

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

“Words to live by.” —*USA Today*

**CHASING
DAYLIGHT**

*How My
Forthcoming Death
Transformed My Life*

Eugene O’Kelly

WITH A NEW AFTERWORD BY

Corinne O’Kelly

**READER’S
GUIDE
INCLUDED**

CHASING DAYLIGHT

How My
Forthcoming Death
Transformed
My Life



A final account

Eugene O'Kelly
with Andrew Postman



New York Chicago San Francisco Lisbon
London Madrid Mexico City Milan New Delhi
San Juan Seoul Singapore Sydney Toronto

Copyright © 2008 by Eugene O'Kelly. All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America. Except as permitted under the United States Copyright Act of 1976, no part of this publication may be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means, or stored in a database or retrieval system, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 DOC/DOC 0 9 8 7

ISBN-13: 978-0071499934

ISBN-10: 0071499938

Printed and bound by RR Donnelley.

McGraw-Hill books are available at special quantity discounts to use as premiums and sales promotions, or for use in corporate training programs. For more information, please write to the Director of Special Sales, Professional Publishing, McGraw-Hill, Two Penn Plaza, New York, NY 10121-2298. Or contact your local bookstore.

A portion of this book's sales will go to The Eugene O'Kelly Cancer Survivors' Fund in order to provide financial assistance to less fortunate cancer patients and their families.

Eugene O'Kelly Cancer Survivors' Fund
Schwab Fund for Charitable Giving
101 Montgomery Street
San Francisco, CA 94104
Account #: 8137-1261

Praise for *Chasing Daylight*

“Mr. O’Kelly hoped that by writing until the end, he might leave behind a lesson on how to die. He did that, yes, but he also left a lesson on how to live.”

—Lisa Belkin, *New York Times*

“Voicing universal truths . . . shared . . . simply and clearly.”

—Janet Maslin, *New York Times*

“The meditations on turning ordinary experiences into ‘perfect moments’ is perhaps the most useful guidance he offers those not yet facing the timetable he confronted. Finding perfection in the mundane is a skill too many leave undeveloped, and undervalued.”

—Celia Dean, *New York Times*

“Eugene O’Kelly made a generous gift of this book. He left behind something wise and insightful; it’s something we all can use.”

—Paul Newman

“Poignant memoir . . . gives readers words to live by.”

—*USA Today*

“[A] well-written and moving book.”

—The Economist.com

“An honest, thought-provoking memoir. . . . O’Kelly has many lessons to teach us on how to live.”

—Steve Powers, *Houston Chronicle*

“Provides a surprising lesson in the art of living.”

—Richard Pachter, *Miami Herald*

“This book is his gift to us.”

—*Toronto Globe & Mail*

“One of the most unexpected and touching books
you’re likely to read this year.”

—Edward Nawotka, *Bloomberg News*

“Inspirational”

—*Newsday*

“This is a book that needs to be read by all of us
who think that we have a chance to slow down later.
I can’t remember being moved by a book like I am
being moved by this book.”

—Jack Covert, CEO Read Blog

“A few weeks ago, a book was published that has
as much power to change people’s lives . . .
as does any tale of addiction/recovery. . . .
Chasing Daylight is a remarkable book.”

—Bethanne Patrick, AOL’s Book Maven

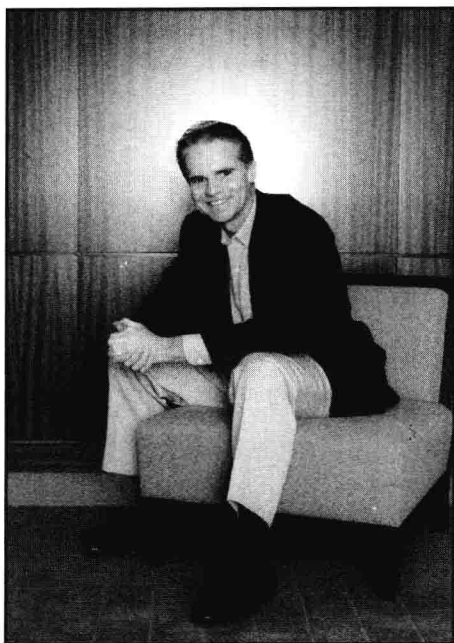
“Three months before he died, Eugene O’Kelly
was one of the most powerful businessmen in America.
Then he was told he had brain cancer.
In a moving memoir he describes what his preparations
for death taught him about life.”

—*The Times of London*

“A calm, moving account of one person’s preparations
for death. . . . This little book makes an enormous—
and enormously positive—impact.”

—*Accounting and Business*, Stefan Stern

CHASING DAYLIGHT



For Marianne and Gina,
my greatest gifts

For Corinne,
my companion in this life,
my guide in approaching the next

Through our living room window we watched the fireworks launching from the Macy's barge on the East River. Exactly one year before, I'd seen them from the river itself, experiencing the fireworks of 2004 up close as a guest on *The Highlander*, the Forbes family yacht. At that time, I had no idea what the next year would bring, as if we ever do.

It's misleading to say I "watched" the fireworks. On this night, July 4, 2005, the real highlight—at least for me—was not visual. True, I had developed vision problems, including blurriness and blind spots, which naturally diminished the glory of the spectacle, the arc and splash of the fireworks showering the sky outside our apartment window. But even had I been able to see more clearly, the real thrill was the sound. Explosions booming off the surrounding skyscrapers, noise rumbling in the canyons of Manhattan's avenues, deep drumming like thunder reverberating throughout my body and my city. The sound was beautiful; it was eye-opening. I would never have guessed the best part of fireworks could be something besides light and color.

You never know how you'll be surprised.

FOR ANYTHING THAT MEN CAN TELL, DEATH MAY BE
THE GREATEST GOOD THAT CAN HAPPEN TO THEM:
BUT THEY FEAR IT AS IF THEY KNOW QUITE WELL
THAT IT WAS THE GREATEST OF EVILS. AND WHAT IS
THIS BUT THAT SHAMEFUL IGNORANCE OF THINKING
THAT WE KNOW WHAT WE DO NOT KNOW?

—Socrates

CHASING DAYLIGHT

CONTENTS

❖ A GIFT	1
❖ THE BOTTOM LINE	19
❖ THE BUSINESS OF DYING IS HARD	43
❖ THE BEST DEATH POSSIBLE	71
❖ THE GOOD GOOD-BYE	97
❖ TRANSITION	121
❖ CHASING DAYLIGHT <i>By Corinne O'Kelly</i>	157
❖ AFTERWORD <i>By Corinne O'Kelly</i>	181
❖ A READER'S GUIDE	189
QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION	191
A CONVERSATION WITH CORINNE O'KELLY	197

A GIFT



I was blessed. I was told I had three months to live. You think that to put those two sentences back to back, I must be joking. Or crazy. Perhaps that I lived a miserable, unfulfilled life, and the sooner it was done, the better.

Hardly. I loved my life. Adored my family. Enjoyed my friends, the career I had, the big-hearted organizations I was part of, the golf I played. And I'm quite sane. And also quite serious: The verdict I received the last week of May 2005—that it was unlikely I'd make it to my daughter Gina's first day of eighth grade, the opening week of September—turned out to be a gift. Honestly.

Because I was forced to think seriously about my own death. Which meant I was forced to think more deeply

about my life than I'd ever done. Unpleasant as it was, I forced myself to acknowledge that I was in the final stage of life, forced myself to decide how to spend my last 100 days (give or take a few weeks), forced myself to act on those decisions.

In short, I asked myself to answer two questions: *Must the end of life be the worst part?* And, *Can it be made a constructive experience—even the best part of life?*

No. Yes. That's how I would answer those questions, respectively. I was able to approach the end while still mentally lucid (usually) and physically fit (sort of), with my loved ones near.

As I said: a blessing.

Of course, almost no one thinks in detail about one's actual death. Until I had to I didn't—not really. We feel general and profound anxiety about it, but figuring out the nuts and bolts of how to make the best of one's last days, and then how to ensure that one follows the planned course of action for the benefit of oneself and one's loved ones, are not typical habits of the dying, and most certainly not of the healthy and hearty. Some people don't think about death because it comes suddenly and prematurely. Quite a few who die this way—in a car accident, say—had not yet even begun to think of themselves as mortal. My death, on the other hand, while somewhat premature (I was 53 at the time of the verdict) could not be called sudden

(anyway, you couldn't call it that two weeks after the death sentence had sunk in), since I was informed quite explicitly that my final day on this Earth would happen during the 2005 calendar year.

Some people don't think about how to make the most of their last stage because, by the time their end has clearly come upon them, they are no longer in a position, mental or physical, to make of their final days what they might have. Relief of pain is their primary concern.

Not me. I would not suffer like that. Starting weeks before the diagnosis, when atypical (if largely unnoticed) things began happening to me, I had no pain, not an ounce. Later, I was told that the very end would be similarly free of pain. The shadows that had begun very slowly to darken my mind would lengthen, just as they do on the golf course in late afternoon, that magical time, my favorite time to be out there. The light would flatten. The hole—the object of my focus—would become gradually harder and harder to pick out. Eventually it would be difficult even to name. Brightness would fade. I would lapse into a coma. Night would fall. I would die.

Because of the factors surrounding my dying—my relative youth, my continued possession of mental facility and otherwise good physical health, my freedom from daily pain, and the proximity of loved ones, most of whom were themselves still in their prime—I took a different approach

to my last 100 days, one that required that I keep my eyes as wide open as possible. Even with blurry vision.

Oh, yes . . . there was one more factor, probably the primary one, that influenced the way I approached my demise: my brain. The way I thought. First as an accountant, then as an ambitious businessman, and finally as the CEO of a major American firm. My sensibilities about work and accomplishment, about consistency and continuity and commitment, were so ingrained in me from my professional life, and had served me so well in that life, that I couldn't imagine *not* applying them to my final task. Just as a successful executive is driven to be as strategic and prepared as possible to "win" at everything, so I was now driven to be as methodical as possible during my last hundred days. The skill set of a CEO (ability to see the big picture, to deal with a wide range of problems, to plan for contingencies, etc.) aided me in preparing for my death. (And—not to be overlooked—my final experience taught me some things that, had I known them earlier, would have made me a better CEO and person.) In approaching my last project so systematically, I hoped to make it a positive experience for those around me, as well as the best three months of my life.

I was a lucky guy.



Suppose I hadn't been given just 100 days. What might I have been doing?

Thinking about my next business trip, probably to Asia. Planning how to attract new business while managing the accounts we already had. Formulating initiatives for six months down the road, a year, five years. My executive calendar was always plotted out 12 to 18 months hence; it came with the job. My position demanded that I think constantly about the future. How to build on the firm's success. How to ensure the continued quality of what we provided. Yes, technically I lived in the present, but my eyes were forever focused on a more elusive, seemingly more important spot in time. (Before the diagnosis, my last thought every night before falling asleep usually concerned something that was to happen one month to six months later. After the diagnosis, my last thought before falling asleep was . . . the next day.) In 2002, when I was elected chairman and chief executive officer of KPMG (U.S.), it was for a term of six years. But in 2006, if all went according to plan, I expected I might become chairman of the global organization, probably for a term of four years. In 2010? Retirement, probably.

I was not a man given to hypotheticals—too straight-ahead in my thinking for that—but just for a moment, suppose there had been no death sentence. Wouldn't it be nice still to be planning and building and leading and cage-rattling like I had been, for years to come? Yes and no. Yes, because of course I'd like to have been around for certain