

Grant

**The Enneagram of Death – Helpful Insights
by 9 Types of People on Grief, Fear, and Dying**

By Elizabeth Wagele

International Enneagram Association Publications (2012)

Reviewed by Kathryn Grant

Elizabeth Wagele, well-known in the Enneagram community for her witty and accurate introductory book, *The Enneagram Made Easy*, and additional volumes: *Finding the Birthday Cake*, written for children and the child-like within each of us; *The Career Within* in collaboration with Ingrid Stabb; and others, presents an ambitious, profound, and compassionate look at death and dying.

Through interviews and story submission, Elizabeth has compiled an interesting array of death-related stories. Liz, as she is best known, presents these to the reader within Enneagram reference. We hear the voices and encounter the writing style of each type as they share a story of their own close encounter with death, watching or waiting with someone who is dying, or recounting a story of someone's death, often early in their own life, that has impacted them. We get a clear taste of the struggles inherent in each type's life and death journey.

One chapter is devoted to each of the nine Enneagram types. The stories are bundled and so impact the reader with a sense of how each type deals with the death of a loved one, the process and anticipation of death, and how each type tends to relate to this experience. An ingredient that had the most impact for me was the insights that the authors and storytellers share of their personal transformation in the aftermath of journeying with death. At the conclusion of each chapter, Liz gives the reader a short, accurate glimpse of the chapter's heroes: their style of grieving and its inner impact and some of the shadow aspects of each style that are so clearly shown in the chapter.

Elizabeth writes succinctly and with accuracy about the struggles and strengths we all will meet on our journey with death, both those unique to our Enneagram type and those that are universal, as well as based on her years of Enneagram study and her own personal growth. Each type receives a humble, questioning summary and we learn about people in those types, as well as how that particular type lives in us.

This concluding piece to each chapter makes the work accessible to those new to the Enneagram as well as drawing those with deeper knowledge into the stories in a more personal way. The potential audience thus becomes anyone who knows someone who has died. Anyone who knows someone who is dying. Anyone who will die.

A topic that often holds little appeal, Liz brings us to a learning edge about one of the two inevitabilities of life. She fortunately does not speak of taxes. We journey with folks of our own type and learn about ourselves in a deeper way. We journey with folks of other types and learn to bring increasing compassion to ourselves and to our relationships. I find this book fascinating as the structure of each Enneagram style, both strengths and vulnerabilities become crystal clear as heard in the voices of those who are suffering and moving through this difficult time with vigor, tears, compassion, denial, and bravery.

Another piece for curious reading, are the stories of folks who came close to death but did not die. Faced with a chilling diagnosis or other threat (gun point!), we hear how people change and shift to a more grateful stance, more open and aware.

Second half of life issues are in the forefront of much writing and lecturing, most likely a result of many authors actually being in the second half of life. I find some of this work helpful, as I too, am solidly in second half. Yet, curiously often the words seem flat as the final moment of life is not addressed. Here, in Liz's work, we see this moment clearly and can use these stories to contemplate how we are relating to this inevitable moment.

I am left with a haunting question: Who is David Bennett? Often quoted, I perhaps should know who this is, however, I do not. It would have enhanced my relationship with the quotes to have background on this person.

Read in a contemplative fashion, we learn how to die. From some stories we learn how difficult it can be to let go – either the dying person refuses to leave or loved ones refuse to allow the peace that the dying seek and ask the patient, spouse, parent to stay. Many stories tell of that mystical moment when there is a relaxation and an agreement to let go. I heartily recommend *The Enneagram of Death* to spiritual directors, hospice workers, and therapists who will find the stories and Liz's comments helpful and enlightening. I also recommend this book to all who would like a guidebook on this most mysterious aspect of our lives, our death.