

Non Timeo Mortem – I Do Not Fear Death

by Frank Luger, DSPE

When we are young, we usually are not concerned with death, except when someone close to us dies or when we face mortal danger, such as machine guns. But under normal circumstances, we only start worrying about it when we get close to it, such as in grave illness or advancing old age. Unfortunately, we are the only animal species in the world cursed with *death-consciousness*. That is, we can anticipate, sometimes even visualize, our death; and the fear of the unknown can worry us sometimes so much that we even bring the feared event upon ourselves.

I hesitate to announce it, but Nature is smarter than we are or can ever be. The purpose of this article is to share a unique experience of mine, my own close brush with death; even closer than the Café Hillel bombing on September 9, 2003, at 23:20 hrs in Jerusalem, when 7 people were killed and over 50 wounded, including me (with a two-inch-long, one-inch-deep slash in my left side, just below the stomach). The event of this article took place near the end of October 1976.

At that time, I was a graduate student in psychology at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada. As one of the means to finance my studies, I had a part-time job with the Canadian Armed Forces Land Reserve on Tuesday and Thursday evenings plus one full weekend per month, usually for field exercises. I was a medical associate officer (logistics), with the 28th Ottawa Service Battalion, initially a (first) lieutenant, then later promoted to captain. During the last weekend of October 1976, I was to visit the Royal Canadian Military Academy in Kingston, Ontario, and give a lecture to a class of young cadets.

I traveled by car, alone, from Ottawa straight down on Highway 31 to the great 401 superhighway, turned right, and headed straight for Kingston, in the middle of a particularly

heavy rainstorm. There was a depression in the road at the bottom of an overpass, filled with water, several inches deep. I hit that big puddle at 60 mph, whereupon, just like on an icy surface, the car started to fishtail. Unfortunately, it was a front-wheel-drive Datsun, so the rear of the car was relatively light, thus causing the fishtailing. Then I made a big mistake—hitting the brakes—whereupon the car skidded out of control, hit the ditch, and rolled over 5 (!) times. Finally, it stopped rolling, ending in an upside-down position with its four wheels in the air. Every window, even the windshield, was broken; and the only thing that saved my life was the seatbelt.



Captain Frank Luger, Montreal, 1978

Now comes the main point of this article: all the time while the car was rolling over, the thought kept flashing through my mind that this is the end: I will die within seconds. And do you know what? Instead of panicking, I felt a detached, almost serene, calm—like sitting in a movie theater, like being a spectator. I *knew* that this was death, as one window after another was

being smashed to smithereens; but I felt no fear at all, not while the car kept rolling. After I crawled out through the broken window and straightened up without a scratch, my heart started to race, drumming so fast and so hard that it must have been an acute anxiety attack.

What I am trying to say is that, in the critical moment just before death, the merciful wisdom of Nature seems to provide a sort of soothing or calming effect, which I have not been able to explain despite my knowledge of psychology, endocrinology, and biochemistry. Something similar happened to me in Israel during the Gulf War, when Saddam Hussein was sending his Scud rockets around 10 p.m. every evening. One day, I stood on the corner of Herzl and Sokolov streets in downtown Haifa, waiting for a mathematics professor friend to pick me up by car. The air-raid sirens started to wail with considerable urgency, right on time; but at that time, the Patriot anti-ballistic missiles were installed on the top ridge of Mt. Carmel. There

came three Scuds, the Patriots were launched, and they hit the Scuds right above my head, at about 500 meters in height. There were three sonic booms and then fabulous fireworks in the sky. Red-hot shrapnel and burning junk fell in a circle all around me, and I did not get even a scratch! Again, no fear, none at all—only delayed anxiety, just as with the car crash.

So, the bottom line is that although our cultural evolution equipped us with death-consciousness and (sometimes) quite useful fear, there is no need to fear death itself. You simply go to sleep without waking up any more, that's all. Death is merciful. True, the agony preceding death can be horrible, but death itself is merciful. Although, due to death-consciousness and fear of the unknown, Man was manufacturing gods, myths, and legends already 30,000 years ago, there is no point in bothering with the inevitable. Because we observe fundamental continuity in Nature, we cannot accept mortality. Yet, believe me, Nature knows best! Ω

**“When your time comes to die,
be not like those whose hearts are filled
with fear of death, so that when their
time comes, they weep and pray for a
little more time to live their lives over
again in a different way. Sing your death
song, and die like a hero going home.”
—Tecumseh**