, it can become a valuable vehicle for structuring thoughts and triggering untouched feelings.¹⁰²

Ms. Berg felt that the human skeleton, symbolizing the

. . . unique interrelationship of all humanity, . . . appeals especially to the dormant idealism of adolescence and encourages youth's desire to achieve insights which lead to the maturity and stability of adulthood.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹Nina Ribak Rosenthal, "Death Education: Help or Hurt?" The Clearing House, vol. 53, no. 5, January 1980, p. 226.

¹⁰²Constance DeMuth Berg, "Life and Death Drawings in Adolescence," School Arts, vol. 79, no. 1, September 1979, p. 42.

¹⁰³Berg, p. 44.

Information from Dr. Frank H. Farley's study of adolescent choices of metaphors representing death could also provide guidance in planning an English lesson on death. He found,

Both sexes and grades . . . hypostatized death more in unpersonified terms than in personification, e.g., end of a song, last adventure, and misty abyss versus grinning butcher, gay seducer, and understanding doctor.¹⁰⁴

This information could be the basis for an English lesson on how we visualize death.

An observation from Jeffrey Schrank, in "Death: Guide to Books and A-V Aids," who noted that English teachers in the past have avoided facing the issue of death, could help sensitize English teachers to the problem. He states,

In literature death plays a constant role (name five books or movies in which no one dies) but is rarely dealt with except as a literary device for eliminating characters or ending stories.¹⁰⁵

Another point he makes could again provide an idea for a topic on death in literature, "Do heroes die?" He finds,

Ten years ago the hero seldom died. But now the Happy Ending has had it: Since this trend took hold only since the killings of the Kennedys and King, one is tempted to speculate that it is once again an example of art imitating life. Heroes can die now, and they do.¹⁰⁶

English teachers themselves have taught death education in a number of ways. Some teach it as a unit, whereas others teach it as an

¹⁰⁴Frank H. Farley, "The Hypostatization of Death in Adolescence," Adolescence, vol. xiv, no. 54, Summer 1979, p. 349.

¹⁰⁵Jeffrey Schrank, "Death: Guide to Books and A-V Aids," Media and Methods, vol. 7, February 1971, p. 34.

¹⁰⁶Schrank, p. 35.

elective course. One poetry teacher, Flora J. Arnstein, in "I Met Death One Clumsy Day," felt great concern by her students' "apparent sense of continuous confrontation with the idea of death."¹⁰⁷ In many of her well-to-do, middle-class students, she found cynicism, disorientation, hopelessness, and loneliness when they wrote poetry about death. Her final questions are,

. . . does the outlook on life recorded in these poems constitute one that we desire for our young people? If it does not, should we not address our concern to those forces in our society which are responsible for darkening their lives with cynicism, with a tragic sense of hopelessness, and above all with a premature preoccupation with death?¹⁰⁸

Iris M. Koby, in "And the leaves that are green turn to . . . ?", taught about death and dying in the fall of the year, mainly through music. Her ninth grade students thought of death as an antithesis of life, and she hoped to expand their ideas, for example, to see death as another step in life. She described one difficulty her students encountered,

The growing awareness that one does not just die but goes through a process, through another stage of life in reaching death, was a concept that was difficult for them to grasp.¹⁰⁹

Understanding this process many times brings us to the reality of death. Alleen Pace Nilsen, co-editor of the English Journal, reviewed several books on death for English teachers, one a review of Sidney Werkman's Only a Little Time: A Memoir of My Wife in which Nilsen points out that

¹⁰⁷ Flora J. Arnstein, "I Met Death One Clumsy Day," English Journal, vol. 61, no. 6, September 1972, p. 853.

¹⁰⁸ Arnstein, p. 858.

¹⁰⁹ Iris M. Koby, "And the leaves that are green turn to . . . ?", English Journal, vol. 64, no. 7, October 1975, p. 61.

Dr. Werkman's beautiful young wife does not "simply fade off into a hospital as did Ali McGraw in 'Love Story.'" ¹¹⁰ Nilsen quotes the following realistic description from Werkman:

. . . her spirit could not thwart the development of large oozing ulcerations of her buttocks, bleeding in her mouth, the development in her arms of great masses of blood where injections were given, and finally, bleeding in her eyes that clouded the world for her. ¹¹¹

Not only may our heroes die, but now they can die realistically, and in the process teach the survivors how to live and how to die.

In the English Journal Christine Fontenot, an eleventh-grade teacher at Loreauville High School, in Louisiana, described a unit on death that she devised which included reference works on death, novels, plays, short stories, poetry, theme writing, panel discussions, art and music. ¹¹²

Malcolm E. Stern, an English teacher in Evanston, Illinois, described his nine-weeks' elective course for seniors in a later issue of the English Journal. ¹¹³ Besides using a wide variety of materials, Mr. Stern made good use of community resource people. He used a medical doctor, minister, priest, rabbi, psychologist, psychiatrist, funeral director, cemetery manager, insurance agent, and an attorney. The first six weeks of his course were devoted to the physical, religious,

¹¹⁰ Alleen Pace Nilsen, "Death and Dying: Facts, Fiction, Folklore," English Journal, vol. 63, no. 8, 1973, p. 1188.

¹¹¹ Nilsen, p. 1188.

¹¹² Christine Fontenot, "Values in Literature: Alternative Approaches," English Journal, vol. 63, no. 2, pp. 62-63.

¹¹³ Malcolm E. Stern, "Death," English Journal, vol. 64, no. 1, January 1975, pp. 61-62.

philosophical, psychological, economic, and legal aspects, whereas the next three weeks centered on literary, musical, and artistic responses to death. He also used an attitude survey at the beginning and end of the course, followed at the end by a discussion of changes that took place within the students.

Andrea Ivie Webb, an English teacher in Ennis, Texas, has also described her elective course on death in the English Journal.¹¹⁴ Her six-weeks' course gave a historic overview of funeral rites and ceremonies and covered medical and ethical questions related to death, such as abortion, euthanasia, suicide, and organ transplants. Other areas of learning included religion and death, the death motif in art and music, and death in literature. Her course also used a wide variety of materials, including several films.

Death education study has become widespread enough in the English class to receive national attention. At the 70th annual convention of the National Council of Teachers of English, held in Cincinnati, Ohio, November 1980, a workshop entitled "Death Education Brings New Dimensions to the Teaching of English" was offered. Chairperson for the session was Dr. Ralph Stuckman, of Wright State University, Dayton, Ohio, who has conducted classes and workshops in death education for several years. Participants included Mrs. Marion Hemphill, an English teacher at Indian Lake High School, Lewiston, Ohio; Mrs. Betsy Shoffstall, who taught a death education unit within her English

¹¹⁴Andrea Ivie Webb, "Death: The Last Taboo," English Journal, vol. 66, no. 6, September 1977, pp. 55-56.

program at Jackson Center High School in Ohio; and Mr. Lee Van Horn, a Lakeview funeral director who sponsors Mrs. Hemphill's unit.

The participants illustrated various activities they used in their units on death; for example, they gave an attitude/information inventory, used local newspapers to locate various types of deaths, showed filmstrips, and displayed a wide selection of books on death.

Available materials on this topic include a selection of filmstrips, for several companies are preparing films and filmstrips on death to be used in the classroom. Guidance Associates offers their award-winning "Death and Dying: Closing the Circle" and "Living with Dying."¹¹⁵ In the first, Dr. Robert Lifton and author Doris Lund participate in honest talk about death. In the second filmstrip, "Living with Dying," dying as a natural part of the life cycle is stressed. Another of the Guidance Associates' filmstrips on death is "Perspectives on Death" which opens up discussions of immortality and of social issues dealing with death.

The Winston Press also offers a filmstrip and cassette program on death and dying called "Death: The Human Dimension." Dr. Gene Stanford, the author, is Director for Children's Services at Children's Hospital, Buffalo, New York, and is regional editor for Newsletter, from Forum for Death Education.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵Guidance Associates, Inc., Communications Park, Box 3000, Mount Kisco, N.Y. 10549. Catalog of Sound Filmstrip Programs, p. 25.

¹¹⁶Winston Press, 430 Oak Grove, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55403.

Several book publishers are grouping paperback books on death and dying for high school thematic units, as mentioned earlier in this paper. The sponsors of the NCTE workshop on death suggested another good source for books, films, and filmstrips on death and dying, Dr. Roger D. Blackwell's A Guide to Death Education Materials, published by the Ohio Funeral Directors Association, Columbus, Ohio, and they also suggested the use of more activities on death awareness from David Berg and George Daugherty's Student Activity Book, Perspectives on Death.¹¹⁷

Death education is slowly working its way into the English classroom where, through the study of literature, the adolescent finds models for living and dying, and through composition, he is provided a way to bring his thoughts and emotions into clear focus. With this knowledge and chance for self-expression, he may, through a study of death, find that his life has more meaning.

¹¹⁷David Berg and George Daugherty, Student Activity Book, Perspectives on Death (DeKalb, Illinois: Educational Perspectives Association, 1972).

CHAPTER III

THE DEATH OF A PARENT

The death of a parent provides the background material and/or starting point for many novels of interest to adolescents. One very different approach to the death of a parent is explored by Camus in The Stranger. Meursault, the main character, is seemingly indifferent to his mother's death and eventually pays for his indifference with his own life. A witness at Meursault's trial, the warden of the home, testified that Meursault "hadn't wanted to see Mother's body, or shed a single tear."¹¹⁸ Meursault had also left as soon as the funeral ended. Later in the trial the defense lawyer asks, "'Is my client on trial for having buried his mother, or for killing a man?'" (p. 121). The prosecutor responds, "'I accuse the prisoner of behaving at his mother's funeral in a way that showed he was already a criminal at heart'" (p. 122).

Before the in-depth analysis of Swiftwater and Pardon Me, You're Stepping on My Eyeball, a brief survey of various approaches to the death of a parent might be viewed. Two adolescent novels that begin after the death of the mother, Mary Stolz's Ready or Not and Claude Koch's The Kite in the Sea, show how the protagonists' lives were altered by those deaths. Morgan, who turns seventeen during the course of Ready or Not, was thirteen when her mother Sarah died. Of her

¹¹⁸Albert Camus, The Stranger (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1954), p. 111.

younger brother and sister, the narrator says, "Julie and Ned wept and remained children. Morgan wept and grew up."¹¹⁹ She became responsible, taking the mother's place in the home, to help her father. Once when things were not going smoothly,

In a moment, hot tears were tickling her cheeks, running into the corners of her mouth. She walked to the bedroom, fell on Ned's cot by the window, and tumbled with her tears like a stick in the surf, crying for the things she wanted but would probably never have, for the mother she missed and sometimes couldn't picture. (p. 12)

Later in the novel Morgan reflects on taking a job in a cafeteria, "I'm frightened, she thought. I feel almost the way I did when Mother died" (p. 168).

Lolly Redding, a fifteen-year-old in The Kite in the Sea, finds it difficult to come to terms with her mother's death or her father's leaving. Jonathan, a next-door neighbor, teaches her to accept things by employing the symbolism of a kite:

Everything is like that kite, Lolly—everything. Sooner or later it enters an element from which you can't retrieve it—and then you have to let it go. It hurts more than the hands to learn it—but that's a sign, and you'll remember. . . . And I think the soul must go that way when we die: not outward, but inward, deeper and deeper until it sinks in that terrible element whose dimension it must discover.¹²⁰

In a third novel dealing with the death of the mother, Cathy Kingsley, a sixteen-year-old Britisher in Dorothy Clewes' A Girl Like Cathy, finds that the death of her adoptive mother triggers her need to

¹¹⁹Mary Stolz, Ready or Not (New York: Scholastic Book Services, 1953), p. 83.

¹²⁰Claude Koch, The Kite in the Sea (New York: Scholastic Book Services, 1964), pp. 56-57.

find out who her real parents were. The search would not have begun without that death.

These three novels deal with a female protagonist experiencing a mother's death. In Irene Hunt's William, a young man who has already lost his father in an accident loses his mother to cancer. Even though he sees her pain and dwindling health and resists facing life without her, his mother nevertheless guides him toward acceptance.

Other novels also deal in various ways with adolescents who have lost both parents, for example, Robert Cormier's I Am the Cheese, Vera and Bill Cleaver's two novels about Mary Call, Where the Lilies Bloom and Trial Valley, Hal Borland's When the Legends Die and Robert C. O'Brien's Z for Zachariah.

Adam, in I Am the Cheese, is a good example of what happens when a young person is unable to accept the death of his father. He is with both parents at the time of death, and of his mother he says, "She was dead, irrevocably dead, the knowledge irrefutable. . . ." ¹²¹ Understanding that his father is also dead is more difficult,

"My poor father," I say. "He is dead, isn't he? He didn't get away, did he?"

The doctor's face is sad; his face is always sad when we talk about my father and I find out again that he is dead. (p. 215)

The doctor is at the institution where, the reader realizes at the end of the novel, Adam has been all along. He was unable to accept what had happened to his family or to live an independent life.

¹²¹ Robert Cormier, I Am the Cheese (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1977), p. 207.

Mary Call, whose mother is already dead, handles her father's death and burial in Where the Lilies Bloom. She has received instructions from Roy Luther, her father,

When the time comes, which he hopes will be in his sleep, I am to let him go on as quietly as he can, without any wailing and fussing. I am not to call any doctor or allow anyone else to call one. If it happens at night I am to wait until morning before I tell the others: I am not to send for the preacher or undertaker.¹²²

Instructions also include a home burial on a mountain, Old Joshua, in a stand of black spruce. Roy Luther, knowing he was going to die, had already dug his own grave. He then told Mary Call how to get him there, and she did. The rest of the novel and the next one, Trial Valley, shows her strength of character as she takes care of her brother and sisters. In dealing so realistically with her father's death, she is able to accept life and death and go on. Here the death experience is very much like that described earlier in this paper as happening in our pre-industrial Western culture. By taking care of the dying person at home rather than in a hospital and by attending to the burial rather than having the funeral home do it, the survivors deal with all aspects of death directly. Jessica Mitford, who in her classic The American Way of Death describes the complexities of modern burial practices, would appreciate the simplicity and directness of Roy Luther's death and burial.

Another novel that deals with the death of both parents is Hal Borland's When the Legends Die. Though the book is mainly about a

¹²²Vera and Bill Cleaver, Where the Lilies Bloom (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1974), p. 15.

conflict of cultures, the young Ute, Tom Black Bull, experiences the death of both parents in the novel. George, the father, dies in an avalanche while he and his family are living the old way in the wilderness. Bessie, the mother, and Tom Black Bull continue the same way of living. When Bessie dies of probable pneumonia, her son continues to live alone there. In a description of her death, the narrator tells the reader what they did but not how they felt at the moment,

All that day he sang the songs for making her well. Late that afternoon she could not hear those songs. She talked about things he did not know. . . . Then she did not talk. It was dark, it was night. Then she said, "Sing the song for going away, my son." She tried to reach up and touch his face. Her arm was too weak. He took her hand and held it to his face. Than she died.¹²³

In the earlier description of his father's death, there is grief and acceptance,

They found his body and they stood beside it, crying for him; and the boy sang the wailing song for the dead. She had not taught him that song. He had that song in his heart, and he sang it. . . .

They gave him burial in the old way. They sang the death songs for him, in the darkness with the stars watching them. Then they went down the mountain and back to the lodge. She said to the boy, "Now you are the man." (p. 21)

As in the Cleavers' novels, death here is a natural part of the cycle of life, realistically experienced and accepted.

Two other novels that, in different ways, are influenced with the death or possible death of both parents are Robert C. O'Brien's

¹²³Hal Borland, When the Legends Die (New York: Bantam Books, 1963), pp. 30-31.

Z For Zachariah and Robert McKay's Canary Red. Ann Burden, who turns sixteen during the novel Z For Zachariah, survived nuclear war along with her family and neighbors in an isolated valley, but when the Kleins and her family go out of the valley to see what has happened, they never return. The reader doesn't know what Ann has experienced emotionally because the novel begins a year later, and she has adjusted to possibly being the last person on earth.

In Canary Red, fifteen-year-old Ming Campbell believes both of her parents to be dead but finds that her father has been in a Florida jail for bank robbery for fifteen years and is returning home. A similar story, Zoa Sherburne's Stranger in the House, tells of the return home of the mother who had been in a mental hospital. Both novels could be studied as examples of what Elisabeth Kubler-Ross calls social death, mentioned earlier in this paper.

An important novel read by adolescents that deals with the father's death is James Agee's A Death in the Family. Rufus's father dies in a car accident, therefore providing no time for emotional preparation for death. His mother tells Rufus and his sister:

"Daddy didn't come home. He isn't going to come ever any more. He's—gone away to heaven and he isn't ever coming home again."¹²⁴

Rufus asks his mother why his father isn't coming home and she answers, "'Because God wanted him'" (p. 237). Still not happy with the euphemisms, Rufus asked if his father were dead,

¹²⁴James Agee, A Death in the Family (New York: Bantam Books, 1972), p. 237.

Her glance at him was as startled as if he had slapped her, and again her mouth and then her whole face began to work, uncontrollably this time, and she did not speak, but only nodded her head once, and then again, and then several times rapidly, while one small squeaky "yes" came out of her as if it had been sneezed out. . . . (p. 237)

The unreality of his father's death is vividly shown when Rufus practices saying to strangers that his father is dead and by his sense of importance when he finds out that it is in the newspaper. Later he sees his father in the casket: "He saw him much more clearly than he had ever seen him before; yet his face looked unreal . . ." (p. 290). Rufus and his sister were not supposed to attend the funeral, but Walter Starr parked them on a side street where they could observe unnoticed the family leaving the house. Later his uncle told him how the butterfly had settled on the coffin and stayed on it until the coffin was resting on the bottom of the grave. Rufus realizes the importance of what his uncle has told him,

And suddenly he began to realize that his uncle told it to him, out of everyone he might have told it to, and he breathed in a deep breath of pride and of love. (p. 315)

Rufus is a young boy, not an adolescent, but his experience with his father's death opens up for adolescent readers the problem of dealing with the reality of death.

Two last novels to be considered briefly are Jay Bennett's Deathman, Do Not Follow Me and Anne Tyler's A Slipping Down Life. Danny Morgan lives in a Brooklyn apartment with his mother in Deathman, Do Not Follow Me. He remembers when his father was alive:

That's what life does at times. It comes in and breaks people apart. Takes them and blows them apart like leaves in a big wind. Sometimes blowing them away for good and forever.

Like it did to me and my father. Before I even got to know him, he was gone.¹²⁵

Danny is a loner who becomes involved in keeping a Van Gogh from being stolen from the museum, and his thoughts of his father help sustain him as he lives:

Danny remembered how his father used to tell him stories about birds, all sorts of birds, just before he went to bed. That was years ago. So many, many years ago. Like it happened in the ice age. He wondered why certain images stay with you. (p. 11)

Then again Danny thinks, "Sometimes it feels like it happened yesterday. Like he was just standing there. And then he was gone" (p. 13).

Beverly Haley reviewed this novel as part of an article entitled "The 'Fractured Family' in Adolescent Literature." Of it she says, "This novel is well written, parts of it being quite poetic."¹²⁶

Evie Decker, a seventeen-year-old in A Slipping Down Life, rebels against her father and leads a different life style, but finds a degree of independence from her husband after her father's death. Earlier she felt isolation and loneliness, but she was able to survive an unhappy marriage and her father's death, and to grow with these experiences.

These are just a few of the many good novels available that in various ways explore the death of an adolescent's parent. Since the two novels to be analyzed in detail end with acceptance, the following Indian song from Rabindranath Tagore's Gitanjali might be an appropriate introduction to them:

¹²⁵Jay Bennett, Deathman, Do Not Follow Me (New York: Scholastic Book Services, 1968), p. 20.

¹²⁶Beverly Haley, "The 'Fractured Family' in Adolescent Literature," English Journal, February 1974, p. 70.

Death, thy servant, is at my door. He has crossed the unknown sea and brought thy call to my home.

The night is dark and my heart is fearful—yet I will take up the lamp, open my gates and bow to him my welcome. It is thy messenger who stands at my door.

I will worship him with folded hands, and with tears. I will worship him placing at his feet the treasure of my heart.

He will go back with his errand done, leaving a dark shadow on my morning; and in my desolate home only my forlorn self will remain as my last offering to thee.¹²⁷

Now follows an analysis of Paul Annixter's Swiftwater, a novel centered around the life of Bucky Calloway and taking place in a rural setting. The second novel, Paul Zindel's Pardon Me, You're Stepping On My Eyeball, explores the life of Louis "Marsh" Mellow who lives in the city.

The growth experience of Bucky Calloway in Swiftwater takes place in a rural setting where life and death are more directly presented. Bucky, like his father, is a hunter who obeys the laws of the woods, killing for survival only. His world is more in keeping with our Western society before the Industrial Revolution, although the modern world is represented by the nearby town of Swiftwater. By living close to nature, and, in a sense, by living in the past, Bucky experiences real and symbolic confrontations with death as preparation for the death of his father, experiences not available to a city adolescent. Bucky is a throwback to the independent pioneer spirit in tune with his natural surroundings, much like Rawlings' Jody of The Yearling, and of Mary Call Luther of Where the Lilies Bloom and Trial Valley. Bucky is also his

¹²⁷Rabindranath Tagore, Gitanjali (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1971), p. 100.

father's child, for Cam Calloway has survived and remained a free spirit through his knowledge of the woods, and he has taught his son his ways. Cam and Bucky's free spirits are represented in the novel by the wild geese, a reminder of Ibsen's The Wild Duck. Cam's death comes about in his effort to save the wild geese from the hunters who have used the technological knowledge of the modern Waste Land to slaughter them, and Bucky's acceptance of Cam's death comes from Bucky's ability to provide a sanctuary for the wild geese.

Throughout the novel there is foreshadowing of Cam's death. Part of the foreshadowing comes from Bucky's repressed fear of his father's death which surfaces in Bucky's fear that his father will not return to the family from his "outjourneys."

All day he'd been thinking of Cam. As always he felt suffocated in the fear that Cam was gone for good. The core of him seemed muffled in his father's absence.¹²⁸

Later, the narrator again expresses Bucky's fear,

He was eager, tearful, melting with affection, yet he was afraid. Always with Bucky there was the fear that Cam might go on and on like the geese and not return. . . .
(p. 12)

As Bucky fears his father's abandonment, he also perceives Cam's physical frailty of Cam. Cam physically declines throughout the novel, and Bucky's awareness of the changes in his father helps prepare him for Cam's death. Early in the novel, Cam groaned as he stood up and rubbed his hips and thighs and told Bucky he wasn't the man he used to be as a grayish look overshadowed his face. Bucky responds,

¹²⁸Paul Annixter, Swiftwater (New York: Scholastic Book Services, 1950), p. 5.

Illness and physical weakness were almost unknown in the Calloway household. A shadow fell over Bucky at Cam's words and the gray look that crossed his father's face, but he said nothing. (p. 30)

A variety of disappointments wear away at Cam, physically and spiritually. Bad luck comes with Cam's accident which makes Bucky feel that the forest has turned against them. Another piece of bad luck comes on April Fool's Day when Cam and Bucky have to sell their furs at a fraction of what they are worth. This event "had undermined the safe surety of their old life—his and Cam's" (p. 123). One of the last hard knocks comes with the loss of their land, and when Cam has to tell his wife that they will have to move further into the wilderness on government land, Bucky notes, "Cam looked frail somehow, and slack-shouldered" (p. 130). Supposedly good news comes with the plan for the sanctuary, but after the Calloways and Dell Fraser settle on a plan for the wild geese, Bucky is aware of Cam's depression,

In spite of the big new idea, Cam's spirits seemed low. It had been so since spring. Cam carried on, but he talked little these days and his back was bent a bit as though he carried a heavy load. (p. 165)

Perhaps the most ominous foreshadowing of Cam's death comes with his hawk dreams. Cam's Micmac friend, Peter Nigosh, appears on Christmas Day and tells him he knows of the hawk dream. Later in the spring Cam tells Bucky that he wants to see Peter Nigosh again because he has been dreaming the hawk dream all week. Cam tells Bucky,

Last night in my dreams I lay in a rocky, fearsome place, held down hand an' foot, with the cussed bird tearin' at me. Could hear it scream--
The words struck into Bucky, opening up a nest of fear. (p. 165)

Just before his death, while intoxicated, Cam recognizes the hawk of his dreams as his own death (pp. 192-193). During the time that Cam is becoming aware of his dream's meaning, Bucky is having "gruesome visions that were worse than any wakefulness" (p. 191). Bucky's need to talk with Cam sends him to the duck blind to his father, "drawn there as by a silent call" (p. 191). Bucky reaches the camp in time to witness his father's death.

Mental depression and physical frailty are used as clues to prepare Bucky for his father's death. A new world order, one rejected by Cam, is also part of what destroys him, for he tries to protect his world as it clashes with that new world order by protecting the wild geese. From the beginning fight between Bucky and Whit Turner over the wild geese on throughout the novel, Bucky has blended his fear of losing his father with his protectiveness of the wild geese. After the initial fight of the novel, the townspeople speak of Bucky and Cam,

"Bucky's different; his father is, too, . . . he's just about as transitory as them wild geese, feels kin to 'em too," they say. "Bucky's a piece of the same." (p. 3)

The wild goose is the totem of the Micmac Indians, and Bucky thinks of it as his and his father's totem also. Further, the geese represent their relationship:

Bucky could hardly remember when he had first become aware that the wild geese were like the pattern of life—his and Cam's. (p. 4)

When the geese are near, so is his father:

Those sounds out there stirred the boy's blood strangely. Always they brought his father close, as if Cam were sitting there right beside him. (p. 4)

The geese and Cam share a common weakness—corn, Cam's in the form of whiskey and the geese's in domesticated fields. Corn provides the common downfall for both Cam and the geese. The corn may bring Cam down, but the geese help him rise, a thought that gives Bucky comfort,

His father had said once that a man's soul could vault straight to the high hereafter on a wild goose's call. (p. 4).

At the end of the novel, Bucky remembers these words as he hears the call of the geese while standing at his father's grave (p. 220).

Cam's death comes about as a result of the clash of two worlds, natural and technological. The word machine is used to describe good and evil in these worlds. Twice, the relationship of father and son is compared to a machine, "From long practice father and son had developed a teamwork. They were like separate parts of the same machine" (p. 26). Later, on remembering a deer hunt when, at age thirteen, he had killed his first buck and become a man, Bucky says of Cam and himself:

Silently they separated, two fledged hunters, equal and reliant on one another as the parts of one machine. It was wonderful. (p. 69)

Evil machinery comes from James Fretcher's mechanical hunter's blind installed in the camp where Cam is hired as cook and guide,

It was a master-built marvel that rolled on wheels, finished in aluminum and rubber, . . . and wall lights, operated by electric dry cells. . . . Its grass-camouflaged roof lifted up by a lever for quick wing shooting. (p. 178)

On his first day, Cam has misgivings and realizes that he should leave because of differences in values, but part of his world values makes Cam stay, stay in an artificial world eventually to protect his and Bucky's totems, the wild geese. Cam feels honor-bound to keep his

word; just as he kept his word and lost his land, he will now keep his word and lose his life:

Instinct counseled Cam to draw out of the situation the first day. But there was his allegiance to Dell Fraser to think of, and he had already committed himself by spoken word. . . . And who would ever have dreamed that these strangers symbolized the sword that had hung low over his head for four months past? (p. 179)

After several angry confrontations with the hunters from the city, especially after they refuse to retrieve the ducks they kill, Cam drinks the liquor the hunters give him. As they ply him with drinks, Cam becomes drunk, ". . . his mind torn with strange fury and grief, misery, and something akin to suicide" (p. 186). Already, Cam is aware that the hunters will treat the wild geese with the same disrespect that they showed the wild ducks. Within his drunken state,

. . . Cam himself was the sword that hung low over his own head—hung by the thinnest, most tenuous of threads.
(p. 187)

From their mechanized hunter's blind, the hunters blast the approaching wild geese in the morning mist. Cam, remembering the fate of the ducks, runs to protect the geese, thinking, "Someone had to stop that, put them out of their misery at least. Out into the swirl of mist and water he plunged" (p. 193). Bucky sees Cam and begins running toward him "Something in Cam's movements, even from a distance, had filled him with a weight of dread" (p. 193). The hunters shoot Cam from their blind. "Bucky screamed at the top of his lungs as he saw Cam fall" (p. 193). The men help bring Cam in, "all limp and bloody" (p. 194). "Bucky took one look, then reeled and fell as dead" (p. 194). It was an hour before he came to.

From the beginning of the novel, the wild geese are interwoven in the father-son relationship and eventually their sanctuary helps Bucky accept and live with Cam's death. But the natural world also offers Bucky preparation for encounters with death, thus heightening his awareness of it. Initiation rites into manhood came at the early age of thirteen; initiation into adulthood's endless trials comes during the winter, itself a season of death. The Little Jackpine Valley is the scene of Bucky's symbolic confrontation with death out of which he emerges victorious and on a higher plane of consciousness. This victory provides him with the strength needed to face Cam's death later on.

Though the author of Psalms 23 writes that he walked through the valley of the shadow of death and feared no evil, Bucky is overwhelmed with fear as he enters his valley and confronts death. The images of life and death are significant, for Bucky uses words like tangle, hysteria, and chaos to describe that which he does battle in. For example, "These weather-bleached masses of branches formed nightmare tangles that seemed caught in a permanent hysteria" (p. 31). Later, during his encounter with the wolverine, Bucky not only has descended into the valley, but he has to descend into a log jam:

Then down into the twisty chaos of dead trunks, led by his nose, for the rank odor of the devil's den now filled the air coming upward from the bottom of the jam; fouler than any skunk, the taint was, the choking of carnivore. (p. 74)

This is the valley where Cam had his leg accidentally crushed, the valley where they were aware of being watched by an evil force, and where Peter Nigosh warned them not to hunt this season. A Castenada reader would look for death over his left shoulder here. The description of the valley could also be a description of death or an afterworld.

"Abandon hope, all ye who enter here" should be written over its entrance:

In a little more than an hour they reached the entrance to the valley and once in that dark, forbidding tangle a hush seemed laid upon them. Bucky felt, as on that first day, an overshadowing sense of oppression. (p. 53)

Death imagery is foreboding and complicated, unnecessarily confusing, but life imagery is clearer, still, and often silent.

On his trip to the valley with Cam during which Cam has his accident, Bucky experiences various stages of response to death as described by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross. After the accident, Cam says, "The valley's got in the first lick . . . (p. 56). Bucky's response to the valley's (death's) lick is first one of denial, "A dark shaft entered Bucky's chest at the words, but he closed a gate against it, threw it off" (p. 57). Next Bucky bargains for Cam's life,

His whole being cried out, framing a plea to the wilderness. It was like a prayer, but all that came forth was a single sobbing word.

"Please--" he breathed to the surrounding trees and the growing night. (p. 58)

In an effort toward acceptance comes an effort to open up and face what is happening:

Because his impulse was to hurry in again and close the door against it, Bucky stood for several minutes with his face straight into it, letting the cold and darkness and emptiness sink into him. (p. 62)

Physical and mental battles take place for Bucky as the inner doors of his mind and heart are opened in this quiet moment.

Because of Cam's accident, Bucky's next trip is one he makes alone. By his identity with the natural world, by his sensitivity to changes in Cam, by his identity with the wild geese, and by his various

stages of response to Cam's accident and possible death, Bucky is better prepared for his next encounter with death in the valley although he is frightened:

The same fearsome feeling of the first day came over him again till his feet wanted to fly away and out of the valley.
(p. 70)

The animals in his traps are devoured, and Bucky knows he has to face the watchful evil force, his enemy. He refers to his enemy as a devil, but the language used could also be a description of death. Whatever it is has to be dealt with:

For long minutes Bucky stood in the dusky shadows, fighting down his fear. Then he thought of what awaited him at home—that stricken look in his father's face—and his fear of that was greater than his fear of the valley.
(p. 71)

The wolverine, his enemy, is both natural and unnatural, for its coloring, "lighter-colored along its back and darker underneath," is "in direct contradiction to all other forest things" (p. 72). Death itself seems to human beings both natural and unnatural, for it is a natural part of the cycle of life, but unnatural when happening to them personally, or at least it is happening to them at an unnatural time. The light-dark imagery representing life and death also becomes part of the confrontation when Bucky realizes it is late afternoon, "And the end of light meant victory for the enemy" (p. 73).

The chase ends at the aforementioned log jam into which both descend. The wolverine growls at Bucky, who experiences absolute terror,

He crouched, peering, shaken to the marrow. And then movement caught his eye below and he made out a soot-dark form in the nether shadows. (p. 74)

Bucky's fierce yelling doesn't stop the wolverine's ascent from the bottom of the log jam,

The creature's advance never checked. Its fighting mask was terrible; the small, implacable eyes brimmed with a blue-green flame, as if the surface of them were burning as the surface of wood alcohol burns in a lamp. (p. 75)

The creature advances much as Poe's Red Death does, gliding around and into, never backing off from its victim. Relentlessly it comes with all its strength: "The thing came up at him in spite of all" (p. 76).

Bucky, who in the stalking has lost his gun, and thus, as in Faulkner's The Bear, must fight his enemy on an equal footing, is finally able to kill it with his skinning knife. Afterwards he climbs upward out of the "hysteria" or "chaos" of tangled logs. "He whimpered once, but there wasn't a tear in his eye" (p. 76).

He held his eyes on the brightest star, until chaos left them and their vision steadied, cleared, as if his head were higher up than ever it had been before, in a realm of pure air. His brain was almost frighteningly clear. (p. 76)

Bucky experiences an altered state of consciousness; his victory over death, symbolic and real, is won: "He wasn't tired now; he wasn't cold; he wasn't afraid" (p. 76).

Never again would the night dogs make his skin crawl. Never again would he be afraid of anything above ground. (p. 77).

Bucky has wrestled death itself in the valley and learned to fear no evil that exists in his natural world. He has conquered his fear of death, conquered death itself in the world as he knows it, in a world where he and Cam are one machine. The fear and death of another world have yet to threaten him, that mechanized world of the civilized town hunter, a world that fights to obliterate the pure and simple natural world to which Bucky and Cam belong. Bucky's victory over death as evidenced in the natural world, though, helps him prepare for his father's death, a death caused by Cam's effort to protect the wild

geese, symbol of his and Bucky's world. The wolverine's hide became a second symbol of proven manhood for Bucky and as a natural warrior, he wears his badge of courage in the form of a hat and mittens made from the hide.

His struggle has also left Bucky at one with nature,

The deep woods were showing him their secret face now, their winter side, which few men even have the need, or the hardihood, to learn. Almost too much to bear it was at first, that deathly, diamond stillness, that awesome and categorical presence. The thick spruce silence was more than silence; it was a spell. (p. 107)

After his victory, Bucky recognizes the change in nature as part of his spoils of war:

The same fearsome trees that had furtively crowded him in the fall as if they hated to see him getting out of their clutches, were opening to him now. (p. 107)

Castaneda's readers might associate this pantheistic approach with finding their right spot during the early evening hours.

Grief and guilt accompany Bucky through the period after his father's death, but the guilt can be seen as a natural part of his grief:

Bucky saw in those days more than could ever be told by pen or word: saw how that fierce, fanatical love of his and Cam's had carried the seeds of death; how the great and silent clasping of their spirits had somehow shadowed this. (p. 195)

Bucky believes that his love and his plan for the sanctuary lead to Cam's death. Many times guilt like this becomes a part of the mourning period. Later Bucky's love for his father is retained and Cam becomes a part of his thoughts of the sanctuary so that his guilt is worked out.

The mechanized world that killed Cam was not allowed to bury him, for Bucky, against his mother's wishes, insisted that his father be buried "on the pine knoll up behind the cabin" (p. 195). At the end of Doc Waters' eulogy, nature responded with the drumming of an old cock partridge.

Every man looked up quickly into the eyes of his fellows, for Nature didn't time herself to a split dramatic second like that for nothing. It was more than a cock partridge beating a log. It was a further accolade for Cam, a requiem of the Red Gods. (p. 197)

Bucky is barely able to hold up at the funeral, and only does so as his mother and sister break down and cry, for their crying steadies him: "He stiffened then, stood still and straight, even through the hollow finality of earth clods falling on the coffin top" (p. 197). "It was not til hours later that he himself broke and then it was alone and far off in the silence of the woods" (p. 197).

Solace comes through physical exhaustion, by walking endlessly in the woods, by being alone with his grief. "Home had become a place of painful, bated silence. He and Ma were wordless in the face of one another's grief . . ." (p. 197).

For Bucky the days that followed were tranced and strange. . . . They were tramping without hunting and the endless song of the fall wind in the pinetops, haunting as death and pain, subtle as grief that ran too deep for tears. (p. 195)

Cam is a part of the woods endlessly walked, and Bucky pictures the two of them "walking always and wonderfully together" (p. 198). These walks are used for more than physical exhaustion, for "Times he communed wordlessly with Cam, explaining, forgiving, making many promises" (p. 198).

The walking and the internal dialogues are the balm that heals the boy's spirit, and another healing source for him is communication with an understanding human being. Grief must be shared. Though unable to prepare for the death experience because of its sudden execution and unable to share his grief with his mother and sister, Bucky is able to share his grief with Doc Waters. Others try to communicate with Bucky, but only Doc Waters, so well versed in talk and experience of grief and death, is able to get through to him. The doctor speaks directly of death with no euphemisms to block the directness of the experience. "He spoke as though it were the most ordinary occurrence in the world" (p. 199).

Instead of cracking up because of pent-up grief, as Doc had feared, the boy makes changes instead. The wild geese help him to overcome his grief, for as he watches for the migration, "It brought Cam closer. Impossible to think of him as separate from the geese and the plan" (p. 199).

Acceptance of death and end of mourning and grief finally come, for "There came days at last when he seemed not always alone. The streams and the wind said the old familiar things" (p. 199).

As life and death have gone full circle, so does the action of the novel, which begins and ends with a fight between Whit Turner and Bucky over the shooting of the wild geese. The last fight ends with both boys defeated, with no winner, but Bucky feels that again the town, that other world that defeated Cam, has defeated him. Refusing help, he walks alone to his cabin, but as he approaches the doorway, he sees something there, a wounded goose, a goose wounded by the town's

hunters who had happened upon the geese eating corn erratically planted for them by the Calloway men. The meaning of the wounded goose comes, "It had to do with him, with the real meaning of him and Cam" (p. 206).

"It came home to die," he muttered in wonder. "It knew where to come."

Another step, the wings lifted, whipped the air, raising the body clear. Then he saw what had happened. Its underside was a smear, its footing all shot away. Nothing to take off with. It was like part of him. (pp. 206-7)

The final stage of his response to his father's death comes with his mercy killing of the goose. He, like the goose, is wounded; he, too, has lost his footing; Cam, Bucky's footing, was also "shot away." By taking what should have been the responsibility of the town's hunters, representatives of that other world that had brought death and destruction to his world, by acting instead of withdrawing, Bucky heals himself.

Good things begin to happen, for the geese remain, eating the Calloway corn, and Bucky begins to hunt again. Changes are evident and the boy accepts them. Speaking of the woods, he says,

They would never again be as he remembered them, with Cam a part of them. The whole country had changed. For Cam had been the last of the old true woodsmen, symbol of a time and a life that could not come again. (p. 216)

In performing the mercy killing of something of his world, in giving something of himself by that act, Bucky is able to change and grow by blending the best of both worlds. He never has to choose between the two but is able to use the knowledge of the world that died with Cam to form a bridge of understanding into the modern world which turned out not to be all bad. With a newspaperman's help, Bucky focuses attention on establishing the wild-geese sanctuary, and with help from

various agencies, it is begun with Bucky working as its manager. Bucky goes to Cam's grave,

"We did it, Pa," he breathed to the night wind moving down from Sugarloaf.

Two scalding tears started from his eyes and bounced off his cheeks, but that was all. (p. 220)

As he stands near Cam, hearing the cry of the wild geese, he remembers Cam's words, words true for him as he soars into his own new life.

"Oh, it was true; you could mount right up to the high hereafter on the wild goose's call" (p. 220).

For Bucky, the wild geese will come and go, but Cam, now a part of the earth, will stay with his son. No longer afraid of abandonment and now able to accept his father's death, Bucky finds, "Cam was rooted in his heart like a tree in the good earth" (p. 220).

Immortality comes for Cam through what he has given his son and by the nature that he lived in harmony with. Cam's spiritual bequests to his son, love, honor, and reverence for life, will nurture the boy on his way into a new life. Cam has returned to the dust he was made of; his body will fertilize the pines on the knoll behind his family's cabin; thus he will become a part of the natural world that had nurtured him.

Bucky is able to grow into adulthood because he has worked toward acceptance of Cam's death. He is able to grow and change, accept love and responsibility. He does not deny Cam's death or remain locked into anger, for Cam remains in his heart and deeds, and in the forest they have shared and loved.

As we leave the rural setting of Swiftwater, we enter an urban setting, that of New York and meet Louis "Marsh" Mellow, a

fifteen-year-old high school student, who experiences several of the stages of response toward death as described by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross. Paul Zindel's Pardon Me, You're Stepping on My Eyeball begins with Marsh's denial of his father's death through lies and by blocking his memory of his father's death. As the novel begins, Marsh is sitting in class making out one of his hate lists, and on this list, number eight, is, "I hate that my father is 3,000 miles away in Los Angeles, and I know he's in trouble."¹²⁹ Marsh is very creative in his maneuvers to keep down his memory of his father's death, a death Marsh, himself, witnessed and felt guilty about. Marsh continues his denial of his father's death by lying to everyone, including himself. In a high school class for maladjusted students, he lies about his and his father's exploits. He fantasizes about his father, creating a person whose faults are acceptable, such as his drinking, for his father's death was caused by his drinking problem. Pete, Marsh's father, is virtuous beyond bound. He has ceased to be a human being—he has become super human—a form of denial itself, for it is only when the survivor can remember the good and the bad that he can accept the death.

At the beginning of the novel, the reader finds that Pete has been gone for a year, though the reader does not realize that he is dead, as the narrator, third person limited, tells the story through Marsh's and Edna's vision.

¹²⁹Paul Zindel, Pardon Me, You're Stepping on My Eyeball (New York: Bantam Books, 1976), p. 1.

Marsh knows he lies about his father, and he recognizes the magnitude of his lies. The narrator says,

Marsh would always lie about two things, mainly. Usually about girls, and about his father. . . . Marsh had a compulsion to tell everyone what lady-killers he and his father were. . . . He didn't know why he was unable to keep his mouth shut. They were huge lies. . . . And the bitter truth he knew oh-so-well. Marsh Mellow didn't have a friend in the world. . . . he couldn't seem to communicate directly with anybody. The only pay he had was Paranoid Pete. . . . (pp. 11-12)

Just as Marsh's lies deny his father's death, so too do they deny him human frailty. Marsh says,

When my father goes to a party, or goes anywhere, I'll tell you, people love him. He's the tops. Mr. Cool. Sir Wingding. And everybody loved me too. (p. 21)

He later tells Edna, a fifteen-year-old classmate, "I'm telling you, if you knew my Pop you would have loved him, no kidding" (p. 54). The reader may come to different conclusions about Pete while listening to Marsh describe him, "Every bar we ever went into, he protected me by punching somebody in the face. Paranoid Pete had guts, let me tell you!" (p. 55). Later, Marsh says,

"See, Pete felt if a father didn't smack his brat around once in a while that that father didn't really love his kid. But let me tell you, Pete really loved me. He used to throw me against the wall like clock work and he'd always tell me it was for my own good. . . . Good ole Pete was king of the hill; dominated the television; hated sitcoms because they were so phoney. . . ." (p. 55)

The lie that ultimately leads to Marsh's acceptance of Pete's death is the one he creates through several letters he claims to have recently received from Pete, who is in a "nuthouse" in California. The letters reinforce Marsh's portrayal of Pete as superhuman, courageous and noble. The letters lead to Marsh and Edna's trip toward California to rescue Pete, who faces a lobotomy.

Marsh idealizes his relationship with his father, especially in his memories of the trips they took together, usually after a confrontation with Suzy, the mother. Marsh has pleasant memories of the trip to Hollywood. The event preceding the trip began with Suzy calling Pete a stinker,

"Oh yea?" Pete asked. Pete didn't wait for an answer. He just took Marsh by the hand, and Marsh knew they were going someplace. He thought it might just be to Dirty Irma's, or the Magic Elephant. But this time it turned out to be three thousand miles to California—Los Angeles, to be exact. What a trip that had been. That was Marsh's idea of paradise; Paranoid Pete and him in Hollywood. (p. 77)

Interwoven with Marsh's act of denial are his guilt feelings about Pete's death. While enjoying remembering the California trip, Marsh knows that he must also stop his memory at a certain point in order to continue his denial and choke back his guilt feelings.

He knew his mind was moving forward to the main thing he didn't want to remember. He knew he could remember only so far, and then he'd have to stop himself. Rather than let the most horrible memory of his life come any closer, he tried to turn his mind off, but he couldn't. (p. 79)

Marsh's memory continues forward to the day of Pete's death. Pete was drinking heavily and Marsh thinks, ". . . he could have told Pete not to drink so much. He could have made his father take him to an early movie or something" (p. 79). Feelings of guilt intensify as Marsh's memory moves forward, recounting the events of that day.

"Turn off the guilt machine! Turn off the horrible guilt machine!" Marsh felt himself beginning to shake as his mind spun closer to the worst of the nightmare. "It's your fault!" A voice in his mind cried out. "It was all your fault!" For a minute he thought he would have no control and the full terror of it would sweep across him. . . . (p. 81)

Marsh exercises mental tricks to stop his memory. First, he counts backwards from one hundred and then he remembers the Hollywood graffiti.

Marsh indirectly is considering the general topic of death, but his thoughts are associated with his father, for the thoughts on death are in the letters from Pete that Marsh made up. Pete supposedly writes,

Death is more than Nature's way of telling you to slow down. Death is horrible. And what makes me feel so sick is that you've inherited it from me. Everybody's always inventing something to believe in, but tough luck, Marsh, they're all wrong. I don't care if they use Yoga, tarot cards, Transcendental Meditations, Zen, I mean, all that garbage. All they're doing is kidding themselves because when you're dead, you're really croaked. Everything we do is unimportant. (p. 68)

Pete, sounding like an existentialist on the absurdity of living, doesn't sound like the life of the party of earlier descriptions, but his thoughts on the absurdity of the human condition lead him to a rather juvenile philosophy of living, one to which a teenager might aspire:

The whole gimmick is that everybody on earth is out to make money and have as much fun as possible before they die and get stuck in a casket and are cremated or frozen like Walt Disney. (p. 70)

Two ways that Marsh learns to live with death without having to face the reality of his father's death are covering his room with posters of people and animals who have died and taking care of and greatly loving a baby raccoon. Edna, Marsh's friend, notices,

Everyone hanging on the walls of Marsh's room was dead. That was what they all had in common; in fact, that was the only thing they all had in common. Everyone wasn't even of the same species; there were humans and horses. The only common denominator, was that all of them were

dead. That was the secret hanging on his walls. Marsh Mellow had a photographic morgue. From that point of view, the cremation urn was in absolutely the right place. (pp. 137-8)

Mr. Meizner, school counselor, early in the novel tells Marsh that the raccoon is symbolically his father, but Marsh denies it through joking. Later in the novel Marsh neglects the raccoon, and the raccoon dies in a fire. Just as Marsh experiences guilt and denial about his father's death, so, too, does he experience both about the raccoon at first:

Marsh knew Raccoon had to be somewhere in the woods below the house. He felt terrible, because he knew how frightened the animal would be and it was all his fault. (p. 168)

Having to face the raccoon's death helps Marsh toward an acceptance of Pete's death. Edna calls Pete a "raccoon-killer." Marsh's response is to hit her repeatedly, but even while striking her, he is aware of changes,

Suddenly he stopped striking out at her. . . . He felt instantly and deeply ashamed; not only because of what he had done to her, but because he was aware that he was crying. He slowly lowered his head onto her shoulder and held on to her. "Come with me," Marsh heard himself beg. "Oh, God, please come with me. Please goddam help me." (p. 174)

Marsh's tears and plea for help after facing his responsibility for the raccoon's death lead him toward acknowledgement and acceptance of his father's death. He needs to make a pilgrimage to California, the scene of that death. Unable to face reality alone, he pleads with Edna to make the journey with him, a journey in time and space, but also one that thrusts both teenagers a step further into adulthood. In a sense, Edna is Beatrice leading Dante ever upwards, but she, too, is advancing through her commitment to helping Marsh. She knows that

Pete is dead, found it out, in fact, rather gruesomely. Suzy showed her the urn holding Pete's ashes which was kept under Marsh's bed. Suzy also told her how he died,

"He got drunk and stumbled out onto a street where he got hit by a bus. On Hollywood Boulevard, of course; nothing but the best for Pete, you know." (p. 114)

Like Marsh, Edna has no close friend, and she is trying to learn to be one to Marsh, though at first she was put off by his lies. Her commitment to Marsh begins with her consent to slip off to California with him to help rescue Pete from the nuthouse. She knows Pete is dead, but she knows that Marsh needs her help in dealing with that death. The raccoon's death helps her to understand Marsh's denial of his father's death:

The picture of that animal staring over the edge of the terrace with the flames tearing into his fur was something she couldn't bear to fully visualize again. It hurt so much, she had to pretend it never happened. Maybe that was the only way anybody could deal with anything like that. Pretend it never happened. (p. 182)

Their journey begins down the New Jersey Turnpike where Edna notices that the service areas are all named for dead men. Just as she felt that Marsh's bedroom was morgue-like with its posters of dead people and Pete's urn, so, too, did she feel that she was in a morgue in Washington, D.C., interestingly, their last place on their journey, for they got no further than that on their trip to California.

Again Edna got the feeling she was in a morgue. There were memorials all over the place; big marble buildings erected to the memory of the very famous and the very dead. It all seemed like just one more extension of Marsh's bedroom and the New Jersey Turnpike. All some kind of mass memorial. (p. 187)

Earlier, Edna had gone to a fortune teller (witch), Miss Aimée, for advise on how to be a friend to Marsh. She tells her,

So what my problem is, is that I want to be a friend to this boy, because I've never been a friend to anybody. All I've been in my life is selfish and interested in myself and so worried about myself. (p. 121)

She and Marsh both win. She is his friend and he accepts Pete's death, but before that happens Marsh goes through a very difficult time that tries Edna's patience—the time of the journey. Miss Aimée's advice helped Edna understand what Marsh was going through. Miss Aimée pointed out,

. . . they've got to be able to break down and cry and to know that the person is dead. And not everybody does that in the same amount of time. . . . The trick is, you've got to get the person to tell someone else that their beloved is dead. . . . But, it gets more complicated than that. Because just telling someone isn't enough. They've got to do some kind of symbolic act. They've got to come up with some kind of ritual. The person's got to lay the whole death trip on to some kind of object, or some kind of action. (p. 123)

With good advice tucked under her belt, and with her understanding of Marsh's denial, based on her understanding of the raccoon's death and her commitment to be a friend, Edna is ready to help guide Marsh toward acceptance.

With Marsh, the various stages of reaction to death are not linear. His first reaction is denial, as previously shown. This is also Elisabeth Kubler-Ross's first noted stage. Her second stage, anger, is experienced by Marsh mainly before his acceptance. Depression is most often accompanied by his denial and recognized by his life-lies, telling himself that he is on top of the world.

Edna notices while preparing to go on their journey that Marsh's being so caught up in his rescue plans for Pete is a sign that he was near the breaking point: "Edna sensed that if she didn't help him tonight, she never could" (p. 179).

Marsh's denial continues as they begin their journey. Edna notes,

Edna realized after a few other attempts at conversation that there seemed to be an understanding between her and Marsh that everything she mentioned had an undercurrent of "Hey, let's get down to brass tacks"; and every response he made seemed to be "Oh no you don't." (p. 183)

The longer they are together on their journey, the more Marsh's anger increases. Edna says, "At least his anger seemed to wake him up a little . . ." (p. 186). After criticizing him for driving without his shoes on, she notes, ". . . he shot her a look of rage" (p. 186). Later, she says, "His tone was so mean . . ." (p. 188). Marsh is still angry after the crash in Washington that ends their journey and after Edna throws the cremation urn into the river, for "He yanked the suitcase handle so hard, it was as if he was angry with it—and the entire side of the suitcase gave way" (p. 197). Marsh's anger increased and his wreckless driving increased with it. He drove faster and became angrier at once. Just before the car began skidding, Edna said, "'You're trying to kill us both' . . . 'I know about your father, Marsh. I'm sorry. I'm very sorry'" (p. 189). After that, the car skids out of control and crashes. Marsh is able to save his suitcase. Both leave the car when they hear a police siren. After following the river road, they cross a bridge, both real and symbolic, for here Marsh really begins to change. Ironically, they are moving at this point to a cemetery.

At this point, everything in the novel could be simply tied together by Marsh's symbolic act, fulfilling the witch's prophesy, by throwing the urn into the river, but that doesn't happen. Edna knows that that is what is needed, so she does it for him, thus delaying Marsh's acceptance of his father's death. She gives him a chance to do so, but he declines the offer—silently—before she commits the act.

"We should get rid of it here," Edna said. She waited a minute, but there was still no reaction from Marsh. "Don't you think so?" Edna asked.

Marsh still didn't say anything. . . . (p. 193)

After "she just gave the urn a good shove and it went flying out falling down toward the water" (p. 193). Marsh still does not speak about it. He ran to the other side of the bridge, but in the dark could see nothing. They move on into the cemetery to hide from the police. Once through the bars of the cemetery gates, both run a half mile before sitting down on the grass between graves. Edna has time to reflect upon her act on the bridge, seen now by her as a mistake. Her depression turns to anger at herself, "because she felt she had all the answers right in front of her and she still didn't know how to put them together" (p. 195). Edna also feels guilty. Edna realizes that there has to be more than a symbolic act involved, that words must be spoken also. Just as the librarian had told Miss Aimée the truth about her mother, Marsh must speak words of truth to Edna. Edna thinks,

When the cremation urn had been between them on the bridge he didn't say anything; he didn't even do anything. It was Edna who had thrown it into the river. Maybe that was the mistake, Edna thought. If Marsh had done it, maybe that would have been the symbolic act. (p. 196)

Edna takes the instruction paper from the elaborate rocket Marsh has brought with him, a rocket given him by Pete. She tore the paper in half and ordered Marsh to write down one thing he hated most and she did the same with her half of the paper. Edna went first, and after some hesitation, Marsh wrote on his part of the paper and handed it to Edna. It contained the words needed to free him: "I hate that my father is dead" (p. 198). Edna found a rubber band and with it attached the two pieces of paper to the rocket. Neither had matches, so Edna lighted a piece of cardboard from the Kennedy memorial flame and went back with it to the rocket. She ordered Marsh to her,

Marsh waited until the flame was close to burning Edna's fingers, and then he grabbed the cardboard and brought the flame to the end of the fuse. (p. 199)

Edna and Marsh run to a safe distance where they watch the magnificent three-stage rocket light up the sky hundreds of feet in the air.

Edna and Marsh bent their heads back as far as they could, and Edna knew, as she watched the sky, that she was seeing the spectacular end of a ghost. (p. 199)

The various stage explosions of the rocket remind the reader of Marsh's various explosions of anger throughout the work, and just as were "the stars set in their proper place" (p. 199), so, too, was Marsh. After angry explosions came acceptance, guided by a friend whose greatest need was to be one.

In The Novel and the Reader, one of the questions Katherine Lever suggests the reader ask himself about the novelist's vision of life is:

Has the novelist enabled you to experience pain, ugliness, evil, fear, and hatred and yet lift you wit/

new awareness of pleasure, beauty, goodness, faith, and love?¹³⁰

Yes should be the right answer for both novels. Bucky's environment presented him with many of the negatives from the question, but it also left him with the beauty of his surroundings and the goodness and love of many of the people he encountered. Marsh's pain, fear and hatred were certainly replaced by Edna's faith in him and their love. Earlier in the novel Marsh was very much like Grollman's description of some adolescents:

Psychologists point out the interesting fact that some adolescents and adults have childlike views of death. They "know" that death is inevitable and final, but most of their daily attitudes and actions are more consistent with the conviction that personal death is an unfounded rumor.¹³¹

But as the reader has seen, he acknowledged the finality of his father's death.

With the death of both fathers, Bucky and Marsh found that the deaths stole a part of themselves. In discussing the death of a parent, Gordon and Klass, in They Need to Know, note, "It is not simply we who are dying, but a part of everyone we know will die with us."¹³² Neither had been ready for their fathers' deaths, but that itself is a part of life.

¹³⁰Katherine Lever, The Novel and the Reader (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., n.d.), p. 118.

¹³¹Earl A. Grollman, Concerning Death a Practical Guide for the Living (Boston: Beacon Press, 1974), p. 68.

¹³²Audrey K. Gordon and Dennis Klass, They Need to Know (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1979), p. 64.

Robert E. Kavanaugh's father died two months after he finished writing Facing Death. Of his father's death, he was able to say,

As was his way, he gave mother a final order to turn off the television, and, as she moved to obey, he fell quietly asleep.

I loved him. We had no unfinished business. His time was right.¹³³

By the end of both novels, though their journeys are different, both Bucky and Marsh can say with Kavanaugh "We, too, had no unfinished business."

¹³³Robert E. Kavanaugh, Facing Death (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1977), from dedication.

CHAPTER IV

DEATH OF BROTHERS AND SISTERS

Many novels, short stories, and plays have centered on the special relationships held by brothers and sisters. The Greeks gave us the struggle between Antigone and her sister Ismene over the burial of their brothers after the battle of Thebes. In the battle of Troy, on the Trojan side, Hector sacrificed his life for Paris's attraction to Helen, while on the Greek side Agamemnon sacrificed his daughter Iphigenia's life so that his ships could sail to Troy and he could fight for his brother Menelaus's honor.

In thinking of literature for young people that deals with brother-sister relationships, I also realized that there are many adolescent books about only children, or children who are isolated, such as Marsh and Edna of the previous chapter, Adam Farmer in I Am the Cheese, John and Lorraine in Zindel's The Pigman, Casey in Sue Ellen Bridgers' All Together Now, and Salty in Ouida Sebestyen's Far from Home, to name a few. While they were on lonely searches, though, the characters in the four novels to be analyzed in this chapter were struggling with what must be, for a young person, one of the most tragic events in his life, the death of a brother or sister. The death of another youngster in the family must bring home the reality of death and also the reality that young as well as old people die. Many times much guilt accompanies the sister or brother to the grave, mainly caused by sibling rivalry within the family. The worst to suffer is Conrad in Judith Guest's Ordinary People. John Cappelletti's suffering comes

mainly from his family's decision to use every possible means to keep his younger brother Joey alive in Richard E. Peck's Something for Joey. Tim Meeker, in the Colliers' My Brother Sam Is Dead, suffers first from his brother's rebellion and absence and then from his death. Meg's suffering comes, much like Conrad's, from the feeling that she should die rather than her sister Molly.

The analysis will begin with the Colliers' My Brother Sam Is Dead, a novel set during the Revolutionary War, beginning in 1775, in Redding, Connecticut, covering a time span of about three years. From there we move to modern times with the Cappelletti story, Something for Joey, based on a true story and written by Richard E. Peck. The setting is Pennsylvania and during the 1970s. Molly, in Lois Lowry's A Summer to Die, is, like Joey, a leukemia victim, and we participate in her death from her sister Meg's viewpoint. The last analysis will be of Judith Guest's Ordinary People in which Conrad suffers over his brother Bucky's accidental death.

The adolescent Tim Meeker tells his family story in My Brother Sam Is Dead, in which he loses his father and older brother during the Revolutionary War. The family's inner struggles are central to the novel; the main struggle rose from conflicting views on war. At sixteen Sam returned home to Redding, Connecticut, from Yale in the uniform of the rebels. His father, Eliphalet ("Life"), who was against war, argued furiously with Sam and then sent him away when Sam didn't relent. Tim, though, kept in secret touch with his brother throughout the novel.

Ironically, the father died on a British prison ship after being taken captive by highway ruffians on the way home from New York from

selling meat that went to the British. Jerry Sanford—a ten-year-old friend of Tim's—also died on the same prison ship.

Life, the father, knew about war and death from first-hand experience and tried to warn Sam against it, rather graphically:

"Oh, Sam. Is it worth war to save a few pence in taxes?"

"It's not the money, it's the principle."

"Principle, Sam? You may know principle, Sam, but I know war. Have you ever seen a dear friend lying in the grass with the top of his skull off and his brains sliding out like wet oats? Have you ever looked into the eyes of a man with his throat cut and the blood pouring out between his fingers, knowing that there was nothing he could do, in five minutes he would be dead, yet still trying to beg for grace and not being able because his windpipe was cut in two? Have you ever heard a man shriek when he felt a bayonet go through the middle of his back? I have, Sam, I have. I was at Louisbourg the year before you were born. Oh, it was a great victory. They celebrated it with bonfires all over the colonies. And I carried my best friend's body back to his mother—sewed up in a sack.¹³⁴

Life was not, during this colonial period, protected or removed from the death of a friend. The violence of the deaths of his friends turned him against war and altered the course of his life. His reported last words before his own death on the British prison ship were, "And now I go to enjoy the freedom war has brought me" (p. 191).

After his father's death, Sam, stationed on the outskirts of his hometown, visited his mother and Tim at the family tavern. He warned them to slaughter their cattle and hide the meat, but before they did, on one of his visits, soldiers tried to steal their livestock. Sam traced the thieves, but they arrested him as the cattle thief and took him back to camp, an event that provided the bitterest irony of the

¹³⁴James Lincoln Collier and Christopher Collier, My Brother Sam Is Dead (New York: Scholastic Book Services, 1974), pp. 24-25.

novel, irony much like that in The Stranger. Tim and his mother tried unsuccessfully to get Sam free, but Sam did not have official permission to visit his family; therefore, he technically had deserted his post.

Another problem that helped condemn him was that Colonel Putnam assumed he was from a Tory family. Sam was court-martialed on February 6th and scheduled to be shot on February 16th. Truth and justice didn't matter; Sam was to be made an example to keep the other restless soldiers in line; he was the scapegoat, the sacrificial lamb offered up for the welfare of the others, for the cause of freedom.

Tim says, upon hearing the news,

It surprised me that I didn't cry or faint or anything like that. I was numb and nervous and nothing more.
(p. 223)

Tim went to see Colonel Parsons, who explained to Tim how General Putnam viewed the situation:

. . . he's thinking that it doesn't matter very much who he executes to do it. So many men have died, so many mothers have wept, so many brothers and sisters have cried. He is thinking that in the long run if he executes somebody, he'll shorten the war and save more lives. It doesn't matter to him very much who he executes; one man's agony is like another's, one mother's tears are no wetter than anybody else's. And that's why he's going to have Sam shot. (p. 225)

The contrast of emotions is astounding. The general's feelings are numbed and people have become masses of humanity; the end justifies the means. For him no individuals are left on earth. People may just as well die as live, to be sacrificed for order. Tim, just the opposite, wants to save his brother, an individual, a brother he loves, and one he wants to see be given justice in this world. Maybe he could have accepted Sam's death in battle, could have understood that that death

would have been one Sam chose for himself, but the terms of this kind of death were too absurd to contemplate. Tim says, "I began to cry. 'It's just so unfair, he fought for them for three years, and now they're going to shoot him for nothing'" (p. 232). Colonel Read told him to be brave and help his mother. Tim responded, "But I didn't feel brave nor like bearing up. All I felt was angry and bitter and ready to kill somebody. If I only knew who" (p. 232).

Tim tried to free Sam from the stockade in a desperate one-man attack that failed. Sam had already been moved and the bayonet Sam had thrown into the stockade lay glistening in the moonlight. "And I knew it had all been a waste" (p. 239).

Tim's mother refused to go to the execution, but Tim went because he knew his brother would want someone there and because someone would have to claim the body. Just as there had been no buffer between his father and the death of his friends during war, there was now no buffer between Tim and the death of his brother. Yet, it was not a death to be closely shared, for, because of the circumstances, Sam and Tim could only see each other; there were no listening and talking about this abrupt death.

Tim, standing on the roadside, saw Sam being taken in a cart to the place of execution, and he shouted to his brother,

"Sam," I shouted as he went by.

He looked around at me. His face was dead white but he managed to give me a grin—not much of a one, but a grin. Then they passed on by. (p. 240)

When Tim reached the place of execution, he pushed his way through the crowd at first,

When people saw who it was they let me pass. I pushed my way up near the front of the crowd, but not all the way. I had a funny feeling that I wanted to be hidden. I didn't want to stand out where people could see me.
(p. 240)

There had been a kind of unreality about the approaching death of Sam. Tim had experienced anger, but a general anger, one which had no target. He had tried to free his brother, a way of denying the death, or maybe of bargaining for Sam's life. He needed to do something, to act, to keep death from occurring. Now he needed to hide, not to feel exposed, yet for Sam's sake, he needed to be present at his death.

Another prisoner was hanged before the crowd just before Sam was shot. Tim was aware of the hanging and of the crowd's response to it. He said at one point in his description, "My eyes were misty and I couldn't see very well" (p. 241). Next Sam was led out in front of the gallows with a sack over his head. Tim wondered "what it was like to be inside that—was it hot and did it itch?" (p. 241). The local minister prayed over Sam, and Tim said,

I tried to pray myself, but my mouth was dry and I couldn't get the words out. They turned Sam sideways to the crowd. Three soldiers stepped in front of him and raised their muskets. They were so close the gun muzzles were almost touching Sam's clothes. I heard myself scream, "Don't shoot him, don't shoot him," and at that moment Sam slammed backwards as if he'd been knocked over by a mallet. I never heard the guns roar. He hit the ground on his belly and flopped over on his back. He wasn't dead yet. He lay there shaking and thrashing about, his knees jerking up and down. They had shot him from so close that his clothes were on fire. He went on jerking with flames on his chest until another soldier shot him again. Then he stopped jerking. (pp. 241-42)

The narrator Tim wrote the story in 1826 at the age of sixty-four, forty-seven years after Sam's death. He was seventeen when he witnessed his brother's death. He recorded his response to Sam's death,

For the first few months after Sam's death I was not able to do much more than my basic chores. But time heals wounds, and by the next fall I had become used to the ache in my heart, and I began to think about what I should do with my life. (p. 244)

Here was acceptance of his brother's death, and part of that acceptance was the sorrow for his brother's death, a death that Tim learned, with time, to live with. His brother Sam was dead and there were no euphemisms spoken that denied that death. On the other hand, doubt as to its being a justifiable death remained. Cause and effect were separated; one was accepted while the other was questioned. Tim pondered,

. . . Father said, "In war the dead pay the debts of the living," and they have paid us well. But somehow, even fifty years later, I keep thinking that there might have been another way, besides war, to achieve the same end. (p. 245)

Sam was dead; the country was free; Tim accepted his brother's death but continued to hope that there might be better ways, other than war, to be free. Life was too absurd during that war; acceptance came for an adolescent in spite of the absurdity, the cruel irony of a brother dying for stealing his own cows. Tim, at sixty-four, spent volumes writing out the circumstances of his brother's death while summarizing the rest of his own fifty-four years in a few pages and generalizations. Sam's death made its mark and altered Tim's life. Hopefully, the writing provided the needed catharsis.

In Something for Joey, Joey Cappelletti's terminal illness gave his family time to prepare for acceptance of his death, but it also gave them time to enjoy him before his death. The family's central problem with Joey came with their decision to put Joey in an experimental program

to prolong his life. The alternative was to let him die naturally of leukemia in six months. The decision was difficult because Joey suffered a great deal of pain during his lengthened life. He lived about five years longer, but the burning question was whether that decision was fair to Joey. Were they being selfish in keeping this youngest child of four alive? The family decided they had been right to prolong his life after Joey's older brother John, a Pennsylvania State football star, won the Heisman Trophy in 1973 and then dedicated it to Joey. Joey was then eleven. He died in April 1976, a young adolescent.

In this study interest lies in the effect of Joey's illness and death on his older brother John, Joey's idol. In their story anger was expressed only once by John when Joey annoyed him continuously while John was trying to study. Denial and bargaining also were absent. Basically, the whole family accepted and lived with the fact that Joey was dying. There were a few times when John and his mother discussed Joey's death and when John felt guilt. The family held back the seriousness of the disease from Joey but at the same time answers his questions honestly. The reader was held at a distance from the daily battle of the illness, unlike Doris Lund's telling of her son's death in Eric. We didn't know how much Joey really knew, for the narrator was mainly concerned with the story of Joey's bravery and love for football. The reader was kept at a distance. Although the telling of the story bordered on sentiment and reeked slightly of Little House on the Prairie romanticism, courage and love were openly expressed in the face of death, and no euphemisms were used.

Several things worked for John and his family as they lived with the knowledge that Joey was dying. Their grief was a shared one by the whole family, a family that worked together without friction. A second thing that helped them was their religion, for the mother prayed for help and felt the divine presence in her home. Religion and a strong family unit helped the family in their acceptance.

Guilt did enter the picture several times. John asked, "'I worry sometimes, Mom, about whether we do enough for Joey.'" ¹³⁵ His mother tried to ease his feelings by telling him that God gave him special abilities, and he shouldn't feel guilty for using them. "When he spoke, pain was evident in his voice. 'What did God give Joey?'" (p. 38). Later John was talking with his brother Martin,

"I don't know why I'm so lucky, and it bothers me." . . .

"You're talking about Joey," Martin said. It wasn't a question. John's voice had taken on a special quality that Marty recognized.

"Yeah, I guess I am. But what kind of sense does it make for Joey to have it so rough, and me to have it so easy?"

The question hung in the room, unanswered--and unanswerable. (p. 85)

John had been aware from the beginning of the story that Joey was ill, but he described him as "all squirming energy" (p. 14). The narrator says, "His steady chatter made it difficult for John to remember how ill Joey really was" (p. 14). Joey's illness and pain become more and more evident, and, as Elisabeth Kubler-Ross suggests, John, the living, learned from Joey who was dying. He learned about courage, endurance, and acceptance.

¹³⁵ Richard E. Peck, Something for Joey (New York: Bantam Books, 1978), p. 37.

There was a lot of strength in Joey, a resilience and spirit that John admired. . . . Mere approval wasn't all that was visible in John's frequent sidelong glances at Joey. There was genuine admiration, that and pride in his brother's grit and optimism. (pp. 15-16)

Later, after Joey has survived a coma and its aftermath, John was well aware of Joey's pain,

"Last week, when he was having trouble with his spleen, he couldn't even straighten up. The doctor said it was like an attack of appendicitis, only for Joey it lasted for four days!" . . .

"I'll tell you something else," John said. "A friend of mine at school had a spinal tap last spring. He was telling me afterward, he never felt pain like that in his life. Well, Joey's had one every month, for years." . . .

"And I've never heard Joey say it hurts," Marty added. John was quiet but obviously troubled. "I don't see how he holds up. . . ." (p. 108)

John's awareness of his brother's own courage and of Joey's expectations of him caused John to push himself at football. For one of Joey's birthdays, John delivered four touchdowns and performed the same feat at the next game. John always took the challenge,

Blinded by his hero worship, the boy almost casually expected his older brother to break records every time he stepped onto the field. John knew he had to make the effort, but he had no hope of fulfilling Joey's exaggerated expectations. Still, Joey had given him an unmistakable challenge. And what concentration and hard work could accomplish, John would do. (p. 66)

The relationship was reciprocal. Joey made gains through his special relationship with his brother. John was with Joey when Joey made his first movement, signaling that he was coming out of a several months' long coma. John had told him he was to carry the football, a remark that evidently brought Joey back to life. Later, when Joey was having to learn to walk again, John was the one who secretly worked with him as a surprise for the family. The relationship could remind the

reader of the two brothers in "The Scarlet Ibis," except that that relationship ended tragically.

John had an added burden in the story, for John was the one family member Joey chose to ask if he had leukemia. The family had agreed to answer Joey's questions honestly, and John did so, even on Joey's eleventh birthday. John waited for follow-up questions, but none followed. Just knowing seemed to be enough.

Another difficult time came for John when Joey dragged John to the hospital with him to meet his friend Mark, another leukemia patient. Mark had never met a football hero and wanted John's autograph, but Joey had an even greater surprise, his brother in person. Mark was not at the hospital, and a nurse took John aside to tell him Mark had died. John, unlike the hospital staff, faced the situation squarely and without any prologues or euphemisms told Joey, "'Mark died last Wednesday'" (p. 149). Joey's response to the news was,

Joey's face showed no change of expression. There was no surprise, no shock, and there were no tears. His face might have been carved in stone. Then he turned away from John and stared straight ahead, hunting for the right words. "John . . . All the . . . kids I used to . . . come here with . . . Now, there are all new kids here." It was almost as though he was talking to himself.

John reached over to put his arm around Joey's shoulders, and they sat together in silence. (p. 149)

John won the Heisman Trophy and the whole family, including Joey, went to the banquet to see John receive it in New York. During his acceptance speech John dedicated the trophy to Joey. John explained that Joey's "courage is round the clock" (p. 179) and that, "'It's more his than mine, because he's been such an inspiration to me'" (p. 179). Bishop Fulton J. Sheen closed the affair with these words:

"Tonight you have heard a speech from the heart, rather than from the lips. You have heard that triumph is made from sorrow, that John was made in part by Joseph. . . ." (p. 180)

Joey enjoyed the reporters' attention, of being the focus of attention. At that moment his parents felt that they had made the right decision for Joey,

For the gift that John had given Joey made everything have meaning. The past six years of uncertainty and pain seemed justified in that one instant. . . . (p. 181)

The dying had taught the living how to live. The living were not afraid to face the death of their loved ones, a dying and death experienced openly and honestly, with no euphemisms.

Just as the terminally ill can guide the living through new experiences, many times an older person can gently guide the young through frightening and puzzling times. Meg, the fourteen-year-old narrator of Lois Lowry's A Summer to Die, is lucky enough to have such a mentor in Will Banks, a very wise man. In her friends, Meg had Will, who has experienced the death of his wife, and Ben and Maria, who through the birth of their son Happy, helped Meg to survive the guilt she experienced throughout her older sister Molly's illness and death. Part of that guilt came because of her ignorance of Molly's condition—leukemia. This information was withheld from her by her parents, who thought they were doing the right thing, but it was also a way of denying the seriousness of Molly's illness. They did not provide enough time for Meg to share the experience with her sister and parents. If her friends had not foreseen the situation and guided Meg toward acceptance of Molly's death, Meg's psyche could have been impaired.

Throughout the novel, Meg and Molly exhibited contrasting physical appearances, talents, interests and temperaments. The novel's

opening sentence separated the girls, "It was Molly who drew the line."¹³⁶ The line was Molly's defense against Meg's clutter, a line that divided their shared bedroom, so that they could tolerate each other. Meg told the reader,

Molly is prettier than I am, but I'm smarter than Molly. I want with my whole being to be something someday; I like to think that someday, when I'm grown up, people everywhere will know who I am, because I have accomplished something important. . . . When I told Molly that once, she said that what she wants is to have a different name when she grows up, to be Molly Something Else, to be Mrs. Somebody, and to have her children, lots of them, call her "Mother," with respect, and that's all she cares about. She's content, waiting for that; I'm restless, and so impatient. (pp. 2-3)

Because of their differences, there was a certain amount of friction between them, and Meg felt guilty for her behavior toward Molly when Molly was ill. Once, for example, Molly tried to tell Meg she would be pretty one day, but Meg reacted defensively instead of accepting Molly's sincere remark. Molly responded with her own brand of anger. Meg said,

She looked surprised, and hurt. Then embarrassed, and angry. Finally, because she didn't know what else to do, she picked up a pile of her school papers and threw them at me: a typical Molly gesture; even in anger, she does things that can't possibly hurt. (p. 41)

The sisters went to bed without making up, and Molly had one of her severe nosebleeds in the night, nosebleeds she had had since February when she had the flu. Their parents rushed Molly to the hospital. After they left, Meg stood looking out the window and cried,

If I hadn't fought with Molly this afternoon, none of this would have happened, I thought miserably, and knew that it wasn't true. If I had just said "I'm sorry" before

¹³⁶Lois Lowry, A Summer to Die (New York: Bantam Books, 1977), p. 1.

we went to bed, it wouldn't have happened, I thought, and knew that that wasn't true, either. (p. 45)

The seriousness of Molly's illness was lurking somewhere in Meg, but she refused to think about it. Instead she mixed it up with her guilt feelings. Meg also denies the possibility of death, refusing to speak of the chance that Ben and Maria's baby could die. When Ben tried to show her where he would bury the baby in case of such an event, his warning was for Molly as well as the baby: "Look, Meg," Ben said, "you can pretend that bad things will never happen. But life's a lot easier if you realize and admit that sometimes they do" (p. 82). Meg lashed out at him in anger; she said,

I turned away from him and left him standing there. I was so angry I was shaking. . . .
I said, "Just in case you're interested, Ben Brady, I think you're an absolutely rotten person. That baby doesn't deserve you for a father." (p. 82)

Descriptions of Molly's illness were interwoven throughout Meg's activities. She expressed irritation with doctors, hospitals and Molly. She refused to understand the underlying reasons for the emotional and physical changes in Molly. She also refused to understand the change in her parents' attitudes toward Molly's behavior. The novel began in November when the family moved to the country so that the father, an English professor on sabbatical, could peacefully finish the book he was writing. As previously stated Molly had flu and nosebleeds in February. Meg's attitude was not very magnanimous at this point,

Molly's flu consists mainly of nosebleeds. . . . The doctor from the village says it's because of the cold weather, which damages the nasal membranes. . . . It's downright messy. Even though her side of our room is still nasty neat, the rug is spattered with Molly's dumb nosebleeds, which to my mind is a good deal more disgusting than anything I leave lying around on my side. (pp. 32-33)

Molly's nosebleeds stopped at the beginning of March, and she was happily back in school. After the severe nosebleed previously described which caused Molly to be hospitalized, Meg described Molly's illness,

In the beginning she had been very sick. . . .

You'd think that with medical science as advanced as it's supposed to be, that they could figure out what the trouble was and fix her up pretty quickly. I mean, nosebleeds! What's the big deal about that? It's not as if she had a mysterious tropical disease, or something. (p. 48)

Meg continued to describe the terrible things that were done to Molly at the hospital. They x-rayed, tested the inside of her bones, experimented with various medicines, even injected medicine into her spine. At that point Meg said, "that gave me the creeps. It made me mad, too, because it seemed to me that they were just experimenting on her, for pete's sake" (p. 48).

Meg's irritation over Molly included irritation toward her family,

And my parents were very strange about the whole thing. They were just like the doctors; they didn't even think of Molly as a person anymore. They talked about her as if she were a clinical specimen. (p. 49)

Molly eventually returned home after this hospital stay, and Meg's comment was,

. . . it turned out that what she ended up with is pills. When she comes home, she'll have to take pills for a while. Big deal. They could have found that out when she got there, and sent her home sooner. (pp. 49-50)

Meg got Molly home, but found her quite unbearable. Meg decided that Molly had gotten used to being the center of attention in the hospital and carried over her changes at home. Meg questioned the changes,

Still, here she is at home, and supposedly well—or why would they have discharged her from the hospital?—and she acts as if everyone should still be at her beck and call. And my parents put up with it; that's the amazing thing. (pp. 58-59)

Meg keenly observed emotional and physical changes in Molly without taking in the seriousness of her illness. Instead of finding a serious reason for Molly's emotional change or even thinking that the pills might be responsible, Meg justified Molly's emotional changes by the way Molly had always been. She held on to the status quo. If Molly could not remain the same, never changing, then Meg would excuse her on the old grounds—that she could understand and relate to. The cause for change must lie in Molly's vanity. Molly did not look very good. She was pale, thin, and losing her hair. In a turnabout situation, when her mother tried to comfort her and tell her her hair would be beautiful again, Molly turned on her in anger and stormed out of the room. She, the beautiful sister, had once tried to comfort her younger sister. Changes came and now she was the one who could not be comforted.

Molly, too ill to return to school, got caught up in the upcoming birth of Ben and Maria's baby and in learning about and collecting wild flowers under Will Banks's tutorage.

Elisabeth Kubler-Ross has described the state of withdrawal experienced by the terminally ill as they accept their deaths and make their peace. Molly withdrew. Meg was puzzled. Molly was now no longer a grouch, but she was not the old Molly either,

I don't know what she is, now, a stranger, mostly. It's as if she had become part of a different world. One that doesn't include me anymore, or even Mom and Dad. She's quieter, more serious, almost withdrawn. When I tell her about things that are happening at school, she listens,

and asks questions, but it's as if she doesn't really care much; she's only listening to be polite. (p. 71)

Meg described other changes in Molly, who one night very quietly crawled up into her father's lap like a two-year-old and put her head on his shoulder. When told that her hair would grow back, "Molly just smiled, the casual and tolerant kind of smile that most people give to small children who say foolish things" (p. 73).

Meg was changing, too. As narrator, she grew up. The irritation in her voice was gone. She said, "Well, things change. I just have to learn to adjust to what they change to" (p. 73). Meg had at least learned a little tolerance. She had also learned that life cannot remain the same, that one can't step twice into the same river.

Changes came again for both sisters. June arrived and school was out for Meg. Molly had never returned, and, for Meg, this was why Molly "was grouchy and mad, too" (p. 83). Meg was irritated because Molly was so lazy and Molly was grumbling about her appearance. Meg said,

I am so sick of hearing Molly talk about how she looks. Her face is too fat. Her hair is too thin. To hear her talk, you'd think she was really a mess, when the truth is that she's still a billion times prettier than I am, which is why I'm sick of listening to her. (p. 84)

In the ensuing argument, Meg noticed Molly's leg, covered with red mosquito-like bites. Molly told Meg not to tell anyone, but Meg told her mother anyway. After the parents argued with Molly, they took her to the hospital. Meg said, "She turned to me, still crying, and said, 'I hate you! I hate you!'" 'Molly,' I whispered, 'please don't'" (p. 85). As the car pulled out of the drive, Molly asked Meg to tell Maria not to have the baby until she returned home.

With her family gone, Meg walked over to Ben and Maria's where they and Will were eating peas from the garden. She sat down on the bench, gave them Molly's message and started crying,

Will Banks put his arms around me and rocked me back and forth as if I were a baby. I cried until his shirt collar was wet clear through, saying "It's my fault, it's my fault, it's my fault" over and over again. Will said nothing except "There. There." (p. 86)

When Meg finished crying, they told her it wasn't her fault, and Meg said, "I knew that already" (p. 87). With all three looking on, Meg single-handedly ate the rest of the bowl of peas, which gave everyone the silly giggles. Meg said,

It is so good to have friends who understand how there is a time for crying and a time for laughing, and that sometimes the two are very close together. (p. 87)

After a while Meg apologized to Ben for her previous ugly remarks. He asked if she understood what he had been talking about. She responded,

I shook my head and answered him seriously, honestly. "No. I think you're wrong, to anticipate bad things. And I don't understand why you even want to think about something like that. (p. 89)

She could no more seriously consider anything unpleasant happening to their baby than she could of Molly. She suspected bad things, but felt that they would not happen if she did not think about them. If she denied the possibilities of Molly's death, Molly would not die. This was a way of bargaining for her life. She also used the method to bargain for a healthy baby for Ben and Maria.

Up to this point in her story, Meg had been gently and subtly guided by her neighbors and friends toward an awareness, at least, that bad things do happen. They had formed a circle of love to protect her

against the harshness of things to come. But now it was time for her parents to include her in their circle of love and grief, to be honest with her and give her time to deal with Molly's oncoming death. Time slipped into July. Molly was still in the hospital. The house seemed always too quiet, but one night Meg asked her father to dance. In the middle of the fun, Meg innocently remarked that she wished Molly were there. For the first time in her life she saw her father cry. All three cried. Meg said,

I knew then what they hadn't wanted to tell me, and they knew that I knew, that Molly wouldn't be coming home again, that Molly was going to die. (p. 91)

Her shock of recognition was followed by strange dreams which her father explained to her had to do with the forthcoming separation from Molly. Meg angrily lashed out at her father over not being told that Molly was going to die. He justified his actions by saying that there had been hope up until then. Now the medicines were no longer working, and the doctors gave no hope. Meg denied Molly's approaching death again. She said, "'Well, I don't believe them'" (p. 94).

Next came another attack of guilt—and the big, unanswerable question—why:

And why Molly? Dad, I'm the one who always got into trouble! I'm the one who threw up on my own birthday cake, who broke the window in kindergarten, who stole candy from the grocery store. Molly never did anything bad! (p. 94)

Her father tried to explain,

"It's a disease, Meg," he said in a tired voice. "A horrible, rotten disease. It just happens. There isn't any why." (p. 95)

After hearing him name the killer, acute myelogenous leukemia, Meg bitterly asked him if he could say it three times fast. He answered,

"Meg," said Dad, putting his arms around me and holding me so tight that his voice was muffled, "I can't even say it once. It breaks my heart." (p. 95)

Elisabeth Kubler-Ross thinks that children should be allowed to visit the dying, that the death experience should be shared. Her early childhood experiences with a dying neighbor helped her as an adult to care for her terminally-ill patients. The hospital rules in this novel were not made to be broken. At least Meg's parents told her that was why she could not visit Molly in the hospital. She was too young. Meg said of her parents, though, "I think they don't want me to have to see Molly dying" (p. 95). Meg did not argue with them "because they know and I know I'm old enough; but I'm scared" (p. 95). She continued,

The dreams and the emptiness at home are enough; it takes all the courage I have to deal with those. I'm afraid to see my own sister, and grateful that they don't ask me to come. (p. 95)

Meg had come a step farther in her growing awareness and acceptance. The guilt and anger were gone. She did not deny it or bargain for Molly. She even had time to see her mother's suffering and try to console her.

August came and so did Ben and Maria's baby, via natural childbirth at home, a birth Meg photographed for them, and one that changed her life, for she was no longer afraid to visit her dying sister. Through her participation in Happy's birth, by being the first to hold a new human being, she was, then, able to participate in her sister's dying, all part of the circle of life. Meg said,

Suddenly I wanted to be the one to tell Molly. I had been afraid to see Molly, and now I wasn't. There isn't any way to explain that. The only thing that had happened was that I had watched Maria give birth to Happy, and for some reason that made a difference. (p. 104)

Meg's Dad drove her to the hospital to see Molly. Earlier Molly had changed and withdrawn from her family. Now she had progressed further. Molly was not in pain or afraid. Her dad told Meg,

"This is a hard thing to explain, Meg, but Molly is handling this thing very well by herself. She needs us, for our love, but she doesn't need us for anything else now." He swallowed hard and said, "Dying is a very solitary thing. The only thing we can do is be there when she wants us there." (p. 105)

Albert Heim described the final stage of death as a mystical state, and Russell Noyes described it as one of transcendence. This is the same state as Kubler-Ross's final stage of acceptance. Molly's acceptance was a model for her family. They had also reached this stage by their acceptance of the situation and their sensitivity to her needs. They made no last minute demands of her, nor did they try to have her erase any guilt feelings about her they may have had. They, too, were letting go.

Meg told Molly all about the birth of Happy, and Molly, unable to speak, reached out and squeezed Meg's hand. "Her hand was not as strong as Happy's" (p. 107). Before Meg's visit was over, Molly had drifted off to sleep again. On the way home, Meg told her father that,

Will Banks said a line from a poem to me once. He said, "It is Margaret you mourn for," and I told him I never ... mourn for myself. But I think he was right. So much of my sadness is because I miss Molly. I even miss fighting with her." (p. 107)

Molly died two weeks later in her sleep. As in My Brother Sam is Dead, this narrator also found that time eased the loneliness and pain. Meg said, much like Tim Meeker,

Time goes on, and your life is still there, and you have to live it. After a while you remember the good things more often than the bad. Then, gradually the empty silent parts of you fill up with sounds of talking and laughter again, and the jagged edges of sadness are softened by memories.
(p. 109)

September came and the family moved back to their own home in town.

Meg wanted to return the next summer, but her mother hesitated,

"There are so many sad memories for us here, Meg," my mother said quietly.

"By next summer, though," I suggested, "maybe it would be easier. Maybe it would be fun to remember Molly in this house."

Mom smiled. "Maybe. We'll wait and see." (p. 114)

The novel ends on a positive note. The dead never really die as long as they live in the minds of those who loved them. Acceptance really came, was secured for Meg, when she even missed fighting with Molly. The living cannot romanticize the dead, and good and bad must be recognized in the lives they lived while among us.

Meg experienced four of Kubler-Ross's five stages of death—denial, anger, bargaining and acceptance. She was not prepared by her family, until rather late, for the death of her sister. The religious background here was very different from the strong religious faith that gave strength and unified the family in Something for Joey. There were no prayers and no answers in this story of another leukemia victim, but there was personal growth through the experience. Meg learned that unpleasant things do happen, and though painful, can be dealt with through the help of friends and family.

In Ordinary People, Conrad Jarret and his father Cal were able to work through their grief, anger and guilt and to attain new dimensions of spiritual growth. Both father and son grew through learning to

accept things as they are, without attributing blame or demanding reasons. The journey they made is difficult for both who travel similar paths toward the well-earned freedom that their acceptance eventually brought them. Their journeys were parallel, and the individual struggles of each helped the other.

In the beginning, after his return from eight months in the hospital after his attempted suicide, Conrad still held his feelings inside, but with the help of the psychologist, Berger, and Cal's steadfast love, Conrad was able to come to terms with his brother's accidental death and his own self-destructive attempt.

Cal, Conrad's father, suffered and grew through his dual encounters with death. He and Conrad grew through adjoining experiences. Each questioned himself, leading, possibly, to the ultimate of knowledge, "Know thyself," and to hard-won wisdom. Their death experiences taught them that there were no ultimate answers, that things just are. Both found salvation in an existential approach to life; both were freed by finding no answers in the chaos of life. Acceptance freed them, allowing them to live fully each day.

The path toward acceptance and freedom was difficult and long for both. Beth, wife and mother, did not survive the journey. She was never able to open up, to work through her grief. Growth, for her, was arrested, and she eventually left her family. She died emotionally when her older son died, and she was unable to forgive Conrad for his suicide attempt. Of it, she said,

"That whole vicious thing! He made it as vicious, as sickening as he could! The blood—all that blood! Oh, I will never forgive him for it! He wanted it to kill me, too!"¹³⁷

Later, of that same attempt, she showed how she saw things only in terms of how she was affected by the event or incident when she said,

He only did it to me. I don't know what he wants from me, and I've never known! Does he want me to throw my arms around him when he passes a chemistry exam? I can't do it! (p. 221)

Her anger over his quitting the swim team and not telling her was also triggered by how it affected her. She was angry because other people knew her private business when she did not.

Beth triggered healthy anger in both her husband and son who, early on, were too docile, too seemingly apathetic. Her fight with Conrad over the swim team awakened him to a painful lashing out at her, and it carried over into his session with Berger. The event afforded him a chance to lose control, thus giving vent to his emotions rather than suppressing them and turning his anger upon himself again. After Conrad's fight with Stillman, the narrator reflected,

. . . he never got mad. And that wasn't good. Everybody has resentments, everybody has anger. Cal has learned a thing or two from Crawford: razoring is anger; self-mutilation is anger. So this is a good sign; he is turning his anger outward at last. (p. 176)

Cal yelled angrily at Conrad over Beth's leaving. When he later apologized, Conrad told him he should do it more often; things would be more normal if both were free to react emotionally without the fear of offending or losing each other.

¹³⁷ Judith Guest, Ordinary People (New York: Ballantine Books, 1976), p. 219.

One problem shared by both father and son was fear of losing control. On his first visit to Berger's office, Conrad told him that he needed to learn more control so that people would quit worrying about him, especially his father. What Conrad saw as a need for control was a need for lack of feeling, a need to avoid pain. After his fight with a fellow student, Conrad punished himself for his loss of control. At this point he was unable to let go or give vent to his emotions, to take a chance of being out of control, of going berserk.

His holding on, his maintaining self-control put his life in a vacuum. At school he was lonely and isolated,

Everywhere he looks, there is competence and good health. Only he, Conrad Jarrett, outcast, quitter, fuck-up, stands outside the circle of safety, separated from everyone by this aching void of loneliness; but no matter, he deserves it. He does not speak to anyone. (p. 107)

Earlier, during his return to school, Conrad was super sensitive to his teachers. Miss Mellon, his English teacher, tried to make up for earlier uncomplimentary remarks about his poems. Conrad rebuffs her and thought, "He doesn't know exactly what he wants from people except that he prefers indifference to concern. Easier to handle" (p. 18).

Later, after his friend Karen's death, he went to Berger for help. In the office.

He lifts his head, holding himself tight. Control. Control is all. He tries to clamp his throat shut over it, to stifle the sound, but he cannot and he begins to sob, a high, helpless coughing sound. There is no control any more, everything is lost, and his body heaves, drowning. (p. 205)

Just as Buck's death came by drowning, Conrad's salvation came by drowning, drowning in a sea of vented emotions, of a letting go, a release of guilt and fear.

Cal saw the need to let go also, especially in his relationship with Beth. To himself he said, ". . . you do not know and you are not in control, so let go" (p. 223). Beth, he realized, only seemed to be in control. She was inflexible, a perfectionist, he said, ". . . but inside, what he has glimpsed is not order, but chaos . . ." (p. 235). Her inability to let go drowned her in her own mental storm.

As both father and son learned to express their feelings, they also questioned the very nature of their existence, asking the age-old question, "Who am I?" The questioning and ultimate growth to which it led was triggered by Buck's death and Conrad's suicide attempt. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross wrote that the living must learn from the dying and both father and son did learn from their death experiences. Of himself, Conrad said,

"Haven't lost your sense of humor after all but your sense of identity is what seems to have been misplaced. no. wrong. You don't lose what you never had." (p. 15)

In speaking to Berger about his fear of losing control, Conrad responded to Berger's remarks about what was inside, "There's a guy in the closet. I don't even know him, that's the problem" (p. 92). Later, during another session, Berger tells him that no one needs him to be Buck, that it is okay to just be himself. Conrad cries, "I don't know who that is any more!" (p. 207).

Of himself Cal found,

. . . it is not only of Conrad but of himself that he is asking questions now. . . . Who the hell are you? . . . Who in the world knows who he is all the time? . . . If you must ponder it, then do it alone at isolated periods with long intervals in between, so as not to drive yourself bats. (pp. 44-45)

Conrad's guilt feelings about Buck's death gradually dissolved, but at the time of Buck's funeral, reported by Conrad in a flashback, he expected punishment for his anger at Buck's death and his own guilt for having survived. He angrily asked his grandmother at the funeral, "Why didn't he hang on to the boat?" (p. 201). Then the narrator said,

And he was punished for that because afterward everything made him ill. . . . even to think about eating made him gag and for weeks afterward not being able to sleep that was punishment too being forced to submit over and over to a hopeless rerun of that day to what could have been done to make the sum of it different. Nothing. That is the nature of hell, that it cannot be changed; that it is unalterable and forever. (p. 201)

Much later, after the funeral and his hospitalization, he pleasantly remembered skiing with Buck and then awaited pain to hit, but there was none; instead, "An oddly pleasant swell of memory, a wave of warmth flooding over him, sliding back, slowly. It is a first" (p. 96). Finally, he could remember Buck without pain.

Fear of punishment lingered, even as he grew, for Conrad asked himself, "What will he have to pay for all of this, for thinking well of himself? . . . Whatever the price, it is worth it. Even for ten minutes it is worth it" (p. 125).

Cal and Conrad relaxed and talked about Buck as they learned to accept things as they were. An important part of the death experience is remembering the person as he was, the good and the bad. Cal remembered of Buck, "He was a genius at getting out of work" (p. 130). Such talk was an earned privilege for Cal, for earlier he had isolated his family. He said,

We are a family, aren't we? And a family turns inward toward itself in grief, it does not go in separate directions, pulling itself apart. Like hell it doesn't. Grief is ugly. It is isolating. It is not something to be shared with others, it is something to be afraid of, to get rid of, and fast. (pp. 117-8)

Again, Conrad came to the bare truth that the past could not be changed and it just was, when, after his fight with Stillman, Lazenby tried to talk with him. As to why they could no longer be friends, Conrad truthfully told him, "It hurts too much to be around you" (p. 168). In thinking about their talk, Conrad later said,

What he said is true. The three of them were always together, why does he think of it as only his grief? Because damn it it is. His room no longer shared, his heart torn and slammed against this solid wall of it, this hell of indifference. It is. And there is no way to change it. That is the hell. (p. 168)

Cal, as he made similar changes and dealt with grief, asked,

So, how does a Christian deal with grief? There is no dealing; he knows that much. There is simply the stubborn, mindless hanging on until it is over. Until you are through it. But something has happened in the process. The old definitions, the neat, knowing pigeonholes are disappeared. Or else they no longer apply. (p. 48)

After much soul searching, Cal said of his own life, "All these things exist, including himself—they exist all right, but not because of anything" (p. 223). Accepting things the way they were was a lesson to be continuously learned. After Beth left, Conrad asked Cal if her leaving was his fault. Cal responded, "'No,' he says wearily. 'It's nobody. It's nobody's fault.' Over and over this same lesson to be learned; it is the way things are" (p. 239).

After Conrad returned from Berger's office, he thought of Karen, his friend who succeeded in her second attempt at suicide, and he cried,

"Tears of grief this time not fair not fair! no, but life is not fair always, or sane, or good, or anything. It just is" (p. 213).

Of Conrad's attempted suicide, Cal was finally able to say, ". . . last year was nobody's fault—nobody's fault. That is the truth. That is what makes it all so impossible to understand" (p. 33). Conrad faced the same problem over Buck's death when he said,

"It has to be somebody's fault. Or what was the whole goddamn point of it?"

"The point of it," Berger says, "is that it happened." (p. 206)

Conrad's ability to work through his grief and anger also gave him the strength to help others, especially as he learned to like himself. In helping his girlfriend Jeannine, "He has never felt so strong, so needed" (p. 185). Of Beth, he planned to visit her at his grandmother's when she returned from Greece. He planned to say hello,

Just hello, nothing important. No point in it anyway, because she knows it all, knows just as he does that it is love, imperfect and unordered, that keeps them apart, even as it holds them somehow together. . . . (p. 245)

In working toward acceptance, Conrad found an important truth,

That there are no secret passages to strength, no magic words. It is just something you know about yourself. Since last night—no, before last night—it is as if he knew it all along. He is strong, he is able, because he is. (p. 193)

Conrad's suicide note had read, "I wish I knew why but I just don't" (p. 222). He still did not know, but he accepted things as they were, accepted Bucky's death, his mother's inability to love and forgive, and most of all—himself.

This chapter has dealt with the difficulties faced by four adolescents whose brother or sister died. Tim's loss of Sam through a

freak accident of war and Conrad's loss of Buck in a boating accident gave neither brother time to prepare for those deaths. Meg and John lost their sister and brother through that dreadful disease, leukemia. They had time, John much more than Meg, to deal with the death, to be somewhat more ready for it. All four were able to share the death experience with those who died and to grow through their ability to accept those deaths and continue living. This is not to say the dead were forgotten, for Sam, Molly, Joey, and Buck become immortal through the memories of their brother or sister. For Tim, John, Conrad, and Meg we might hope that the last line of Dylan Thomas's poem "A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London" might be true, that "After the first death, there is no other."

CHAPTER V

DEATH OF THE PROTAGONIST

Edgar Allan Poe believed the death of a beautiful young woman to be the ultimate theme in literature, as witnessed by "The Raven" and that frightful word, nevermore, but the death of a bright, energetic, young man can also move a reader to rage against the universe or quietly mourn for his loss. Whether with a bang or a whimper, when a young person's world ends, our world loses some of its hope and some of its possibilities. Ben Jonson mourned the death of his seven-year-old son whom he referred to as his "best piece of poetry." A. E. Housman, in "To an Athlete Dying Young," spoke to the young man cut off from life and glory and offered consolation in that his name did not die before he did; in other words, he died in his prime and would be remembered that way. And there was John Crow Ransom's "Bells for John Whiteside's Daughter," which described the stillness of a once very active child.

Two novels that deal with the death of the protagonist and which are widely read by adolescents are John Donovan's Wild in the Wood and Margaret Craven's I Heard the Owl Call My Name. In the first, John, the last survivor in a family of seven brothers and four sisters, lived alone in the mountains until a dog (possibly a wolf) came to live with him. John named him Son. Even after John died of pneumonia, Son stayed around. Having the dog had made John's isolated death easier though death itself had cut off his dreams of their joining a circus. The story was full of isolation and loneliness, but also companionship and loyalty.

In the second novel, I Heard the Owl Call My Name, a bishop sent his young priest who, unknowingly, had no more than three years to live, to an Indian village called Kingcome where he learned by living close to nature to meet his own death. When a friend's mother died, Mark Brian, the priest, and Marta, a wise tribal woman, prepared the body for burial, and Mark noted, "Everyone in the village shared the death. Here death could not be hidden or pushed aside. Here death is normal."¹³⁸ Of the village, Mark said,

Here, where death waited behind every tree, he had made friends with loneliness, with death and deprivation, and, solidly against his back had stood the wall of his faith.
(p. 145)

The moment of recognition, the moment when he realized he was dying, was described in terms of the owl's call, "From the dark spruce he heard an owl call—once, and again— and the questions that had been rising all day long reached the door of his mind and opened it" (p. 149). He died while helping in a rescue attempt and was buried at the village which had taught him how to live and die.

Rose Levit's Ellen, another account of an adolescent's death of interest to teenagers, is a story of a fifteen-year-old girl who died of bone cancer. There are, of course, others, and this chapter delves into the lives and deaths of four such young people. Two novels have narrators who tell of their own deaths, and the other two accounts are given by their parents. Annika in Admission to the Feast, a Swedish novel by Gunnel Beckman, found out accidentally that she had leukemia;

¹³⁸Margaret Craven, I Heard the Owl Call My Name (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1973), pp. 83-84.

Kate, in Norma Klein's Sunshine, had a rare form of cancer. Johnny, in his father's account of his son's death, Death Be Not Proud, died from a brain tumor, and Eric in his mother's account of her son's long fight with leukemia, in Eric, died of that dread disease. All four young people struggled with their afflictions and to live, but at various times, according to the life and struggle of each, they, in individual ways, accepted death. In earlier chapters, young people had died, but those deaths were seen through other characters in those works. Here the main characters themselves faced their own deaths.

Annika Hallin, the nineteen-year-old narrator of Gunnel Beckman's Admission to the Feast, was accidentally told that she had leukemia. The novel was written as a letter to her friend Helen, who is going to school in America. Annika's father was dead, her mother was a medical doctor in Pakistan, and her boyfriend Jacob was away in the service.

Annika's first reaction to the news of her illness was a physical one, nausea and vomiting. Later she remembered:

The surprise acted like a local anesthetic. I was fully conscious. I moved but I felt nothing. I heard, I saw, I spoke, but all feeling had become numb and stiff, like your cheek after having a tooth out.¹³⁹

Because she desperately needed to be alone to think through her situation, she decided to go to her family cottage, and it was there that the events of the novel took place, and it was there that she worked through the initial shock that she was going to die. Her catharsis came from writing her letter, through expressing her feelings

¹³⁹ Gunnel Beckman, Admission to the Feast (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1969), p. 24.

about her death, about the father she barely knew before his death, and about her mother and Jacob.

Annika was rather in a frenzy at the beginning of her stay. She had isolated herself, but she also pleaded for help, and in looking for someone to talk with, decided to write Helen, the "someone who doesn't interrupt to comfort me" (p. 15).

Annika was mortified by the conflict between how she felt and reacted, and how she would have liked to feel and react. She said,

You know, I'm so frightened. I'm terribly scared. Stupid that you're not master over your own body.

I thought I would be able to take it with more—what shall I say—more . . . more dignity. (p. 16)

Later she added,

Everything is so horrible . . . primitive. I mean your emotions. You behave like . . . a small child. One should have wanted to accept it . . . with style. With courage. Wisdom. (p. 27)

Part of her shock came from never before having considered the topic of death. "I had never even given the matter a thought. That sort of thing would never happen to me . . . (p. 16). She later asked,

Shouldn't one learn something about death at school?

A few exercises on thinking about death? Just like exercises on the balancing beam and geometric optics? (p. 27)

Annika's range of emotional reactions included anger and self-pity. One moment she could not take in enough of nature's beauties, and the next she said, "I hate Nature for her impudent permanence" (p. 20). Her words to Helen were words to herself as she lashed out, trying to make herself realize that she was dying,

Do you hear what I am saying—do you understand what I am saying—I am shouting, I am calling—I'm going to die, die, die. Now you know. I'm going to die. (p. 21)

In her continuing attempt to realize that she was dying, she later added,

I don't think I really understood until last night. For more than a short while at a time. That's the most difficult thing, you know, to understand. (p. 28)

Earlier, in her effort to understand, she kept typing the words, "I'm going to die soon." Of this effort, she said,

I must type it again and again and again. So that I finally learn to grasp it properly, fasten on to the thought. I see the words on the paper. But I don't understand them. (p. 22)

She tried to imagine what it would be like just not to exist, and she separated her mind from her body in those thoughts. Her body, she imagined, was dead, and she saw what it was like. She also realized that the world would not stop when she died; the natural world and the human world would live on. She faced one of the difficulties of dying, that the world can and will exist, indeed prevail, without her. Again and again she told herself that she was going to die as she tried not to deny her death:

I am going to die. My body will no longer live on earth. My body, which is so young and warm and unused, will just be put away, wiped out, obliterated. A few months perhaps, and then nothing, nothing in the infinity of infinity. And here on earth everything will just go on. (p. 35)

Annika's self-pity came through her cataloguing of things she would miss because of an early death, the most tantalizing of which was not knowing how things work out. "Just imagine shoving your head into the world for a brief moment like this and sniffing at it and . . . out again. Never to know how it works out" (p. 36).

She found no consolation in thoughts of an afterlife, for what she wanted was to stay on this earth. Trying to see her death in perspective brought no comfort either,

I try, indeed I do, to think of all the children who die of starvation every day, of all the people who are killed every day all over the place, young people like me. . . . But it doesn't help. It's sad, of course, it's life and life is cruel. It's all kinds of things, but it is other people's deaths. It is not mine. (p. 37)

In deciding against suicide because of what it would do to her mother and Jacob, because they would feel guilty and not understand, she also added another reason,

And in addition to that, there's that tiny, tiny, little idiotic hope deep down there. The hope that a miracle will happen. That it's all a mistake, that the doctors have mixed up the names or the tests or something. . . . (p. 42)

Later, in a similar denial, Jacob tried to comfort her, "Annika, listen now. Don't worry . . . listen, it's not at all certain, the doctor said . . . there's lots of new drugs . . ." (p. 119). Annika later remembered those words and said,

One moment I clutch at those vague words of comfort Jacob had spoken over the telephone. Supposing it's true after all, supposing it's not fatal, supposing the doctor was wrong, supposing all sorts of things?

The next moment I don't want to be comforted— isn't it crazy? (p. 124)

Annika did survive her own denial and anger, for after much anguish she woke up one morning to inner changes. Much like Conrad awaiting pain to hit him when he thought of Buck, Annika woke up and waited for,

A weight, an indefinite ache at the back of your head, or in your heart, or somewhere. A forgotten agony which grows and grows until suddenly you remember everything with stinging clarity. (p. 72)

This morning, though, she escaped and felt almost fine. Later she said, "I've wallowed so much in tears, anxiety, and self-pity that somehow I've acquired a kind of thicker skin over my soul" (p. 121).

As Annika worked toward her acceptance of her own death, she found that, for various reasons, she would be withdrawing from other people, and even as she waited for Jacob to come get her she said, "I must deceive him. Perhaps that won't be all that difficult. People want to be deceived" (p. 121). Later, of Jacob, she said, "Supposing I can't act. Supposing we just sit there weeping, and he heaps a whole load of pity on to me" (p. 123). Alienation from the healthy would also be difficult,

I think it's going to be worse than I'd thought, meeting people, people who know. There's a kind of chasm between the healthy and the sick. People stand on each side of the chasm and shout at each other in different languages. You can understand that the healthy want to comfort you and be kind, but they use such silly words. (p. 120)

Annika said, "I've adopted my great role of the brave young girl who is going to die, and it feels almost insulting for anyone to come and say that it's not that bad, honestly it isn't" (p. 125). She also thought about what she would do with her life if she were to be granted a grace period.

Now that Annika was living somewhat more comfortably with the thought of her own death, she could be more generous toward other people. She worried about Jacob, whose life has been easy. She said, ". . . I know he's very unhappy now, like a small boy whose puppy has been run over" (p. 136). Of her mother, she said,

Oh, Mother, how would she take it? She, who every day saw other people's children die. Would that help her . . . I mean, would that give her some kind of perspective or other? (p. 33)

Annika felt that whatever was to come, she was right to stay alone in the cottage for a few days, and she knew, ". . . this hard surface that has grown over my soul, or whatever it is, will crack and break many times . . ." (p. 138).

Gunnel Beckman had not allowed Annika, at least by the end of the novel, the comfort of talking honestly and openly with people she loved in a face-to-face situation about her impending death. If Elisabeth Kubler-Ross were their advisor, boyfriend and mother might be able to share intimately Annika's dying and death. Kubler-Ross's stages of denial and anger were experienced in an interwoven pattern by Annika. She did not seem to move from one stage to the next, and it seemed that, though she had reached at least partial acceptance, she might at some later time experience other stages also, depending on her ability to communicate with others. By the end of the novel, she was very much like Molly of A Summer to Die in that she withdrew and isolated herself, even before the anticipated meetings with Jacob and her mother. They would have to work on their own growth and understanding as Annika worked on hers. The reader hopes that real communication takes place and that they can comfort each other.

In Sunshine, a second novel focusing on the death of a young woman, Norma Klein introduced the reader to Kate Hayden. This novel was based on the journals of Jacquelyn M. Helton, who died in 1971 of a rare form of cancer called osteogenic sarcoma. Kate, the first-person narrator, recorded her thoughts on a tape recorder for her young daughter Jill. Unlike Annika, of the previous novel, Kate described her experience from beginning to end. In this work, Kate tackled many of the

problems connected with death that have not been brought up in the previous novels, problems such as planning one's own funeral, allowing oneself to die with dignity, and communicating with doctors.

Kate went through many stages toward acceptance of her own death. When one doctor wanted to amputate her leg, she left the hospital and did not want to go back. She thought,

The mountains are so beautiful. It's hot, there are flowers all around. The whole hospital thing didn't happen. This is what's real. How could this be real and that too? It can't be.¹⁴⁰

Later she could see how difficult facing her death was for Sam, her second husband,

I think maybe he's scared. Watching someone die must be different from dying. Not worse, but different. I think it's really he who'd like to pretend that it's not happening, that some miracle cure will come along. Sure, big chance. (p. 144)

Later, Kate said,

In my soul, I somehow feel that all is not lost. Maybe I won't die. Maybe, though, is a very big word. I sound like a child, I guess. And I'm lonely for the warmth of my mother. (p. 150)

Both Kate and Sam experienced anger. Kate took out her anger on Sam; then when she realized what she was doing, she asked herself, "Am I angry just because he isn't sick, because he has so many options . . .?" (p. 73). Sam's anger turned toward God. He said,

"I guess I don't believe in God especially," he says, "but if he does exist, he ought to be drawn and quartered. . . . He must be some sick joke artist." (p. 181)

¹⁴⁰ Norma Klein, Sunshine (New York: Avon Books, 1971), p. 52.

There was also bargaining on Kate's part,

The other night, when I started thinking about dying, I had the most incredible melancholy feeling. . . . I kept thinking: let me have time to get everything done. I think I was almost pleading. There's so much I still have to do. (p. 102)

Later, she reprimanded God,

Who's going to clean the toilet or the oven? Who will remember when the cat needs to be wormed? What's the matter with you, God—my family's not a bunch of boy scouts who can figure out all these things for themselves. (p. 214)

Here, there was an unspoken kind of bargaining. She would take care of her family if He would allow her to live.

Kate also learned to accept her own death, and she isolated herself from the healthy,

The hospital is my second home. I know it so well by now, I know every nurse, every doctor, a lot of the other kids. I don't mind the hospital itself, or the treatments. It's not even the thought of dying I mind the most. Dying is beautiful, even the first time around, at the ripe old age of twenty. (p. 171)

With acceptance came curiosity and longing. Death described here sounds like living in isolation. She blocked the universal questions with trivial ones,

What's it like to die? Sometimes, I think I know. It's cold and hard and so lonely. Everybody tries to be nice. I don't know how to react. I wonder what will happen to all my things when I die. . . . I'm sort of afraid about dying. I don't regret not taking the drugs. They made me sick in my mind. . . . I'm just afraid of not knowing what it's like after you die. I don't know how I'll be towards the end. I have to be strong. (p. 157)

Later, she added more wishes and fears. She also had an urgent need to give of herself to others while she could. This giving could have been an extension of finding out more of who she was before she died.

Oh, how I wish that at least in death you could remember. I wonder if you can. I doubt it. Death being not proud. What does that mean, I wonder. It means to me that death isn't afraid to come and take you away, no matter who you are, which is upsetting. I have so much to give, so many things to do, so many people to be—and I'm not going to get to do it. (p. 190)

With her growing acceptance of her own death came withdrawal from other people. Kate found that, "In the playground I don't feel like getting close to anyone and then having to tell them my long, sad story" (p. 159). With her sense of isolation came a little self-pity,

Sitting here, I let myself feel immersed in self-pity. I like to sometimes. Like right now because I'm alone. Because I'm dying. I like being a martyr. At least it gives me something to be. (p. 163)

Kate, as we have seen, experienced many of the stages of death awareness as described by Kubler-Ross. She also experienced many of the problems connected with dying that have been discussed in books like Langone's Death Is a Noun and Hendin's Death as a Fact of Life. One of her problems that has been recognized by the medical profession itself and one spoken of by Kubler-Ross is the clinical attitude used by some doctors, doctors who themselves have trouble facing the fact that they cannot save every patient. On the problem of doctors who have difficulty in speaking of death to their patients, Kubler-Ross explains,

One of the biggest problems is that we train our physicians during four years of medical school to cure, to treat, to prolong life. The only instruction they receive that has anything to do with death and dying is how to ask for an autopsy. It is very understandable, therefore, that "patients who die on them" are often seen as failures as the physician gets no training on how to be a good physician to patients who are not going to recover.¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹ Kubler-Ross, Questions and Answers on Death and Dying, p. 118.

Kate was lucky enough, or stubborn enough, to change her doctors to those with whom she had an open and honest relationship. Of her new woman doctor she said, "What I like about Dr. Gillman, compared to that doctor in Spokane, is she treats me like a person. He treated me like a thing, like a "case" (p. 70). According to Kubler-Ross, doctors are beginning to study the problem of communication with their terminally-ill patients. She suggests,

Every hospital should have seminars, workshops, or sessions where the problems of terminally ill patients are discussed, and where the staff can share their own feelings, frustrations, and anguish and try together as a team to come to grips with these problems.¹⁴²

Another problem Kate faces is her funeral:

The dilemmas of dying are many. You can't figure out if you want to be buried or cremated, embalmed or not, what clothes you want to be buried in, what you want on your gravestone. What is natural? That's what I have to decide. Or at least what would feel most natural to me. (p. 175)

Kate liked the idea of Sam's scattering her ashes across the mountains, much as in Joan Baez's song "Sweeter for me" from her album

Gulf Winds, "take me down to where the hills meet the sea on a stormy day/ ride a ridge on a snow white horse and throw my ashes away/ to the

although she hated the idea of "being stuffed inside a box and put into the ground" (p. 175). She wanted John Denver's Country Roads played and wild flowers—"Queen Anne's lace, roses, daisies, to signify not just death, but a passing on, a freedom that I will have achieved" (pp. 175-76). She also wished to be buried in "a pair of shorts or one

¹⁴²Kubler-Ross, Questions and Answers on Death and Dying, p. 119.

of the skirts Sam bought me, and a comfortable shirt . . ." (p. 176). She wanted "just a simple wood coffin, with old-fashioned handles and a soft plush inside and a nice pillow" (p. 176).

Another controversial problem faced by Kate was the problem of when to die or how to die with dignity, and what rights the patients have in controlling their own death. Her choice,

. . . I'd much rather die peacefully with some semblance of sanity than take the drugs and die a bit later than I might have naturally with no mind at all. . . . (p. 130)

On the day of her death Dr. Gillman asked Kate what she wanted for lunch. Kate's response was

"A pain pill. . . . But don't give me any other drugs to prolong it."
 "I won't."
 "I want to die on my own clock, all right?"
 She nods. (p. 222)

Her decision on this issue was doubly difficult because of her husband's disapproval. He could not accept her decision nor her death. On that last day of her life he ran from her hospital room unable to bear the pain of her death.

The struggle of Karen Ann Quinlan's family, if one remembers the case, made medical, ethical and legal history when they struggled with the problem of when to let Karen die, when to pull the plug. Kate's family suffered over her own choice to quit treatment and thus end her life earlier. When asked if it is a patient's right to decide when to turn off the machines, Kubler-Ross answered,

Yes, it should be the patient's privilege to decide when he is no longer willing to go along with a certain extension

of life which to him may not only be meaningless, but also very costly.¹⁴³

Kate was not reconciled with her mother at the time of her death. Her only family present was her daughter Jill, aged two. Even though Kate refused to prolong her life with drugs, her acceptance of death did not mean she did not want to continue living, even for one more day. She said,

Thinking about dying and about me and feeling rage that soon there will be no more me. It's hard now. Very hard. I keep thinking, let me wake up just one more morning. There's so much more I have to say to Jill. It's so important. (p. 222)

Dr. Gillman held her hand as she died. Aside from her story, Kate's immortality was biological, for she left the world a beautiful child. Her last concerns centered on her daughter, and her regret in dying was missing the chance to see Jill grow up. Her family-centered existence had given her life meaning, and leaving a child for the world to love gave her death meaning.

The two deaths discussed so far in this chapter have involved young women, and the remaining two are about young men. Death Be Not Proud is a book written during an earlier time when death was not openly discussed. Therefore, this account was ahead of its time, yet its approach to death and dying is different. For example, the father narrates with a stiff upper lip, and his son was never told that he was dying. Emphasis was on maintaining life as long as possible and dying with dignity. At times, the parents, like Kate in Sunshine, had trouble communicating with the doctors.

¹⁴³ Kubler-Ross, Questions and Answers on Death and Dying, p. 77.

The parents fought off death for their son Johnny who died of a brain tumor after fifteen months' illness. Because of their energy in finding new possibilities for cures, they prolonged his life several months. John Gunther wrote,

The thought never left us that if only we could defer somehow what everybody said was inevitable, if only we could stave off Death for a few weeks or months, something totally new might turn up. What we sought above all was time.¹⁴⁴

Earlier, the father went to the library and read up on tumors and found that the prefix "glio" before the name of any tumor meant death. He said, "I rushed to several doctors, appealing to them to say that surely, surely, Johnny's tumor could not be of this deadly type. 'Of course it isn't,' they replied" (p. 35). Johnny was his only son and too special, too talented, too loving to die so young. The parents' denial continued in their relationship with Johnny. After the first major operation, during which three holes were drilled in Johnny's head and half of a tumor the size of an orange was removed, the father reported,

Yet, I give my word on it, no whimper ever came out of Johnny after the first operation, no word of unreasonable protest or appeal, no slightest concession to terror or giving way to misery. (p. 22)

With his father, Johnny became the model son and patient. He remained cheerful and cooperative. His anger or impatience was usually of an acceptable kind. A contemporary reader might cry out to let the child break down, to express his feelings, but this was not the model he followed. The parents not only kept secret the seriousness of his

¹⁴⁴ John Gunther, Death Be Not Proud (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1965), p. 48.

illness and possible death, but they also on a later major operation, left him at the hospital thinking he was just going for routine tests.

The father told of this experience,

We went up to Neurological—once more that drive through the crosstown traffic and then skimming northward along the river—on the evening of April 29, just a year after the first outbreak of his illness. Johnny had not, of course, been told that any major operation was impending. We left after a while and the minute we arrived back at the apartment the phone rang and it was Johnny, indignant and very frightened. (p. 88)

He had realized from the preparations that he was in for more than a test, and later, when Tony the barber came in to shave his head, he was so upset that the doctor did not have Johnny's head shaved. His father said,

He really was scared. He knew that a complete barbering job meant a big operation, and more important, this must mean in turn that his condition was not good. (p. 89)

The parents, as they saw it, helped Johnny to keep up his optimism, keep up the hope that he would get well, but they suspected that Johnny knew how ill he was,

The effort to pretend that the tumor was nothing cost him dearly; the price of his invincible fight was fatigue. It took a miserable lot out of him to pretend to ignore what he must have now known to be the truth, that he wasn't getting any better. The faraway look was in his eyes more often now. But it was impossible for us not to support his optimism, because any discouragement would have been a crushing blow. All he had now was his will to live. We had to keep that up at any cost. The cord of life was wearing very thin, and if we took away hope, it would be bound to snap. (p. 96)

Earlier his father had said, "I never knew till this moment just how anguishing was the strain that he strove so hard to conceal" (p. 73).

Johnny's eyes at this moment were full of tears, "but did not spill

over" (p. 73)—a source of pride in the father. Later, John said of his son,

Now Johnny was steadily becoming more aware of how sick he was. Did he know he was going to die? I leave it to the evidence of his own conversation. He was lethargic and sometimes testy during these last declining weeks. (p. 102)

From bits and pieces of conversation with Frances, Johnny's mother, it did seem that she introduced the possibility of death with her son. She talked to him about narrow escapes she and people Johnny knew had had from death. With his father, Johnny also on one occasion indirectly asked if he would die. At this time, the tumor was bulging out again, and Johnny asked, "'Father, if it comes out again, will it be for the last time?'" (p. 80). The father's response was not given.

The parents had lied to Johnny in order to protect him. After the first operation, John said, "Over and over we told Johnny, lying, that the tumor was dead, that Putnam had got it all" (p. 35). When he later underwent x-ray treatment, they pretended that the doctors were just taking pictures, but,

Then he knew from the time he spent under the machine that something much more serious than taking pictures was going on, and that this must be a form of treatment. He turned to me firmly and asked, "Does this mean that I have cancer?" Then he murmured to Frances later, "I have so much to do! And there's so little time!" (pp. 38-39)

Johnny, though, continued denying the seriousness of his illness, his father reported,

"Papa, I feel so sick!" Johnny said on one of the rare occasions when he would even admit that he was ill. He had now built up a secret defense within himself about the x-rays. It was that they had nothing whatever to do with that little "wart" (he had decided now that of the original tumor a small "wart" remained) but were merely to ameliorate the general post-operative swelling. (pp. 41-42)

His denial continued later when studying English literature, "he would look bored or turn away whenever we chanced on a poem about Death" (p. 97).

Johnny's mother had long encouraged him to keep a diary, and he did keep one during his illness. His parents found that he used it as a means of indirect communication with them. It was his way of letting them know what he was thinking but did not want to talk about death.

Johnny experienced a wide range of emotions throughout his ordeal. After one of his doctor's visits, "he was wan and dispirited. He would stand in the doorway and look at us tentatively, appealingly" (p. 51). Later his father said, "He was frightfully depressed sometimes, and he hungered for contact with us the first and last minutes of the day" (p. 61). And there was anger at times, open hostility, "Of course he was fretful sometimes. Sometimes he was subconsciously hostile to me as if out of resentment at my good health" (pp. 63-64)

The father, as noted previously, took pride in Johnny's not giving way to tears, and on the one occasion when Johnny's eyes "spill over with tears" (p. 85), John noted that it was just once.

Johnny's parents were aware that their son's illness caused him to isolate himself from the healthy, an occurrence that is given more detail in Eric. Of Johnny, his father said,

Johnny came to feel that people not in hospital were representatives practically of a different race, from another planet. He banded together with his fellow patients, fellow prisoners, in a kind of mutual defense pact, walling out the external world. But how he envied the healthy outlanders! (pp. 73-74)

Two problems faced by John and Frances were the possibility of euthanasia and the lack of communication with the doctors. Of the first,

the doctors, knowing what a horrible end could be in store for Johnny, and knowing that death was inevitable, suggested putting "a cap in Johnny's skull, which would eliminate the bump. Also, by driving the tumor inward, it would kill him" (p. 49). According to John, euthanasia was forbidden and "the doctors wanted to be merciful" (p. 49). Later, when Johnny had had a cerebral hemorrhage from which he did not recover, the doctor told John, "'He's dying. Shall we do anything or not?'" (p. 110). Right to the end, Johnny's parents gave him every possibility for recovery. After the hemorrhage, Johnny was rushed to the hospital and "was given every known medicament that could possibly help . . ." (p. 111). Johnny's parents continued to hope that he would not die right up to the last minute, and they used all the medical help, orthodox and unorthodox, that they could find.

Of the second problem, communications with the many doctors, Johnny's parents found that on several occasions the doctors were unable to talk with them, evidently because they, too, were so involved in saving Johnny. During the early stage of Johnny's illness, his father said,

Five minutes after I got there I knew Johnny was going to die.

I cannot explain this except by saying that I saw it on the faces of the three doctors. . . . (p. 21)

He made a later comment on lack of communication with doctors, "But very soon we discovered several things about doctors. One is that they seldom, if ever, tell you everything" (p. 23).

After the first major operation, John noticed, "Several doctors seemed to be avoiding us, and Putnam himself said little, glossing it all over . . ." (p. 38). Later, after the doctors attempted to drain

off fluid from the tumor, John said, "The job was finished finally and then I knew it was very bad, because both Mount and Miller backed away from me in the corridor and would not talk" (p. 85).

There were other times when the doctors were able to talk directly with the parents, even rather bluntly at times, as when Dr. Penfield "cut through all the euphemisms and said directly, 'Your child had a malignant glioma, and it will kill him'" (p. 47). And later, Dr. Mount, who had a very close relationship with Johnny, "could offer no hope at all when we asked him what to do next. He said, 'Let Johnny do exactly what he wants to do and die happy'" (p. 86). The same doctor operated again and was honest with the parents,

Later he told us that the tumor was growing so fast that the blood vessel nearby was thrombosed, that the malignant mass was even invading the scalp and that despite the depth he had reached, 11cm., he had never penetrated to healthy brain tissue at all. (p. 90)

From what the father has written, the doctors cared very much about their young patient, but, since they were human too, they had their moments when they could not face Johnny's death. Much has been said about our society's insistence that our doctors have god-like qualities. They, too, are not perfect and need our understanding. Ironically, after having so many doctors work with Johnny, there was not one in the hospital at the moment of his death. "Not that they could have done anything" (p. 111).

There have been hints that Johnny knew he was dying, and there was an interesting reference to death in his diary. On January 8 he noted that "I discussed fears of death with Mother" (p. 149). He also advised himself on the topic, "Accept death with detachment. Take

more pleasure in life for its own sake" (p. 149). His mother told that it was only after his death, from his diaries, that,

We learned he had known all along how grave was his illness, and that even as we had gaily pretended with him that all was well and he was completely recovering, he was pretending with us, and bearing our burden with the spirit, the elan, of a singing soldier or a laughing saint—that law of life which out of infinite mutation had produced Johnny, that law still mutating, destroyed him. (pp. 156-57)

How well he fooled his father could be seen in John's descriptions of Johnny's death, "Johnny did not lose function. He lived almost a year after this, and he did not die like a vegetable. He died like a man, with perfect dignity" (p. 48). And at Johnny's death, he said, "He never regained consciousness. He died absolutely without fear, without pain, and without knowing that he was going to die" (p. 111). Both parents were present in the hospital room when, unconscious, Johnny died,

Johnny died at 11:02 p.m. Frances reached for him through the ugly, transparent, raincoat-like curtain of the oxygen machine. I felt his arms, cupping my hands around them, and the warmth gradually left them, receding very slowly upward from his hands. For a long time some warmth remained. Then little by little the life-color left his face, his lips became blue, and his hands were cold. What is life? It departs covertly. Like a thief Death took him. (p. 111)

In an afterward, Frances recorded interesting insights on guilt and grief. Of guilt, she stated,

I think every parent must have a sense of failure, even of sin, merely in remaining alive after the death of a child. One feels that it is not right to live when one's child has died, that one should somehow have found the way to give one's life to save his life. (p. 160)

Of her grief, she found

My grief, I find, is not desolation or rebellion at universal law or duty. I find grief to be much simpler

and sadder. Contemplating the Eternal Deity and His Universal Laws leaves me grave but dry-eyed. But a sunny fast wind along the Sound, good sailing weather, a new light boat, will shake me to tears: how Johnny would have loved this boat, this wind, this sunny day! (p. 157)

She added, "Never have I felt the wonder and beauty and joy of life so keenly as now in my grief that Johnny is not here to enjoy them"

(p. 160). Both mother and father dealt in their own ways with their grief and writing about their son's death was their form of catharsis.

Like Johnny, Eric, whose death will be discussed last in this chapter, struggled through a fatal illness and died unconscious and peacefully. The reality of death and dying came from the detailed description of Eric's illness over a five-year period, from the age of seventeen to twenty-two. There were six remissions fought for and eventually lost, a tumor behind Eric's eyeball which is removed by radiation, a multitude of hospital stays and periods of Eric's being an outpatient. There were drugs—vincristine, cytosine arabinoside, thioguanine, methotrexate, asparaginase, prednisone, and cytidine. The fatal disease, acute lymphocytic leukemia, brought with it new terms, such as protocol, the whole procedure of drug treatment agreed upon by the doctors, maintenance, the course of drug therapy to help maintain a remission, and consolidation, which describes the battery of poisonous drugs to try for total kill of the leukemia cells. There was a sterile room, the laminar air-flow room, and, for Eric, there were nosebleeds, nausea, diarrhea, dry heaves, hair loss, and seizures. For the family, without major medical insurance, there was financial worry, until Clinical Research Facility took over all costs.

The day-to-day strain on the family, recorded by Eric's mother, should help ease the guilt felt by any family going through a similar crisis. As part of his anger and denial, Eric often, throughout the five years, rejected his mother, often brutally. His mother reacted as a normal human being, not a saint, for she did not deny her own hurt feelings or anger. Of Eric, she said, ". . . he read my concern in gestures, in a thousand small ways, and he rejected every shred of what he considered babying."¹⁴⁵ He later forbade her calling his doctor anymore, and she circumvented the situation by setting up code signals with the doctors. When events became especially tense, she went to Florida so that their defenses would have time to melt. During one of his hospital stays, she stayed away for three weeks at his request. When she did go visit him, he met her with, "'What are you doing here? I didn't ask you to come'" (p. 121).

At one point, his mother told a friend that for Eric, mother was a dirty word. The analyst-friend explained that, "Men have often seen woman as the death figure" (p. 148). He reminds her, "We all come from the unknown, from darkness, from the mother. And we go back into darkness when we die" (pp. 148-49). Understanding Eric, however, did not stop the anger and denial, for when Eric was given a pass for an outing, he raged at his mother when she appeared with his father to pick him up. He stormed, "'Why did you come? I didn't ask for you!'" (p. 196). She explained she only wanted to say hello and then go shopping, but he did not believe her,

¹⁴⁵Doris Lund, Eric (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1974), p. 21.

"The hell you are! You came to take care of me, to make sure I wouldn't overdo. This is my first day out of this place in a month, and you've ruined it! (p. 196)

There were also the good times to counterbalance the bad. He appreciated her listening and understanding; he enjoyed writing to her and his father "because you take me seriously and I value your opinions" (p. 90). He also sent for her while in the hospital, hugged her and held her hand for long periods of time. She responded by saying,

This was love, sitting here through the blazing afternoons of early August, holding Eric's cool fingers in mine. This was peace, to be needed in this small way, at last. (p. 214)

When Eric's illness was first diagnosed, his parents decided to tell him his problem was anemia, but finally they decided to tell him the truth, and his mother wanted to be the one. The news made him physically ill at first, but he soon recovered,

"You know," he said at last, with a little smile, "I'm not scared. It's funny but I'm really not scared. I can handle it, Mom. It's going to be all right. I know I can beat it." (p. 26)

Later in this conversation he thanked her for telling him everything. Years later he participated in a seminar at the hospital and said he was glad his parents had not told him at first that he had leukemia, for he would have given up.

Eric continued to live a normal life during his illness, playing on the soccer team at the University of Connecticut, working at a funeral home, going on a cross-country trip in his friend's van. He tried to keep in good physical shape, even, at times, running twenty miles a day.

He also experienced a wide range of emotional reactions to his illness. He did crazy things. For example, at the end of his second remission, he started midnight soccer games in the dorm hall, turned on the firehose and let it flood the stairwell, and threw his shoe through a window as a counselor watched. Later he resisted staying in the hospital and said,

"Don't you see? I'm not like the others in there. I've got to fight it, and I can do it better outside. Then I can keep in shape. I don't want people messing me up. It's my attitude that counts." (p. 73)

When one of his friends at the hospital died, Eric's mother noted,

Now I saw how angry he was at death, how angry at all that courage counting for nothing. . . . He was afraid. It was the first time I'd seen it. And he was afraid of being afraid. (p. 110)

On a diving trip with a family friend, Eric was able to finally let go and cry for the friends on his ward who died. Ted, his friend, told Doris:

"He started talking about his friends on the eighth floor, and pretty soon he began to cry. He cried and cried. He said he just couldn't accept it that they had to die." (p. 138)

Doris, Eric's mother, kept vigil over Eric's psyche, and once she saw that "He walks the line well between fear and false bravado. . . . He's not taking chances. But he's not trembling in his boots, either" (p. 123).

His hospital stays certainly introduced him to death, for approximately six people he personally knew on his floor had died. He barely escaped death during several of his last stays. His mother, for example, was sure that he would die on Valentine's Day, but blood donations saved his life that time.

These long periods of hospitalization isolated Eric from the healthy world. Many times he did not want visitors from home, but the distance from his family was necessary as he faced his own death. His change was noted by his mother:

I'd never seen him so gentle, so loving, so at peace with the world. It was as if he had entered another time span where minutes, even seconds, could be enjoyed for the quality that each one held. (p. 230)

Later she added,

His quietness was different from his fighting hustle. His gentleness had in it some acceptance, some letting go that I'd never seen before. He was no longer the carefree jock, but he was free of care somehow. I looked at him and saw old paintings of saints. (p. 231)

During this period, Eric had fallen in love with a nurse, MaryLou. When he found that he was again out of remission, the two went away together for a vacation before he returned to the hospital. After telling his mother of his plans, Doris said, "Then he leaned his head against me and cried. I hadn't seen him break down like this in all the years of his illness" (p. 237). They both knew he was going to die soon, and she rocked him in her arms.

Eric and MaryLou returned home on December 30 to several parties, including Eric's twenty-second birthday party, before he entered the hospital again on January 3. He knew he was dying and talked with his mother about the things he had enjoyed most and about things he and Mark, his brother, had done. He worried about MaryLou and had given her Kubler-Ross's On Death and Dying.

"I gave it a helluva try, you know," he said suddenly.
"But there comes a time you're ready to rest. You say, well, that's the ballgame—" Then he smiled a little.
(p. 246)

The modern day problem of how far to go with our technological wizardry in prolonging life began during this last hospital stay. The first such decision to be made by the family came when the doctor told them Eric had kidney failure. He told them, "He will die very soon if we don't do something right away. We're considering a peritoneal dialysis" (p. 252). The procedure called for installing tubes in Eric's abdomen. The family was divided: Meredith, the older sister, and her husband, and Eric's father were for it and MaryLou and Doris against the operation. The doctors proceeded. Doris said,

Eric had come to the end of his will. I had seen the look on his face a few days ago when he whispered, "Is it all right to rest now?" His body was broken. His spirit was not; it was simply, finally at peace. (p. 253)

When she was told the doctors were going to operate, she reacted angrily,

"Dear God, no!" So they might keep him "alive" for days, maybe weeks, with their machinery, their oxygen tanks, and all the rest of it? My anger was for no one, not the doctors, not those who had spoken for the operation, but it was there, blazing helplessly. (p. 254)

After MaryLou explained what a Code Alert entailed,

All the interns came running to pound on his chest to get his heart started again. They beat him with paddles. Or they do a tracheotomy and cut a hole in his throat for a tube so he can breathe better. . . . (p. 255)

Doris and MaryLou decided they would fight the hospital staff off and not allow it. "'Let him die with dignity, MaryLou said softly. 'I promised him it would be peaceful'" (p. 255).

After the operation, Eric remained unconscious with tubes inserted, even in his feet at this point. He roused only once, then slipped back into unconsciousness. MaryLou told the family to talk to

him as he was dying, for hearing is the last sense to go. This is a reminder of The Tibetan Book of the Dead in which the living talk with the dying. After telling him that she loved him, Doris said, "'You're beautiful, Eric. You were beautiful all the way. You did it just right. You're almost there. I love you!'" (p. 259).

He died a "good and gentle death" (p. 259) in MaryLou's arms. Then both stood in the doorway and told the nurse "no Code" (p. 259). When the nurse protested, Sidney joined them.

As Doris found, there is also an "afterwards." She unsuccessfully attempted to give Eric's body to science. Finally, because of depleted family funds, his parents allowed the city of New York to claim the body, and he was buried in potter's field. His mother would have liked the following,

"Oh, I guess the only thing I really would have wanted is a funeral pyre with beautiful flames soaring seventy-five feet in the air. And maybe a parade with lots of music and flags and everybody in town, especially the little boys he played with—and maybe Aida's elephants and all the animals from Noah's Ark, too—marching down the main street right by Eric's bonfire." (p. 264)

Lisa, the younger sister, suggested that such a sight would make too much smoke and pollute the air, so, Doris said, "Give Eric back to the earth. We should send him to potter's field. Then he'll be recycled" (p. 265). The whole family planned to be buried there.

Doris accepted her son's death and learned from the experience. She must have learned about funeral arrangements from Jessica Mitford's The American Way of Death, especially about the complexity of laws governing the burial of the dead. She also learned from Eric to appreciate his humor, "His ability to look at hard truth without

blinking" (p. 266), "His sense of time . . .", and his love of nature and people" (p. 266). She found, "Eric's death is not the end of joy. It's somehow a chance for another start" (p. 266). Sidney continued to donate platelets at the hospital with the hope that children would one day walk out of the hospital cured, and through them Eric would be a part of that victory.

Sylvia Plath, in her poem "Lady Lazarus," said, "Dying/ Is an art, like everything else./ I do it exceptionally well." The same could be said of Annika, Kate, Johnny, and Eric. Though one does not know of Annika's death, one does know of her death struggle and know she will do the most she can with the death experience itself. The other three young people have found immortality through creative works, for their stories will influence many adolescents and adults, as well, in their thinking about death. From the struggles of these adolescent characters one is reminded of Kubler-Ross's teachings that each day is important and full of meaning. Kate's days were filled with love for her husband and daughter. Johnny crammed his last months with academic work. He caught up with his class and graduated from Deerfield Academy, and he died hoping he would enter Harvard the next fall. Eric's five-years' fight with leukemia was filled with athletic activities and keeping physically in shape, but his greatest goal was gaining and maintaining his sense of independence. He did things his own way and tried not to collapse emotionally on his family. He took much of the responsibility upon himself that related to his illness.

What did the living learn from the deaths of these young people? We have already seen what their families learned. Readers, aside from

learning to live each day to the fullest, might learn to share dying and death experiences with others and to be better guides throughout these experiences. They might also find themselves in harmony with the following poem,

90

On the day when death will knock at thy door what wilt thou offer to him?

Oh, I will set before my guest the full vessel of my life—I will never let him go with empty hands.

All the sweet vintage of all my autumn days and summer nights, all the earnings and gleanings of my busy life will I place before him at the close of my days when death will knock at my door!¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁶Tagore, p. 104.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The subject of death in our earliest Western literature seems to have been related, primarily, to love and war. Heroes such as Patroclus and Hector died at Troy, one its enemy, the other its defender. Luckless women chose their own deaths: Dido, for example, fell upon Aeneas's sword after he abandoned her. Even children suffer, for Astyanax, Hector's son, was thrown from a tower to his death.

The Middle Ages also had its heroes who died for good causes, usually Christian ones: Roland and his friend Oliver, El Cid, and Malory's good King Arthur, who when mortally wounded disappeared on a barge to the vale of Avalon. Everyman sought friends to accompany him to the grave, but found only Good Deeds willing to go with him. Chaucer's characters search for death so that they may kill him, but, alas, death finds them.

Renaissance characters many times murder others or others murder them. Cellini, the artist, certainly did his share. The knights in Spenser's The Faerie Queen and the lovable Don Quixote also fight in death-defying situations.

With all these early models, the challenge of death is faced with physical courage and with little inner turmoil. The afterlife was familiar, for Greeks, Romans, and Christians knew their gods and their own purpose on earth. Our Renaissance prince, Prince Hamlet, is one of our first well-known doubters about this earth business and what the

next life holds in store. Courage in facing one's death begins to take on a variety meanings.

The characters in the ten works analyzed in this paper have displayed courage in its various forms. Some have faced family deaths, whereas others have faced their own. Some have faced death with Castiglione's sprezzatura, making the difficult seem easy.

In Chapters III and IV the six young people faced the death of family members; Bucky and Marsh learned to accept the deaths of their fathers, whereas Tim, John, Meg and Conrad faced the deaths of their brothers or sister.

Death of a parent can leave an aftermath of practical and emotional problems. Practical problems occur, such as financial strain on the family members left, or added responsibilities for the adolescent which may in turn create new problems. An adolescent's whole life may be changed as a result, a change that could be for good or bad. The death of a parent could cause the adolescent to experience social or partial death himself. His emotional growth may be stopped if he cannot reach acceptance of his parent's death. He may also feel isolated from the adult world, or may undergo painful readjustments in his relationship with other living adults.

Loss of a brother or sister by an adolescent can also cause emotional problems. The remaining adolescent may feel guilt from a variety of sources; for example, he may feel guilt about mistreatment of the brother or sister before death. He may feel that he caused the death, unworthy of life. The emotional strain of the day-to-day witnessing of the dying process and final death of a family member can be

devastating. Problems with parents may result, and the family survivors may withdraw the love they usually have for each other for fear of being hurt.

Chapter V illustrated how four young persons faced their own deaths with all their attendant problems. The initial reaction to the news of their impending deaths caused a physical reaction in Annika and Eric. Problems for all four included a lack of communication with family, medical staff, and the healthy, in general. Family acceptance or their own worries about their family's suffering plagued all of them: how could they help their families live with death became a source of concern. Of greatest concern was how to use the little time they had left. Days were condensed to minutes. Attending this concern was honing their own perception of all that surrounded them, to really see, to soak up the world. They also had serious choices to make about their own deaths. All, in their own ways, fought off death as long as they were able. They then chose their own types of death and time of death.

This study has shown the adolescent's experience with death, as that experience occurred in ten accounts. The need to fight to live and the need to die peacefully have been illustrated as well as the fact that most of the characters have found little, if any, real peace in thoughts of an afterlife, although religious faith was shown to give strength to some family members. We have seen the sick band together and create their own world, a world that bans the healthy. Again and again we heard the cry for opportunities to pack full each day with meaningful experiences for those about to die. The latter lesson,

making our moments count, has been written about by all the authorities in the field of death and dying.

General problems from these accounts include such issues as euthanasia, what rights the dying have in deciding to turn off the machines, and communication with medical staffs. For the healthy come such problems as whether or not to tell the dying about his condition, whether or not to shelter him or let him exercise his own free will. Then there are the emotional problems involved in handling and working through their own guilt and grief, and of how to pick up the pieces of a life and live it fully after a loved one has died.

We assume that learning to live with death, learning to accept death as a part of life, is necessary for personal growth. English teachers can provide space and experiences for adolescent growth in this area. They can help satisfy the adolescent's curiosity about death by providing vicarious experiences that help him tap into his own nature and emotional life, if he is intellectually and emotionally ready for those experiences. Adolescent literature dealing with death and dying can provide rich emotional experiences, present a variety of attitudes toward death, show a variety of culturally acceptable death stances and hone the adolescent reader's perceptions of death.

By using Chapter II as a beginning point, English teachers can help the adolescent discover, first of all, what people think death is, and then introduce him to types of death, issues involved with death, and ponder why man has to die, or if he does. Of great interest could be our fear and denial of this once taboo subject. Cultural differences and varying religious outlooks could be explored. Other rich sources

for discussion encompass stages of death acceptance, paths toward immortality, death awareness in children, and adolescence as a death and rebirth experience. A final look at preparation for the death experience might include sharing experiences, death awareness exercises, visiting nursing homes and the terminally ill, and opening up family discussions on the topic.

Teachers can also benefit from the experiences of teachers who have already taught the subject. Chapter II of this paper reviewed material in this area. Of special importance is the warning to allow the emotions a share of class time and to remember that literature shows a variety of ways to experience death, and composition allows free expression of personal feelings about death.

In conclusion, the death experience is being handled openly and honestly in works of interest to adolescents, as witnessed in the ten accounts analyzed in this paper. Since adolescents need vicarious experiences and are intellectually and emotionally, for the most part, ready to have these experiences, death education should be a part of the English curriculum, for it is the responsibility of every teacher to help educate the whole child. It has also been seen that working through a death experience is necessary for personal growth. Acceptance, rather than denial, helps the adolescent discover his true being.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX

A. ADOLESCENT NOVELS ON DEATH OF FRIENDS

Christine Arnothy. I Am Fifteen and I Don't Want to Die.

The setting is World War II Budapest. Christine and her family lived in a cold, dark cellar of their bombed-out apartment building. First the Nazis and then the Russians invaded. Christine's family escaped to their country home and then escaped over the border.

Christine's friend Pista, who also lived in her basement, was killed when a mine exploded in front of him. Afterwards Christine told her priest she didn't want to die, and he reassured her with visions of an afterlife.

Marietta D. Moskin. I Am Rosemarie.

Rosie Brenner was taken through a series of concentration camps from May 1940 through 1945. Her ages during this time ranged from twelve to sixteen. She and her parents survived to become displaced persons. Her grandmother, the person Rosie is closest to, died at Bergen-Belsen, one of the camps.

Gunnel Beckman. That Early Spring.

Mia lived with her father, and together they decided to move his mother to their apartment from the nursing home. Mia learned from her grandmother and grew close to her before the grandmother's death. Her grandmother's move shortened her life, but it was a conscious choice.

Betty Greene. Summer of My German Soldier.

Twelve-year-old Patty Berger, a Jew, lived in Jenkinsville, Arkansas, where a German POW, Anton Reiker, was imprisoned. She helped him escape, but he was shot in New York, and she experienced anger and disbelief at his death. For her part, the FBI investigated and she was put in reform school. Pearl, the black maid, her closest friend, visited her there.

Katherine Paterson. Bridge to Terabithia.

In this 1978 Newbery Medal Winner, Jesse Oliver Aarons, a ten-year-old fifth-grader and his friend Leslie Burke, another ten-year-old, create a magical kingdom in the woods and name it Terabithia. Leslie has an accident on her way there and dies. Jesse experiences denial and anger as a reaction to Leslie's death. His teacher, Mrs. Myers, who has previously lost her husband, shares his mourning. Acceptance of his friend's death comes when he can take his little sister May Belle to Terabithia.

Ann Head. Mr. & Mrs. Bo Jo Jones.

Although this novel is not primarily about death, the teenage couple, Boswell Johnson Jones, seventeen, and July Greher, sixteen, who are forced into marriage, have a baby that dies soon after its birth, causing aftereffects to be dealt with by the young couple, aftereffects not seen by the reader.

B. POETRY DEALING WITH DEATH

1. War Poems

Wilfred Owen, "Dulce Et Decorum Est"

Archibald MacLeish, "Lines for an Internment"

Siegfried Sassoon, "They"

Randall Jarrell, "The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner"

William Vaughn Moody, "On a Soldier Fallen in the Philippines"

James Dickey, "The Fire Bombing"

2. Suicide

E. A. Robinson, "Richard Cory"

e. e. cummings, "In the middle of a room"

Suicide of writers: Hart Crane, Ernest Hemingway

3. Immortality—Various Views

William Cullen Bryant, "Thanatopsis"

Robinson Jeffers, "To the Stone-Cutters"

Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Ozymandias"

S. T. Coleridge, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner"

4. Grief

Wordsworth's Lucy poems:

"Three Years She Grew in Sun and Shower"

"She Dwelt Among the Untrodden Ways"

"A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal"

Robert Frost, "Home Burial"

5. Thoughts and Feelings about Dying

Emily Dickinson, "I heard the fly buzz"

Thomas Gray, "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard"

John Keats, "When I Have Fears That I May Cease to Be"

Carl Sandburg, "Death Snips Proud Men"

"Waiting for the Chariot"

Walt Whitman, "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd"

"Whispers of Heavenly Death"

Matthew Arnold, "Dover Beach"

Alfred, Lord Tennyson, "Crossing the Bar"

John Keats, "Bright Star! Would I Were Steadfast as Thou Art"

Robert Browning, "Epilogue to Asolando"

Edward Fitzgerald, The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam

6. Loneliness and Isolation

Robert Frost, "The Death of the Hired Man"

C. S. Lewis, A Grief Observed

7. Wasted Life/Meaningless Death

T. S. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"

8. Tragic Premature Death

Lives of some of the Romantic poets.

VITA

Mary Lord Beasley, born in Savannah, Georgia, on January 21, 1937, attended public schools there, graduating from Savannah High School in June 1954. She received, from Georgia Southern College, the Bachelor of Science degree in Education with a major in English in 1960 and the Master of Science in Teaching with a major in English in 1966.

She received an IBM Fellowship for doctoral work in English at the University of Miami for the 1969-1970 school year. In 1978 she entered the Graduate School of The University of Tennessee, Knoxville. She received the Doctor of Education degree with a major in Curriculum and Instruction in August 1981. Her main area of concentration was English Education with collateral areas in English and Social Foundations.

The author has two children, Mary Celeste and Jody McAllen Beasley.

