



## *Anna Fiske* *[1964]*

*Anna Fiske (b. 1964) is an author, illustrator, and cartoonist. Fiske's playful and distinctive style, both literary and pictorial, has earned her numerous awards and honours for her works. Several of her books have been published with great success in many countries.*



*How To Talk About Death* by Anna Fiske

Translation from Norwegian by Lise Lærdal Bryn

[Page numbers refer to the PDF]

p. 6

Many people think about death.

p. 7

Many people find it difficult to think about death.

Some find it difficult to talk about it.

Maybe because there is so much we don't know about death.

Others don't wonder as much and think about other things.

p. 8

Some people have lots of questions about death.

p. 9

Some questions about death have answers.

Some questions about death don't have answers, only ideas and theories.

p. 10

Death is a part of life.

Life has a beginning and an end.

That's the case for most things.

In nature, things are born and die all the time.

p. 12

A seed becomes a bud,  
then a flower,  
which withers and makes new seeds,  
rots and turns into soil in which other plants can grow.

p. 13

Some plants in nature don't become that old.  
I flower for only a few days, and then I wither!

While others can become ancient.

My leaves fall in autumn, but my trunk is many hundreds of years old!

p. 14

Finding a dead animal can be sad.

p. 15

When an animal we know dies, we feel very sad. It feels empty, we miss the animal and feel grief.

When we have grieved a while, we may want to take care of a new animal.

We come to care for that animal too, but it is different pet, a different love.

p. 16

Both animals and people are all different.

p. 17

There is only one of each and every one of us.

One of you and one of everyone else.

We are unique.

p. 19

If no one died, our planet would become very crowded.

All the plants, people and animals wouldn't fit.

All the new beings and buds born to the world wouldn't have room to grow and develop.

p. 20

A family is made up of many generations.

We have our parents and their parents and our grandparents' parents and so on and so on for all eternity.

We've never met the people who lived a long time ago, but we might have heard about them. It's good that they once existed, because otherwise we who live now wouldn't exist.

They are all important and a part of our history. We are connected like links in a long chain.

ME

DAD

GRANDAD GRANDMA

GREAT-GRANDPARENTS

GREAT-GREAT-GRANDPARENTS

GREAT-GREAT-GREAT-GRANDPARENTS

p. 21

Some people are named after one of their ancestors who lived a long time ago.

Great-grandmother Turid

Turid

We might look like our relatives.

You have your great-granddad's ears!

No way!

MUM

DAD

GRANDAD GRANDMA

GREAT-GRANDPARENTS

GREAT-GREAT-GRANDPARENTS

GREAT-GREAT-GREAT-GRANDPARENTS

p. 22

Our family is like a tree, with a big trunk and branches.

PARENTS — ME — GRANDPARENTS — GREAT-GRANDPARENTS

Some people make family trees to remember their relatives and to see how nicely everyone is connected.

p. 23

Some people live with a new family and then become part of that family's history, while at the same time having their own tree.

p. 24

We might be afraid that the people we love will die.

But most people live for a very, very long time and only die when they become very old.

p. 25

When we become very old, our body becomes worn out, and some of the important parts of our body that we need to live stop working as they should.

Many very old people may feel that they are nearing the end of their life.

100 years — 90 years — 80 years — 70 years — 60 years — 50 years — 40 years — 30 years — 20 years — 10 years — 0 years

They have lived lovely long lives and have experienced many wonderful things.

p. 26

Not everything in our body needs to function for us to live,  
but some parts of our body are absolutely vital.

What parts of our body can we live without?

What parts of our body do we need to live?

A tooth to chew with?

A heart that beats?

A drop of blood?

All the blood in our body?

p. 27

A finger to point and scratch ourselves with?

A brain to think with, and which also sends signals so we can feel and move?

Lungs to breathe with?

A leg to walk on?

p. 28

Inside our bodies we have lots of parts that ensure the body functions properly.

Everything in there works without us needing to think about it very much.

I have organs inside me!

I have organs too!

So do I!

I don't have organs!

p. 29

But if an important part, such as:

the brain — think, think! feel, feel!

the heart — thud, thud!

or the lungs — breathe, breathe!

becomes old, hurt or sick and we can't fix it, the body won't be able to work any longer and dies.



p. 30

If an accident happens, or someone is hurt or shot, and something important in the body that is needed to live is harmed, that person could die.

This is rare, and very dramatic and painful for those who loved the person who died.

p. 31

Those who hurt themselves so that they die, often have something dark and difficult in their thoughts.

They forget that they are important to the people they love, and think that they are doing them a favour by disappearing.

They hurt in such a way that they think they are a burden for the ones they love, and love them so much they want to spare them that pain.

When someone dies in this way, we call it taking your own life, or committing suicide.

Death can also happen as a result of a serious illness that the doctors and the body can't heal.

The heart stops beating, the lungs stop breathing, and the sick person dies. When we are dead, we stop feeling, so the sick person is no longer in any pain.

p. 32

Sometimes a life ends before it is born. Then there is usually something wrong with the fetus, so that it isn't able to live.

p. 33

This can happen to babies too, but this is very, very uncommon.

The family that waited and longed for the child who never got to think, feel and experience, feel grief for what never came to be.

The death can feel very unfair.

p. 34

When someone dies, everything that is needed to live stops working.

The brain stops working.

The heart stops beating.

The lungs stop breathing.

Hair and nails also stop growing.

All the muscles stop working.

p. 35

Every part of the human goes completely still.

A person who is dead doesn't come back.

A person who is dead can't live again.

p. 36

Only the body remains, a bit like a shell or a house someone used to live in. The person is now gone.

The dead body no longer feels, thinks or talks.

But those who knew and loved the one who died, remember their laughter, tears, words, hands, and face, remember the whole person.

p. 37

Those who die sort of live on in the thoughts and hearts of the people who loved them.

p. 38

The dead body is groomed and dressed by those who work in a funeral parlour.

I know everything about how to organise a funeral! — Undertaker

Their family or closest friends can also join if they want to.

Many find it comforting to choose what the one who died will wear in their coffin.

The clothes are cut up in the back, so they are easier to put on.

p. 39

The family also chooses which coffin the body will be placed in.

We call a dead body a corpse.

Coffin

Some people put things in the coffin, a photograph, a stuffed animal, drawings, flowers, or anything else the dead person may have loved.

Some people have already thought about and written down their wishes for their funeral while they're alive.

p. 40

The day of the funeral, the coffin is driven there and nicely displayed.

It is decorated with flowers and candles. Some have a picture of the dead person next to the coffin, and items that were special to that person.

A funeral is held to remember, say goodbye to, and bury the dead.

At funerals there is a ritual, a ceremony.

A ceremony is something we do to celebrate or mark something, like for example:

a baptism, a naming ceremony, a wedding or a funeral.

Yes! Yes!

p. 41

It is good for us to gather, reminisce together, say goodbye to and celebrate the life of our loved ones. We can then feel that we are not alone in our grief. It is also a great comfort to be together and grieve. Many people cry at funerals, but not everyone.

When someone flags at half mast, it means someone has died or that it is the day of the funeral.

p. 42

Dressing in black or the way the dead person wanted, is a way of showing that we care about the dead and their loved ones.

p. 43

Many are sad, and many think about the dead person's family.

My condolences! =

I feel for you!

How sad that the one you loved so much is dead!

Thank you!

In a funeral, there is usually music, songs and stories about the life of the dead person.

p. 44

Afterwards, the coffin is carried out by someone who knew the dead person, or those who work in a funeral home.

If the coffin is to be buried, it is lowered into a hole in the ground.

p. 45

Otherwise, the coffin is placed in a funeral hearse that drives slowly to a crematory.

There the coffin and body are cremated. That means it is put in a very hot, large furnace and is burned to ashes, which are collected in an urn.

As the person is dead, they can no longer feel or think. It is only a body, a shell.

Some choose to store the ashes in the urn, others choose to scatter it outdoors.

In some funerals, it is the urn of the dead person that is buried. Burying an urn so it has a permanent resting place is called urn interment.

p. 46

After the funeral, there is often a memorial service where everyone gathers together and remember the person who died.

Maybe someone both laughs and cries when they say nice things about them.

If the coffin is buried, the people who work in the cemetery, the custodians, will fill the grave with soil and arrange the flowers beautifully on the grave.

p. 47

Funerals can look quite different. Almost all funerals have songs, music and speeches.

Secular funeral

The funeral orator leads the funeral.

It can be held in a chapel, a home, another venue, or outdoors.

If the funeral is religious, prayers are said and texts are read.

## Protestant funeral

A priest leads the funeral. Hymns are sung. The funeral is held in a church or a chapel.

p. 48

## Muslim funeral

The dead person is buried as soon as possible after their death.

The body is washed and shrouded in a white cloth.

A simple coffin. Turned towards Mecca.

Imam — Mosque

## Catholic funeral

Family and friends gather the day before the funeral and share memories of the person who died.

Incense is burned at the beginning and end of the funeral. Sometimes the coffin is open.

Priest — Church

## Buddhist funeral

Buddhist texts. Buddhist music.

Lead by a monk or nun or those who are in the funeral.

Temple

p. 49

## Jewish funeral

The funeral must be held as soon as possible after the person dies. The dead person is dressed in white, so that everyone is equal in death.

Family and friends fill the grave with soil.

Rabbi or cantor.

Synagogue

Hindu funeral

Quick and simple.

The one who died is shrouded in a sheet and get a dot on their forehead.

The eldest son or brother holds the funeral.

Incense is burned.

The body is cremated. The ash is scattered or collected in an urn. The urn is lowered into water or placed where the dead person used to live.

The urn dissolves in water.

p. 50

It is normal to mark the grave with a gravestone. The dead person's name and the years were born and died are written on the stone.

Some graves are on family plots, where relatives who died long ago are also buried.

If an urn is placed in a cinerarium or buried, the name is on a sign or a stone. Sometimes there are no names there.

p. 51

The grief you feel when a beloved pet dies can be as painful as when a human dies.

Some people bury their pets in their garden. An animal can also be cremated.

There are special cemeteries for pets.

Sometimes, if there has been an accident, or if someone has been killed, people place flowers and greetings in the place it happened to remember and honour the person who died.

p. 52

When the coffin is buried, the bacteria in the body start to break down all the soft body parts. It takes about ten to fifteen years for them all to disappear.

Only the skeleton and coffin then remain.

It can take many decades for the skeleton and coffin to turn into soil.

I'm up here crawling around and eating soil! Me too!

p. 53

Then the dead body, which of course is only a body, without feelings or thoughts, becomes a part of the Earth, like everything else that lives and dies, but it lives on in the memories and feelings of those who loved them.

The ashes in an urn are already one with the Earth.

p. 54

We have buried and grieved for the dead throughout all of history.

We have found remains that are many, many thousands of years old that have been buried in many different ways.

Graves have looked different throughout history. In some graves, it is believed that chieftains and kings were buried first, then others were added to the grave later. There can be many hundreds of people buried in such graves.



## The Stone Age — The Bronze Age

Throughout history, dead bodies have both been buried whole and been cremated, and the ashes and bones have been covered with rocks.

Old graves still exist, and some are easy to discover.

Burial mound

p. 55

If they believed that the dead person travels to a new world when they die, they may have buried them with gifts they thought they may need.

This could include food, tools, jewelry, and other beautiful objects.

The Vikings sometimes buried a whole boat or ship. Animals were often also put in the grave.

A long time ago in Egypt, they treated the body so that it would be nice and whole when it arrived in what they believed was the next world, the realm of the dead.

Mummy — Pyramid — Sarcophagus

p. 56

When someone dies, we feel grief. The grief is often as big as the love we felt for the person who died.

Love — Grief

We still love the dead person, but we grieve and miss them too. Grief is love.

If someone is very ill and know that they are about to die, their loved ones can prepare themselves.

If someone dies in an accident, are hurt or are killed, the grief can come suddenly to those who loved them.

p. 57

Grown-ups may be very sad and upset all the time. That is their way of grieving.

In time, they become less sad.

Children can go more in and out of their grief.

Although we feel sorrow, we can also laugh and play.

Many have big thoughts before falling asleep.

p. 58

In the beginning, grief may be painful and difficult to feel, both in your body and your thoughts, and we need comfort.

We can become angry with death, ourselves, or the person who died for our pain.

p. 59

If we don't receive or feel we receive any comfort, we might hide that we are sad by becoming scared, angry, silly, feel guilty, feel shame, or feel that it hurts in our stomach and head.

Then the grown-ups need to see us, and help us process those feelings and grieve.

When we can hold the grief in our thoughts and bodies, it helps us understand that the person we grieve for is dead.

Then the grief doesn't hurt as much anymore.

Comfort and consolation help us live on without the person we grieve for.

p. 60

Many things can disappear or die.

Which of these things may we grieve for?

An animal?

A sock?

A pop star?

An apple we've eaten?

A stuffed toy?

p. 61

A friend who moved away?

A mosquito?

A snowman?

A tree?

A person?

p. 62

There are many ways of remembering those we loved, such as:

Lighting a candle. Looking at photos.

Memory albums.

Making a memorial.

Music.

Scents, tastes and objects.

Arts and crafts.

Visiting their grave, memorial place, or wherever the person is buried to make it look nice and reminisce.

Many people keep talking to their loved ones and ask them things, even though they don't get an answer.

Many have the person who died in their thoughts and can almost feel that they are sometimes still there.

p. 63

The grief never disappears entirely, it can still feel painful, but as time goes on, it becomes milder and lighter.

The grief turns into memories, becomes a part of life.

p. 64

We can be scared of dying.

This can stop us from doing dangerous things.

Maybe not very wise!

I don't think so!

I'll drop that one!

But it can also be painful to think about.

p. 65

When we think about death and when someone dies, we might have many questions.

Then it's a good idea to ask them.

It's not certain that the grown-ups will be able to answer them all, or that they know everything, but they'll try to answer and puzzle it out the best they can.

There are grown-ups who know a lot about being in pain and whose job is to help people feel better. Like a counselor or a nurse.

p. 66

We know as little about where we or our loved ones go when we die as we do where we were before we were born.

Do we turn into ...

a star in the sky?

A bird?

Soil that other things can grow in?

A cloud?

A martian?

A tree?

No one knows what happens or where we go. But we can wonder.

p. 67

Do we turn into...

An angel?

Air?

Nothing?

A ghost?

A rainbow?

A flower?

Or something else entirely...

Whatever we believe is right for us and it can help us with our grief.

p. 68

In Mexico, they celebrate the Day of the Dead.

On that day, they remember and celebrate the lives of their dead.

They make their favourite foods, decorate with bright colours and scented flowers, and light candles.

They also make skeleton and skull decorations.

Many celebrate on graves.

They party, play music, put on make-up, get dressed up and walk in street parades.

p. 69

In the past in Ireland and Scotland, they thought that the spirits and dead could return to scare us and play tricks on the day they celebrated the transition from summer to winter.

To scare the spirits back into their graves, the people lit bonfires, dressed up and made lanterns and figurines out of cabbages. They also put out food for the spirits.

We don't believe in such things anymore, and we call that day Halloween.

p. 71

Many dress up like witches, ghosts or whatever they want on Halloween.

Trick or Treat!

The first Sunday of November is All Saints' Day, when many people light candles at the graves of their dead and think about them.

p. 72

Thinking about death is also thinking about life.

And how nice it is to live.

p. 73

Life is composed of so many things.

Sometimes life is hard and difficult.

Other times it is beautiful and fantastic,

And often life is somewhere in between.

p. 74

It's good we have a life to do and experience so many things. We all have different dreams for what we want to spend our lives doing.

I want to build and create!

I want to get to know lots of people!

I want to have a few close friends!

I want to be a superstar!

I want all people to be happy!

I want to have many children!

I'm going to fight for animals and nature!

I want to move onwards!

I want to stay in the here and now!

p. 75

I want to explore the world!

I want to work a lot!

I want to enjoy good food!

I want to make decisions and have power!

I want others to make decisions!

I want to invent a way to live forever!

I want to do everything!

I want to do a few different things!

I want to chill and relax!

All our life we continue to have thoughts and dreams about what we want to do.

p. 76

Thinking about death is also thinking about love and how much life there is.

p. 77

About those we love.

And those who love us.

Those who love you.