

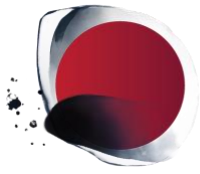


Ruby



Death is Inevitable, but we still have choice

It was a cold, winter's day and the wood stove creaked with the morning's first fire, like an aged, long-distance runner beginning to warm to his morning jog. I heard a knock, and as I opened the door, there stood a gnarly woman in her sixties, weathered like a piece of hard tack and smelling of a three-pack habit of Lucky Strikes. My first thought was "I cannot bear to be with this woman for the entire hour, let alone work with her." Ashamed of this first response, I softened and greeted her as the guest that she was with a reluctant but opening heart.

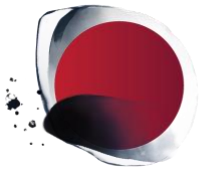


Ruby reported that she had a very short time to live, maybe half a dozen weeks, several months at best. I sat silently with her for most of the hour as she wept. I was young, at the time, and honestly didn't know what to say. As the hour drew to a close, I thought of a question; "Ruby," I inquired, "are you here to live or here to die?" This seemed like a good question given the circumstances; I didn't want to assume one way or the other. Standing slowly to leave, Ruby replied, "I would like to live."

Ruby did not know how to proceed with her "living." She wanted to heal; yet she understood that her "healing" would move her more consciously into either life or death, and she recognized that, for her, either path was ultimately the same.

Ruby could only walk a short distance before becoming breathless and disoriented. Along the path to my office sat a bench, and I would often see Ruby, through the twelve-pane corner window, resting as she slowly made her way to our session. Ruby loved her grown children, the woman she was with, and a tree, one particular tree in a remote stand of wood.

Ruby and I would meet regularly, she might talk a little, and I would teach her brief and distilled meditation practices. We began slowly. She wanted a practice that she could attend to every day, and we settled on walking. Twice a day she would leave her cottage and walk a set number of steps in the direction of her favorite tree. She started with 25. That was all she could manage, 25 steps toward her tree, turning around and 25 steps back. The tree was past the bluff and down a dirt road two miles. The next day, she would walk in the same direction adding only a few more steps before she would return. Ruby's journey included awareness of her breathing, the sounds around her, the sensations in her body, and the thoughts that streamed through her consciousness. Upon her return, she



would jot a few notes in her journal. This, she would bring to our meetings, and we would talk about her experience. Simple observations became the stuff of a hero's journey. This was her practice: Daily walking in the same direction, gradually increasing the effort as she mindfully acknowledged the bounty of life that greeted her with each step forward.

Her journey, our work, continued week to week, month to month, year to year. She lived for seven. And before death, she was not only walking to her favorite tree, but she was also able to slowly jog the entire distance there and to return to her small cottage.

In her final days she glowed. A beautiful, aged woman who remembered who she was and found her way of returning to herself daily. In her living, Ruby chose to heal into her death.

Epilogue

Ruby lived a very simple life with little money. Quality of life was always more important to her than quantity. She drove an old car and shopped for clothing at the local thrift store. This way of life served her well until the day came when she needed my help. Head in hands, she arrived at my door distraught by her recent diagnosis and ashamed that she had no way to pay for my services. With no savings and very little discretionary income, Ruby and I negotiated a reasonable fee of \$10.00 an hour.

We met once a week for the years remaining of Ruby's life. One day, Ruby arrived with a large, rusty Folgers coffee can tucked neatly under her left arm. Even though she was soon to leave this world, on this day, she was radiant. She had something to tell me, something to share.

Handing me the coffee can, Ruby explained that this old can had been rolling around in her trunk since that crisp, November day when we first began our journey



together. Poignantly, she recalled making a weekly ritual out of opening the plastic lid and dropping in a little cash after each of our sessions. Over the years, Ruby held on to the growing savings in case she ever needed it. And now, alas, it was time to let it go. I wept with her graciousness. We cried together at this subtle but clear indication that our time together was ending.

Much later, upon opening the can, I found hundreds of rolled-up bills laced ever-so-slightly with the faint smell of Folgers coffee

Image courtesy of: [Juan Manuel Núñez Méndez](#) [@juanmanunez](#)

The Tim Dukes Method provides an opportunity for self-reflective individuals to cultivate the capacity to receive into consciousness hidden aspects of the self, claiming your unique gifts – ensuring that today’s brilliance successfully transitions into tomorrow’s wisdom. The Tim Dukes Method is designed and implemented by Dr. Timothy Dukes for determined creatives to ensure long-term viability — as a continuing investment in the well-being of yourself, family, organizations, culture, society, and the Earth itself.