

# Dustin, I Contend

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Dustin Hoffman told me and Charlie Rose  
In the “best of circumstances, we are all dying together.”  
I must contend: perhaps in the best of circumstances,  
We are all living together,  
And Death follows slowly at the end of the line,  
                  snatching up those who lag behind,  
Believing in the best of circumstances, they are only here to die.

I must agree that when we focus on the babies we kill and the babies who kill, we are all  
dying together.  
I must agree when bombs go off in Kosovo and Nairobi and right on the corner of  
35<sup>th</sup> and Broadway, then we are all dying together.  
I must agree that when faces on Childrens’ Fund ads are as haunted as those  
staring through me over cardboard signs at freeway ramps, we *are* dying together.  
But my contention that we are, indeed,  
*Living* together in the best of circumstances  
                  would contradict my agreement  
Were I not to point out that perhaps we are in the worst of circumstances.

The worst of circumstances being we are all dying together:  
                  That Death has free reign to pick off whom it would at will.  
                  That Death need only ask for a child and we bring it,  
                  That Death may freely inhabit our young and we let it.  
The worst of circumstances being that we are all dying together by our own hand.  
                  That we would earnestly destroy land we would die for.  
                  That we would be reduced to justifying a ‘fight for peace.’

In the best of circumstances, we hold babies to our breasts  
In the best of circumstances, those babies are ignorant of and uninterested in the ploys  
and teasings of Death.  
But I must also argue that the best of circumstances do not negate the worst of  
circumstances.  
They indeed coexist so finely that art seems to be our only defining line.  
The best and the worst do battle in the arena of our aesthetics:  
                  In the cool tickle of honeydew on a summer’s day,  
                  And the pressure of a lover’s hand in the small of your back.

The passion in an operetta's solo and the rise in your chest at the feel of raw silk.  
Our weapons are ribbons and leather-soled slippers and high-key lighting  
and brushes translating two-dimensional pain into three-dimensional despair.

I must come to the realization that through my contention and agreement and argument,  
there is a truth.

One that we are all dying together and we are all living together and

My contention

and

Your contention,

Dustin,

Live together,

Here in the best of times,

Here in the worst of times,

Here in the times we live.