

*The 'Last Great Taboo': The Rise of Thanatophobia in the United States and How We  
Can Deal With It*

**An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)**

**by**

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## Abstract

Our relationship with death in the United States has changed dramatically since the nineteenth century. With the rise of modern technology as well as modern medicine, we as a society have become very disconnected from death. As a result of this as well as the notion that death is “un-American,” we have become very fearful of death (Samuel x). While it may seem that our relationship with death in the United States is too far gone to worry about fixing, there are things that we can do to repair our relationship with our mortality. By adopting the tenets of the death positivity movement and choosing more eco-friendly alternatives to death care, as well as listening to people from non-death-denying cultures, we can make our relationship with death a bit more positive, and also begin to better understand and appreciate the natural cycle of life.

## Acknowledgments

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Finally, even though they can't read, I want to thank my plants and my pets for reminding me just how alive I am.

## Process Analysis Statement

I have always had a sense of morbid curiosity, and in all honesty, this project has been long in the making. As a child, I was obsessed with Ancient Egypt, and the way they treated their dead. As I grew older, my sense of morbid curiosity grew with me, and my interest in death and my research on it continued. My curiosity in regards to death peaked during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, when I discovered a YouTube channel called “Ask a Mortician.” This YouTube Channel is run by Caitlin Doughty, author and founder of The Order of the Good Death. After reading her book *From Here to Eternity: Traveling the World to Find the Good Death*, the idea for this project was born. I was inspired by learning about how cultures from around the world viewed death. Seeing the diverse, vibrant traditions when it came to death and remembering the dead in other parts of the world made me reflect on how cold and medicalized death and the process of dying can be in the United States.

What made me curious about our collective relationship with death in the United States was my own relationship with it. I’ve experienced the death of many of my closest loved ones over the past ten years of my life, and that made my relationship with death and my own mortality quite strained. While we were all stuck inside during quarantine, I had plenty of time to reflect on my mortality. Losing a loved one is hard, and it made death even scarier than it already was for me. It was quite a daunting endeavor, but through learning about death positivity, I was able to vastly improve my relationship with death. My goal in completing this project is to hopefully help others improve their relationships with death and their own mortality through learning, just as I did.

My research for this project was expansive, and began in the Spring of 2023 during my fellowship with Dr. Obed Frausto. During that fellowship, we did research regarding Indigenous

thinking on death in North and South America. The sources I used in my discussion of this topic in the following paper were obtained during that fellowship. The research I did pertaining to the other topics in my paper was completed at the beginning of the Fall 2023 semester. Doing research for this project was a bit difficult, and it took months to find exactly what I was looking for. I struggled to find sources that pertained to the specific topics I wanted to cover. I scoured the depths of Bracken Library as well as the internet in order to find sources. I think the lack of sources regarding how Americans typically think about death is a very telling or strained relationship with it. I also want to point out that a few of the sources I've included are a bit old. I chose to include them because I think the information within them is still relevant. Again, I think the fact that I had to use a few sources that are a bit outdated speaks to the relationship that we have with death.

Coming up with my thesis statement was a very important part of this project. Though the fear of death in the United States is definitely an issue, I didn't want to include that in my argument. I chose not to because you can be death positive and have open discussions about death while still being scared of it, a point that I wanted to make clear in my project. Instead of focusing on the fear of death a significant amount in my argument, I wanted to more so focus on diverse perspectives on death and things that can help us reduce our anxiety towards our mortality.

The process of completing this project helped in my continual reflection on my relationship with my own mortality. I truly love writing and conducting research, and they are a few of the things that really make me appreciate my mortal existence. I can't help but to think that mortality is a beautiful thing. It's what connects us all as humans, and it's also something that I share with my beloved plants and pets, who, just as I will, will someday cease to be.

Mortality makes me feel connected to the things around me in a way that I don't quite know how to put into words. It's a closeness that I can't describe. In a time when everyone is so divided on everything, I think our mortality can be a helpful reminder that we are all, in fact, human and that we all have at least one thing in common. When you look at it that way, it's much easier to fully appreciate the limited time that we have on this planet

## The 'Last Great Taboo': The Rise of Thanatophobia in the United States and How We Can Deal With It

### **Introduction**

Thanatophobia is the word used to describe one's fear and anxiety surrounding death and the process of dying ("Thanatophobia"). This is a fear that can be easily observed within the predominant culture of the United States. When someone gathers the courage to discuss death in a meaningful way in the United States, the general reaction to said discussion is that death is something too morbid to talk about. I have often found myself questioning why death is something that is so quickly shot down as a topic of discussion. Death is something inevitable, unavoidable. It comes for us all. One day, all of us, including myself and the person reading this, will be dead. If death is something that will eventually come for us all, why do we avoid the matter at all costs? Among other things, Death is seen as being "un-American" (Samuel X). Death is seen in this light because there's no place for death in a capitalistic society that thrives on having as many alive, working, and consuming people as possible. Because of this, as well as other causes that I intend to further explore later on, America has developed into a death - denying culture. Like most difficult topics in America, we tend to avoid discussing death in a meaningful way. Let me be clear - in no way do I intend to come across as saying death isn't a difficult topic to discuss. Death is incredibly difficult to discuss. It's daunting and can be scary, and it's especially difficult to discuss when you've recently experienced the loss of a loved one or if you're preparing to. However, our lack of discussion surrounding death is part of what makes it so daunting. We are so incredibly disconnected from death in the United States that we don't allow ourselves to discuss the matter in any way, shape, or form, and our lack of discussion about the matter is not only harmful to ourselves as individuals but to all of us as a society.

I think Americans tend to assume that everyone is fearful when it comes to discussing one's inevitable death and their own mortality. However, this is far from being the case. Many countries and cultures from around the world have a much better, less disconnected relationship with death than we do. However, we don't even have to look that far to see cultures that have a better relationship with death than the predominant, death-denying culture here, which is a topic I plan to discuss in depth later on. So, how do we heal our relationship with death? How do we wade through the fog that we ourselves have created when it comes to discussing the things that will eventually happen to all of us? Though on the surface things may be looking pretty bleak in terms of repairing our relationship with death, there are alternatives to the avoidant way in which we handle and discuss it now. There are plenty of ways that we can improve our relationship with death and mortality as both individuals and as a society. In order to change the predominant, death-denying culture of the United States, we must begin having meaningful conversations about death in order to break the disconnect between ourselves and our inevitable end and we also must change our attitudes towards death. Instead of viewing death as defeat, we must begin to view it as the inevitable end to a natural cycle. To do this, we should look to the various non-death-denying cultures around the world so that we can learn about how cultures that are more connected with death handle the matter. In the last part of this project, I will be exploring the green death movement as well as the death positivity movement in order to discover what is out there in terms of facing death head-on, and how these movements may help us on the journey of healing our collective relationship with death. By adopting the tenets of the death positive movement and choosing a method of death care that allows us to return to nature, as well as listening to perspectives on death from people within non-death-denying cultures, we can create a much more death positive society than the one we live in now.

## **What is Thanatophobia?**

The Cleveland Clinic defines thanatophobia as “an intense fear of death or the dying process” (“Thanatophobia”). Fear and anxiety surrounding death and the process of dying is completely natural. There’s a lot that we just don’t, and can’t, know about dying, and many people fear the unknown (“Thanatophobia”). Unsurprisingly given our hesitancy to discuss death, resources reporting on attitudes towards death and dying are few and far between. The Cleveland Clinic reports that between only 3% and 10% of people fear death. However, they also mention that people are unlikely to report their true feelings in polls regarding sensitive topics (“Thanatophobia”).

One study conducted by the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) from 1995 reported that 68% of people from 18-64 did not have any problems thinking about death. Again, it is important to remember that responses to polls such as ones conducted on attitude towards death are unlikely to be entirely accurate due to the sensitive nature of the topic as well as the stigmatization of having a fear of something. An earlier study conducted by Gallup and Newport in 1991 reported that most Americans don’t even think about death (“Approaching Death”). I think this in and of itself is in support of the idea that we live in a death-denying culture. While these studies are quite dated, which, in my opinion, also speaks to our death-denying tendencies, I truly don’t think much has changed regarding our attitudes toward death. People find it difficult to talk about death partially because they fear it and fearing something is seen as weakness, but also because we have a tendency to not talk or think about things we find unpleasant. However, things were not always like this in regard to death in the United States. The creation of the death-denying culture that we live in today is a somewhat recent development, having occurred during



the twentieth century. Before the twentieth century and the rise of modern medicine, death was much more common and therefore was unavoidable in our discussions.

### **Death in the Nineteenth Century**

Once upon a time, death was not disregarded in the way that it is today. Not too long ago in the 1800s, death was a much more frequent visitor, as life expectancy was much shorter than it is today. Unfortunately, infant mortality was quite high too compared to what it is today (“Approaching Death”). Before the rise of modern medicine and technology, death was something that had to be acknowledged as there was no way to ignore it. Because of this, death was prominent in every aspect of society, including in the media. Various authors - Poe, Whitman, and Dickinson just to name a few - discussed death in a way that is all but extinct in American literature today due to our incredible disconnect from death (Samuel 23).

In the nineteenth century, because the death of a loved one was a rather frequent occurrence, people were encouraged to spend a lot of time with their soon to depart family members. Prolonged deaths were also preferred, and even romanticized during this time period. Common illnesses such as tuberculosis that didn’t immediately kill someone were seen as a somewhat good way to go as they allowed plenty of time for the dying person to spend with their loved ones and also time for the dying person to reflect on their relationship with their religion or spirituality (“Morbid Curiosity”). It was also much more common during this time period for people to die at home, and for their loved ones to care for them during the process of dying as well as before they were buried (Marquardt).

### **The Turning Point in Our Relationship With Death**

Instead of viewing death as something that while visiting a bit too often was an inevitability as we did in the nineteenth century, we started to view death as an enemy (Samuel

xi). Our goal in the 1900s, as well as today even, was to eliminate death as we started to see it as a failure of science and medicine (Samuel 54). We have decided that dying is a tragedy instead of seeing it as something entirely neutral in its existence. Death is neither good nor bad - it just is. Death itself is just something that happens and though with advancements in medicine and technology it can be delayed, as of the current moment, it cannot be stopped. I would argue that we should stop trying to find a solution to death altogether as I do not think that it is an issue in need of being resolved. Our mortality is something that connects us - humans, plants, animals, and all other living beings to one another. Our mortality is not something that should daunt us, it is something that should remind us that we are, in fact, alive.

How did we go from seeing death as an inevitable visitor to viewing death as an enemy that must be eliminated? Along with advancements in medicine and technology that lead us to the goal of eliminating death, in the United States specifically, we have decided that death is “un-American”(Samuel X). Author Lawrence R. Samuel argues that “The notion of one day disappearing is contrary to many of our defining cultural values” as well as that “death and dying [are] viewed as profoundly “un-American” experiences” (x). I agree with Samuel in that death and dying go against many of the ideals that define American culture. We live in an incredibly capitalistic society, and in order for capitalism to thrive, there must be as many workers and consumers as possible in order to sustain the system. Because of our capitalistic obsession with being able to work, we are also obsessed with youth and not aging. The anti-aging industry in the United States is huge! Every other pop-up ad on a website is titled something like “Eat this one thing every day and you’ll live 15 years longer!” or “Stop eating this if you want to live longer!”. Because of our obsession with youth, we’ve started to see death as “a threatening foe or adversary” (Samuel xi). Essentially, we see death as something that has the ability to defeat us,

and defeat is unacceptable in the eyes of American culture. Death is a natural event, the ending of a cycle, and America is obsessed with conquering and overcoming nature and its ways, so, unsurprisingly, we view death as a thing in need of overcoming as well. To put it simply, we see death as our enemy because the ending of a life has no place in a capitalistic society that thrives off of production and consumption.

Another major contributor to our problematic relationship with death and our own mortality in the United States stems from the fact that we are incredibly disconnected from death. What I mean by this is that in most scenarios, we are not directly involved in the care of our dying loved ones, nor are we involved with the care of their bodies after they pass. In the nineteenth century, before death became as medicalized as it is today, people typically passed away in their homes. Before the rise of the American funeral industry, it was commonplace for the family members of an individual who passed to prepare them for burial. It would be the family who would clean the body and dress the corpse, making the death of a loved one a much more connected, hands-on experience for the living family members (Marquardt). Nowadays, most people pass away in hospitals, despite the fact that most people would prefer to pass away at home, surrounded by their family members rather than strangers in white coats, surrounded by machines (“Approaching Death”).

### **Non-Death-Denying Cultures Outside of the United States**

As I mentioned in the introduction to this essay, there are plenty of cultures outside of the United States that are much more connected with death than we are. The handling of death is a very diverse matter that varies from culture to culture. There are a few cultures from outside of the United States that handle death in a very different way than we do that I would like to briefly bring your attention to in order to show you that there are many, different, diverse ways of

handling death. All of the cultures I am about to mention as well as their relationship with death that I am about to discuss are viewed from the lens of anthropologist Anita Hannig.

The first culture I would like to discuss is that of the Hyolmo Buddhists of Nepal. The people belonging to this specific sect of death hold the belief that the process of dying is “an intricate art to be learned — a project undertaken with foresight and self-awareness to ensure a smooth passage into the next life as well as a successful rebirth” (Hannig). As you can probably guess, a culture that views dying as a form of art is much more inclined to discuss the matter in a meaningful way.

Another culture from outside of the United States that has a much better, more connected relationship with death than we typically do is the Korowai people of West Papua, Indonesia. For the Korowai people, death as well as the process of dying are ordinary, everyday topics of conversation (Hannig). I have chosen to mention these two groups of people and their cultural beliefs surrounding death from outside of the United States because I wanted to make it clear that not all countries have death-denying cultures, and that it’s much less common for a culture to deny death than we may be inclined to think. I also wanted to mention them because I think we can learn a great deal from how other cultures handle death.

### **Indigenous Thinking on Death in the United States**

Before I go into my discussion on Indigenous thinking on death in the United States, I feel it is important to disclaim a few things. First, I, as a non-Indigenous person, am in no way trying to speak for the Indigenous people of the United States. Each individual group of Indigenous peoples has their own beliefs surrounding death, so I also don’t intend to generalize any of their beliefs, and in order to avoid doing so, I will be using the name that each specific group of people chooses to be identified by in my discussions. Finally, I am not encouraging

anyone to go out and try to obtain sacred knowledge from Indigenous people about their customs and beliefs. The academic world has often viewed Indigenous people as something to study instead of people to learn from, and in no way do I want to contribute to that harmful practice. It is also important to remember that not all Indigenous people, even those within one particular culture do not all share the same beliefs, so the individuals I am citing are speaking of their personal, cultural beliefs.

The Anishinabe (Ojibwe) people fully “embrace the circle of life” (Longboat 5). They see life as being separated into four, distinct stages that are composed of birth, life, death, and afterlife. Death and the process of dying within the Anishinabe is a very communal event. Throughout the process of dying, a person is surrounded by members of their community, including their family and friends as well as community leaders (Longboat 6). I think that the community aspect of dying within the Anishinabe belief system is something that non-Indigenous people could definitely learn from. As I previously mentioned, death has become incredibly medicalized, and people typically die in hospitals without their family near them, despite most people saying they would prefer to die at home (“Approaching Death”). I also think that by embracing the “circle of life,” we can reduce our anxiety surrounding death (Longboat 5).

The traditional beliefs of the Cheyenne people heavily focus on mortality. Sheldon Spotted Elk of the Cheyenne people explains that “In our culture, there is an awareness of mortality and this brief period of time we have here, rather than a tendency to avoid it” (Spotted Elk, et al.) This is very different from the predominant, death-denying culture of the United States which typically tries to avoid thinking about one’s mortality at all costs. Another member of the Cheyenne, Lamar Spotted Elk, shares with us the traditional, Cheyenne view that “We are going to go back to mother earth, and there is a cultural grace about that in our tribe, about our

bodies returning to mother earth and restoring and continuing the cycle that is life” (Spotted Elk, et al.). I think that the belief that we are simply returning to the earth when we die, and therefore allowing the cycle of life to continue, is one that many could potentially take comfort in, and therefore reduce anxiety surrounding death. Sheldon Spotted Elk wraps up his discussion about the beliefs he holds on death by stating “I think there is a big need for us to come together and develop tribes in the small-T sense” (Spotted Elk, et al.) Essentially, Spotted Elk is saying that we need to come together and start discussing our mortality and appreciating it rather than running from it. This is advice that all of us in the United States should consider when thinking about our individual relationships with death.

### **What Do We Do? Death Positivity: What is it and What Can it Do for Us?**

Death positivity may seem like a confusing concept when first hearing about it. Being death positivity doesn't necessarily mean that you don't fear death. It also doesn't mean that you think death is always a good thing, or that it doesn't hurt when a loved one dies. The organization The Order of the Good Death describes people who are death positive as people who “believe that it is not morbid or taboo to speak openly about death” as well as those who “see honest conversations about death and dying as the cornerstone of a healthy society” (“Death Positive Movement”). It's also important to mention that you can be death positive and still fear death, and that's ok (“Death Positive Movement”)! Being death positive is vital to improving one's individual relationship with death and may even help with death anxiety. The Order of the Good Death has played a fundamental role in the death positive movement in recent years. This organization emphasizes the eight tenets of the death positive movement, which are as follows:

1. By hiding death and the process of dying behind closed doors, we are causing much more harm than good in our society.

2. We must break the silence surrounding death in our society by having open, honest discussions about the subject. We should not refrain from including it in our art or our academics.
3. Thinking about our mortality and our eventual death is not morbid. Instead, it is one of the many ways that we display our innate curiosity as humans.
4. Dead bodies are not dangerous. Everyone should have the confidence and accessibility to be involved in the care of and preparation of the bodies of their dead loved ones if they so choose.
5. Laws that exist and that are created in the future that involve death and dying should ensure that the person who is dying or receiving end-of-life care aligns with their wishes, regardless of their identity, including but not limited to, their race, gender, sexuality, and religion.
6. I wish for my death to be handled in a manner that does not cause great harm to the environment.
7. We should inform our loved ones of what our wishes are for during the end of our lives as well as after our deaths, and we should have the necessary paperwork to ensure that those wishes are met.
8. Our advocacy surrounding death can do great good for our society and it can change the death-avoidant culture that we live in (“Death Positive Movement”).

If we all adopted the eight tenets of the death positive movement, we could create a society that is much more open to having in-depth discussions about death and dying. Being more open and honest about our feelings towards death, and even just increasing our discussions of death in general, would be incredibly beneficial to not only our society but us as individuals.

Dying is when we are at our most vulnerable. Knowing what we want to happen to us while we are in the process of dying and after we have passed as well before we're (hopefully) even close to death will allow for a much more peaceful experience for ourselves and our families. We focus a lot on grief after a loved one has passed, but we often overlook the struggles that a family faces when a loved one passes and they don't have explicit wishes for what kind of care they would like their body to receive after they have passed. Having to choose what kind of after death care a passed family member should, or would want, to have makes an already difficult situation even harder. Outlining what your wishes are for after you have passed will create space for your family to mourn without having to worry about making any major decisions during a time when they are experiencing great emotional distress.

### **The Green Death Movement: Going Back to Nature**

Another step that we must take in order to heal our relationship with death is to stop attempting to conquer nature and its cycles. As I previously mentioned, one of the eight tenets of the death positivity movement is "I wish for my death to be handled in a manner that does not cause great harm to the environment" ("Death Positive Movement"). The goal of the green death movement is to do away with death care practices that harm the environment. They aim to move away from the conventional method of death care which typically involves "embalming, caskets and concrete grave liners" which are "polluting and unsustainable" (Duffy). There are many options when it comes to having a more eco-friendly burial than what is standard in the United States. Something that has become increasingly popular is natural burials, in which a body is left unembalmed, and buried in a shallow grave, either in an unfinished wooden coffin or a cotton shroud. Another eco-friendly death care option is alkaline aquamation, which essentially does what cremation does, but with water instead of fire. Cremation, although it was once thought to



be a more environmentally friendly option, actually is not as it “leaves behind an unnecessary environmental footprint since it produces greenhouse gasses, particulate matter, and sometimes, heavy metals” (Duffy). Aquamation has the added benefit that it does not leave behind an unnecessary eco-footprint, nor does it produce any sort of harmful aftermath (Duffy). Something else that has been a topic of conversation in death positive spaces recently is human composting. Human composting works the exact same way that normal composting does, which is by taking organic material such as food scraps or lawn trimmings and mixing them with fertilizer that can be used to help support plant life (Vallie). Though I’ve named just a few, there is a whole world of alternative burial methods out there! Moving to more eco-friendly ways of caring for dead bodies, not only can we help the environment, but we can also help repair our relationship with death.

### **How Choosing a More Environmentally Friendly Version of Death Care Help Us Improve Our Relationship With Death**

By choosing a green alternative to traditional death care, we are improving our relationship with death in a few ways. First, by choosing what sort of death care we would like to receive before we are actually going to need it, we are tackling our mortality head-on. Choosing the death care you would like to receive is one way of acknowledging that you, in fact, are going to die one day. By specifically choosing a green method of death care, which typically does not involve embalming, you are also acknowledging that one day, your body will cease to exist, which I believe is something that people tend to struggle with a little bit. In a country that is so fearful of death, and that sees it as the enemy, it can be difficult to contend with the fact that our physical bodies will cease to exist at some point. So, by straying away from embalming, a chemical process that is used to preserve one’s body after death, not only are you helping

mitigate the impact that death care often has on the environment, you are facing your mortal existence in a way that can be very difficult to do!

Other than helping us to face our mortality head-on by getting us to think about what sort of death care we would like to receive, I also believe that choosing one of the various types of environmentally friendly death care condoned by the green death movement will help heal our relationship with the natural cycle of life. A few of the burial options that are condoned by the green death movement allow us to fully return to the earth. One of the options I previously discussed was natural burial, in which a corpse is wrapped in a cotton shroud or placed in an unfinished wooden coffin and buried in a shallow grave. Choosing an option like natural burial helps us remember that our time on earth is limited and that one day, we must give back to earth after having used its resources for our entire lives. I think by acknowledging that we must return to the earth one day because of all we have taken from it is a much more comforting, less scary way of thinking about death than most people in the United States typically think about it. I think a lot of people in the United States view death as simply a cease of existence, which it is, but thinking about it that way when you're already scared of it doesn't really help when it comes to your relationship with mortality.

## **Conclusion**

I don't think that we need to completely overcome our collective fear of death in order to move forward as a society. However, I do think that we need to stop allowing our fear of death to halt our conversations regarding the subject. Although death is certainly a difficult topic to discuss, we must stop allowing difficult topics to escape our conversations. When we avoid discussing difficult topics, we are complicit in the continuation of the issues that are caused by avoiding the discussion of said difficult topics. By not discussing death, we have become

incredibly fearful and disconnected from the matter. Our lack of conversation surrounding death is harmful. It harms us as individuals because it creates an environment of fear and foreboding surrounding the topic. It harms us as a society because it holds us back from examining the incredibly capitalistic society we live in that demands as many alive, working, and consuming people as possible in order to keep going.

We share this notion that somehow, someday, we must overcome death. America perpetuates the idea that dying is a weakness, that it's defeat, and that it goes against American values. Rather than overcoming death, we as individuals and a society must change our attitudes towards it. We need to stop attempting to overcome the natural order of things and instead reconnect ourselves with nature. There is no overcoming of the cycle of life, and the sooner we accept that the sooner we will see meaningful change in the way that our society handles death.

I firmly believe that the way forward for us as a society is within the tenets of the death positive movement. In order for us to create a society that doesn't avoid death and instead faces it head-on, we must have conversations about dying. If we all start talking about death and having meaningful conversations about it, we will become less fearful of it. Though there are things we will just never know about death, by discussing it, we will all gain a better understanding of our mortality and we may even come to appreciate it, seeing as it is one thing that connects us all and makes us human. If we all adopt the tenets of the death positive movement, especially the ones that have to do with breaking down the barriers we've built when it comes to discussing death, we will have the power to create immense societal change. Not only that, but we can also improve our individual relationships, which are often strained, with our mortality as well.

We can also move forward and create a less death-denying society by taking into account how cultures around the world, as well as Indigenous cultures in the United States, view death.

There are cultures around the world, such as the Hyolmo Buddhists of Nepal and the Korowai people of West Papua, Indonesia, who have a much better relationship with death than we do here in the United States, and we can learn so much from them. There is also a lot that we can learn from the knowledge surrounding death and mortality that Indigenous people who live in the United States have shared with us. If we take into account how other cultures view death when we reflect on our own relationship with it, we can realize that it's not as hard to foster a positive relationship with death as it might seem. By listening to Indigenous people in the United States perspectives' on death, we can face our own mortality in a much more meaningful, less fearful way, which will help us move forward and create a society that is more welcoming of thinking and talking about death.

Other than adopting the tenets of the death positive movement and listening to what various cultures both within and outside of the United States have to say about death, I believe that another step in the right direction that we can all take as individuals is to choose a method of death care that is minimally harmful to the environment. By doing so, we are facing our mortality as well as the fact that one day, our physical bodies will no longer exist, head-on. Though death can be a scary thing to think about, if we change our perspective on it, and think of it as returning to the earth after having lived on it and taken resources from it for our entire lives, we may begin to view it in a slightly more positive way. Through the values of the green death movement, we can choose to have our bodies cared for in a way that will not only mitigate the harm we cause to the environment but also allow us to return to nature, and give back to it after all we have taken from it.

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