

Death



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I became aware of my own mortality when I was 11 years old, as a result of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Like everyone else, I was convinced we were all about to be incinerated in a nuclear holocaust and I became depressed for the first time. When the crisis was resolved everyone else was relieved, but I realized I would eventually die anyway. I have been aware of that fact most days since October 16, 1962. That awareness has had an enormous influence on the course of my intellectual, emotional, social and professional

development. Our expectation for *when* we will die is central to responsible financial planning and to many important lifestyle decisions. It is also central to the development of our personal philosophy and quality of life, whether we are aware of this or not. The psychological impact of mortality can be moderated by faith, denial or certain types of reasoning; each of which has broad and complex consequences.

I have had the privilege of interacting closely with a number of friends, relatives and clients who knew they were going to die within a short time. Each of them reacted in their own way and each was surprised by that reaction. Despite the essentially traumatic nature of living through a terminal period, I would characterize about half the cases I have witnessed up close as positive in ways that these people articulated themselves. In almost every case there was a major reassessment and realignment of priorities. Nearly everyone would agree that the priorities of people who are aware of their imminent death are superior to those of people who are not. There is an opportunity here for those of us who have not yet received our diagnosis. Trust me. Call me.

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