

Gay and Transgender Issues in the Workplace

On Death and Whales

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With the wake of my boat, I rang the channel bell for Andy Whitfield, the 39-year-old star of *Spartacus: Blood and Sand* who died that day of lymphoma. The clanging of the giant old bell was a message to the heavens of my thanks to Andy for the pleasure he brought me in his role as the famed gladiator, and of my loving thoughts to his wife and two small children.

A short while later, after I rounded the Race Point lighthouse, thinking of death, sad with the signs of summer's end, and perplexed by my need to make changes in some of my relationships, I turned off the boat's engine and stretched out in the sun. I hoped to be lulled to sleep by the gentle rocking of the boat.

I then started to think about an e-mail I had received that morning from a young mother who had decided to separate from her husband. She said that she wanted the same love that she saw in Ray's and my relationship. She didn't want to settle for less. She was lonely in her marriage and had decided to move on. I had replied to her, "You are making a courageous decision. Do your best to do it with great love, and without closing any doors. We all need the time and space to make decisions, and the opportunity to change our minds."

As I pondered the significance of my friend's decision and its possible thematic connection to the death of the Welsh actor Whitfield, and the end of summer, and the volatility of friendships, a handsome whale surfaced next to the boat. The sound of it blowing out air, and the sight of its sleek black body moving gracefully through the water, pulled me into a different realm—a place of peace. I was no longer Brian in a boat with heavy things on my mind. I was in union with the small whale, and with the waves, the soaring seagulls, the warm sun, the pure sand, and the brilliant sky. For the briefest moment, I was a simple but important part of nature's essence and wonder.

But the whale didn't resurface as I hoped it would, and in time I was forced to come back to the other reality, and my thoughts of death—the end of life, the end of a relationship, the end of friendships, and the end of the season. All of it is about letting go, sometimes with a choice and sometimes with no choice. Sometimes it's final and sometimes it's not. But, it's death.

This morning, I got an e-mail from a friend and fellow diversity trainer who wanted me to know that she had changed jobs and was now a wealth manager focusing on gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people, as she had in her corporate trainings. I think she made a good decision, but only time will tell. I was nevertheless very proud of her, and told her so. She seemed really happy.

This afternoon, I took two transsexual women friends for a boat ride to Race Point. Through choppy waters and ocean sprays that soaked us completely, we rang the bell in honor of their transitions, and we talked of the death they would have endured had they not chosen to fully embrace their female gender identity. Transsexuals cannot live full lives in the gender they were assigned at birth. Gay,

lesbian, and bisexual people in the closet will only experience death. When we reached the lighthouse, our focus was captured by the magnificent sight of a giant sunfish floating joyfully at the water's surface. For a brief moment, we weren't a gay man and two transsexual women in a boat. We were lost in peace and awe as three souls that shared life with the sunfish. But, then we headed back to shore, with more talk of making choices.

Death brings new life. Letting go of one thing means the possibility of new life with another. Fall follows summer, and in the fall there are experiences I can't have in the summer. What's more, summer will return, so there is death, birth, death, and birth with human life, marriages, friendships, seasons, careers, gender transitions, sexual orientations, and all other aspects of our lives. It's nature's way.

Choosing not to change or to let go can mean death. Staying in a marriage that is not loving is death. Staying in friendships that no longer feed you is death. Staying in a career that no longer interests you is death. Andy Whitfield didn't have a choice. He wanted to live but death was going to have its way. But if he embraced his death, made peace with it, and let go, he too found life if only in the change of forms.

Sometimes, when we're feeling the weight of these important decisions to stay or to let go and move on, a whale surfaces or a sunfish plays. It's an unexpected event, or sight, taste, sound, feel, or smell that takes us away from our dilemmas, and allows us to reside in a more peaceful frame of mind. But it doesn't last long. It's only a short peek into what's possible. And then it ends. The moment dies, and then enters the world of someone else to give them peace.

It's important to remember in all of this that even the whales and sunfish must face death, and make decisions that can mean life for them.