

A Publication of Harbor Hospice

Touching Lives™

Holding Hands. Holding Hearts.

Making Peace With Our Biggest Fear

7 Ways to
Celebrate Life

The Best
Plan For You

Spiritual
Comfort

Learning
To Listen

HARBOR
HOSPICE
Celebrating 35 years

FEATURE ARTICLE

10 Making Peace with Our Biggest Fear

By Dr. Ken Druck



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Welcome to *Touching Lives*

We're Here For You



Facing death is one of the hardest things for people to do. The fear and uncertainty that surrounds dying is often a big reason why patients and their families hesitate to call us and don't get the full benefit of hospice care. Most patients are eligible for the support we offer much sooner than they know. Sometimes they think calling hospice might be a sign that they're "giving up."

To us, that first call means they are ready to focus on living rather than dying, and to live the remainder of their life—however long that may be—to the fullest extent possible!

In this issue, you'll read about Jim and Mary Lou Kramer who discovered the comfort, security and answers that Harbor Palliative Care offers them as they navigate the complex world of pain medications and side effects. Mary Lou told us, "There is so much support for us, and we never feel like we are going through this alone."

You'll also read about Bill Jacobks whose grief after the sudden death of his wife led him to our beautiful Bob and Merle Scolnik Healing Center. There, he got involved in both group and individual counseling and channeled his grief into powerful poetry.

If the thought of calling Harbor Hospice crosses your mind, make the call. If a family member is struggling with a life-altering medical diagnosis, if you've been told there is little anyone can do, if you are grieving, give us the opportunity to share with you all the ways we can help. It's our job—and our calling. We are here for you 24 hours a day, and we wouldn't have it any other way.

Warm Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lisa McMichael".

Lisa McMichael

President & CEO, Harbor Hospice and Harbor Palliative Care

P.S. If you're approaching 70 ½, check out the tax benefits of contributing the required minimum distribution (RMD) from your tax-deferred retirement savings *directly to the charities of your choice.*



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Your Journey. Your Terms. Our Expertise.

Thanks to palliative care, “...we are getting a chance to live again.”

By Susan Newhof

Jim Kramer was diagnosed nearly three years ago with lung cancer. The news was devastating, and by the fall of 2017 it was taking a toll on him both physically and emotionally.

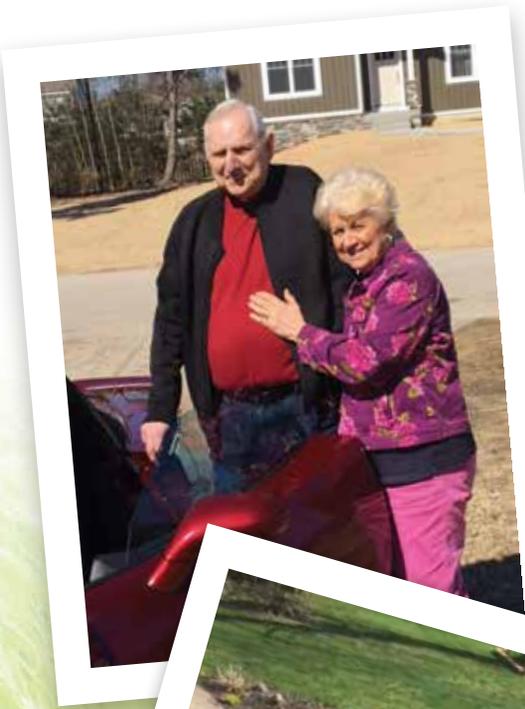
“I started getting down,” recalls the Muskegon native. “A diagnosis like that works on you mentally.” He was also in pain. His physician, Dr. Amy Gorski, suggested it was time to call Harbor Hospice and Palliative Care to explore the benefits of the palliative care program.

All Jim heard was the word *hospice*.

“I knew those are the people you call when you are nearing the end of your life,” recalls Jim, “and I didn’t think I was there yet.”

Jim was reluctant to make the call, but eventually he did, and he and Mary Lou, his wife of 53 years, met with Harbor Hospice medical director Dr. Gerald Harriman. They quickly came to understand all the ways palliative care was going to help Jim feel better.

“We really liked Dr. Harriman,” says Mary Lou. “It was clear from our first meeting that he had Jim’s best interest at heart and that he would work to make Jim as comfortable as possible. We loved Dr. Harriman’s sense of humor, too. We knew immediately that he was on our side. It was also a big relief to know that Dr. Harriman and Dr. Gorski would work together to coordinate palliative care for Jim and that Jim could continue to see Dr. Gorski for treatment of his cancer.”



The Kramer’s daughter-in-law, Lisa, celebrated by taking photos of them on Jim’s first outing with his car since seeing Doctor Harriman.

Photography courtesy of Lisa Kramer

“Palliative care is designed to treat the symptoms and side effects of both treatments and illnesses including chronic conditions,” explains Dr. Harriman. “A palliative care practitioner walks side-by-side with each patient to provide care and counseling. We help them understand their illness and how it will progress. And we relieve symptoms such as pain, shortness of breath, nausea, and emotional stress.”

While patients are receiving palliative care, they can continue to seek aggressive medical treatments for their illness or whatever life-changing medical condition they are dealing with. And patients can receive palliative care for as long as they need it.

Jim is delighted that he’s feeling better these days. He is up and around more than he used to be, and Mary Lou has noticed that he is taking an interest in things again.

“We’re making progress with the pain, and I look forward to getting out of the house these days,” says Jim, who is a car lover from way back. The palliative care he has been receiving helped him feel good enough to go to a car show this spring with his son.

“When I see that it’s nice out now,” he laughs, “I want to go for a ride in my Corvette!”

“Having Dr. Harriman take over and manage Jim’s pain has been a big relief for me,” says Mary Lou. “It’s been hard for me to watch him struggle. Now I know I can call Dr. Harriman or Harbor Hospice any time I have questions.

“Jim was already on pain meds so we thought that was all that could be done. But Dr. Harriman said, “I have a lot of tricks up my sleeve,” as he pointed up his sleeve. Before we left, he utilized one of those amazing tricks. He changed Jim’s medications, and I felt a great weight lifted from my shoulders.”

Mary Lou Kramer

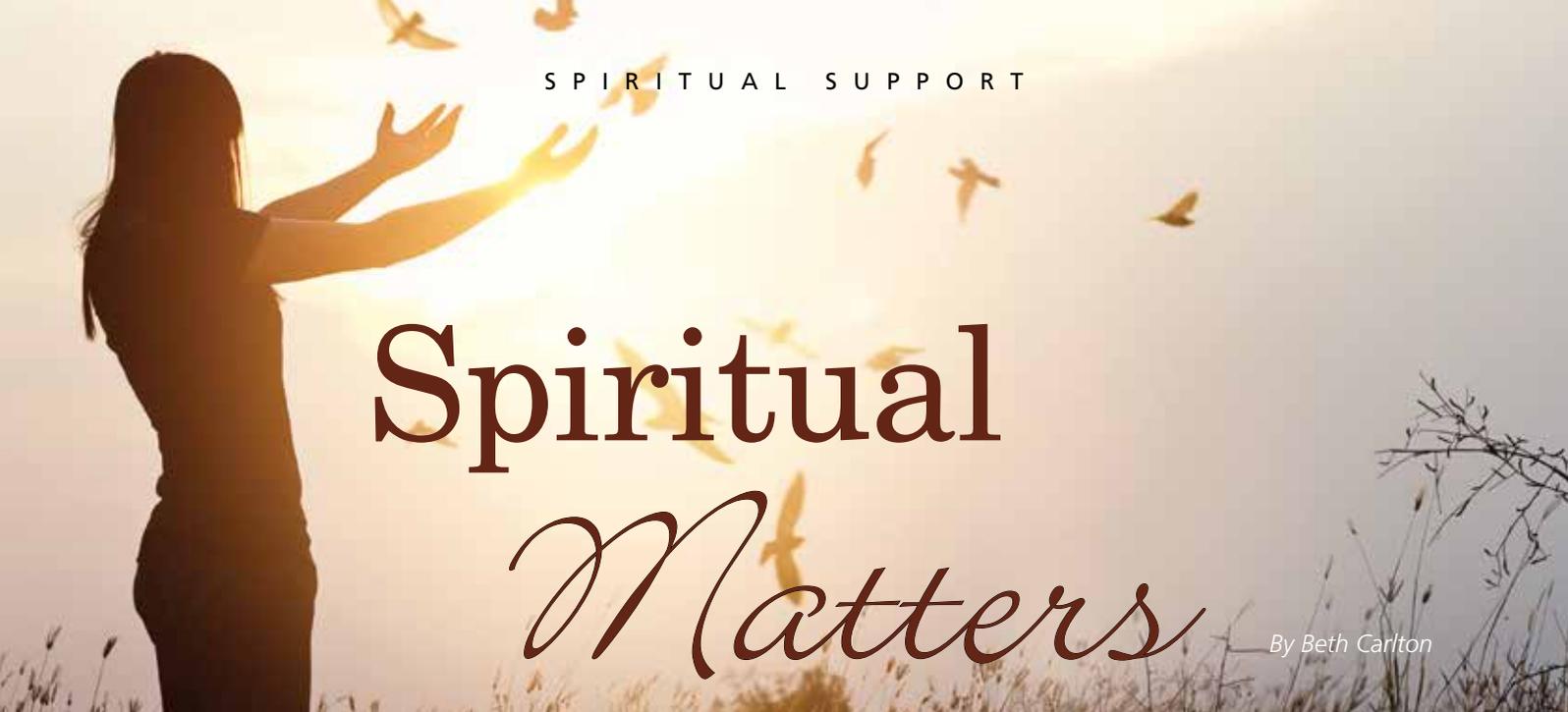
There is so much support for us, and we never feel like we are going through this alone.”

Jim wishes he would have investigated palliative care sooner, but initially he didn’t understand what it is, how it differs from hospice care, and how it could help him.

“With palliative care, we can focus on the person we love and not on the tools they need. The tools are being taken care of,” says Mary Lou. “When Jim asks if I want to take the Corvette out and go for a ride or visit a relative, it feels like we’re back in the old days when we could go out and do things together. We are getting a chance to live again. It comes in pieces, moments, and hours, and we cherish this time together.” ❀

Did you know?

- Most health insurance covers palliative care consultation
- You can continue to receive aggressive treatment for your illness or medical condition while you are receiving palliative care
- You may continue to see the doctor (primary care or specialty) who has been treating your illness
- You may receive palliative care for as long as you need it
- Palliative care also helps prepare you for future medical decisions



Spiritual Matters

By Beth Carlton

According to a survey by the Pew Research Group, 89% of Americans say that they believe in God.

Even though research indicates that people value spiritual care and spiritual well-being, many of us may find it difficult to put our belief into practice during life's most difficult time.

When illness occurs, many people may want to feel a sense of purpose in their lives and may begin to reflect on their past and, in doing so, may find themselves asking difficult questions about life and its meaning.

After being diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease at 59 and knowing her life was coming to an end (she died at the age of 64), Pat Summitt who will be remembered for winning more women's basketball games than any other college coach, male or female, said, "God doesn't take things away to be cruel. He takes things away to make room for other things. He takes things away to lighten us. He takes things away so we can fly."

When the physical body becomes frail, our inner being can become stronger as our spirituality is awakened. Some people may experience a desire to resolve issues with family

and friends as they detach from this world and get ready for the next stage—whatever they believe that to be.

When someone says they feel overwhelmed or sad about dying, try not to dismiss such feelings, which are deeply important at this time.

You may want to suggest coping techniques such as relaxation, meditation, writing down thoughts and feelings, talking to a hospice chaplain, prayer, yoga, reading or listening to audio recordings of sacred books.

“God doesn’t take things away to be cruel. He takes things away to make room for other things. He takes things away to lighten us. He takes things away so we can fly.”

When someone reveals feelings about spiritual matters, you do not need to have an answer to these profound questions. Sit quietly and allow time for listening, thoughtfulness and stillness. Be aware of your own thoughts and feelings, as your emotions may come to the surface.

Trying to find a spiritual practice that feels right may cause someone to experience a range of new emotions, but it is during the wild and sometimes turbulent ride that a loved one may make new discoveries which can lead to a more joyful and meaningful life. ✕

As a hospice volunteer, Beth Carlton has watched lives transformed through spiritual awakenings.

Learning to Listen

By David Kessler

Richard Phillips and his sister Paula greeted me as I stepped off the elevator on the second floor of the hospital where their mother, Frances, was being treated for advanced cardiac disease.

"My mother can't talk about the fact that she's dying," Paula said, as we sat in the sparse hospital family room.

"Our mother is incredible. She's a true survivor," Richard began, recalling how she worked at JC Penney to support her five children when their father left.

"After all that," Paula said, in tears, "I can't believe that she could be leaving us now."

"I'd like to meet her," I said. As they walked me to the room, they cautioned me, "Remember, she doesn't know she's dying."

I saw Frances Phillips' blue eyes light up as her children introduced me. When they left to go to the cafeteria, she looked at me as if to let me in on a secret.

"If you're here to tell me I'm dying, I know. Nobody wants to die, but it's not like I didn't know this was coming

at some point. It's amazing how people talk around it." She smiled and said, "I bet you can talk about it."

Indeed I could, I told her. Then I asked if I could tell her family that she knew she was dying and could talk about it.

"I guess it's time," she said, as if the charade was up. When Richard and Paula returned, we went into the hallway, where we were joined by their brother, Frank.

"She knows she's dying," I told them. "She knew long before I got here."

"Our mother, who can't talk about dying, told you, a complete stranger, that she's dying?" Frank said.

"Maybe because I'm a complete stranger, it's easier for her," I replied.

"Well, what do we do now?" Paula asked. "Do we still tell her to try to get better? Or do we say, 'Sorry you're dying?' Now I'm more confused than ever."

"Maybe you can say something like, 'Mom, I hope you can make it through this, but if that isn't meant to be, I'm here, whichever way this road goes.'"



Listening is a powerful way to offer comfort. Listen to them complain. Listen to them cry. Listen to them laugh. Listen to them reminisce. Listen to them talk about the weather, or about death.

When You Don't Know What To Say

What do you say to the dying?

Most of us are afraid what we say will be either too threatening or too trivial. We wonder if talking about the things they loved to do will cheer them up or make them sad.

It's fine to say, "I don't know what to say to you. Should we talk about baseball or your chemotherapy?" And it's all right to talk about dying. Avoiding a conversation about death won't make it go away, but talking about it can bring life into your relationship.

Listening is a powerful way to offer comfort. Listen to them complain. Listen to them cry. Listen to them laugh. Listen to them reminisce. Listen to them talk about the end of life.

Remember the days when we would take family members to the airport and wait at the gate until they left? And when they returned, we'd meet them at the gate, not curbside or in the baggage claim area.

The concept of "walking to the gate" symbolizes the way we should approach life and death. Today's newborn is "met at the gate" by his father in the delivery room, not in the waiting room. We should do the same for the dying.

June, 92, was living in a retirement home when her doctor found a tumor wrapped around her aorta. Given her age and poor general health, treatment was not advised.

Her son and daughter-in-law told June, "As you get sicker, we don't

want you to go into a hospital and be cared for by people who don't know you. We want you to die in our home. Between us and the kids, we'll manage. You've always been there for us, now we'll be there for you."

We walk our loved ones to the gate when we bring them home to die. We walk them to the gate when we let them know we will be with them. We finish our unfinished business when we say what needs to be said. We cry with them and for them, and we hold their hands as we walk them to the gate. ✨

David Kessler is the author of *The Needs of the Dying* and co-author with Elisabeth Kubler-Ross of *Life Lessons and On Grief and Grieving*.

7 Ways to celebrate life

by Marlene Prost

Peering into the past and examining the events that gave life meaning can be a surprisingly uplifting experience. Many families find that celebrating the life of a terminally ill loved one brings everyone closer. It can inspire candid talk and laughter. What's more, the process gives the ill person, who may be feeling vulnerable, a sense of control over his or her own legacy.

These seven loving ideas can help you all cherish old memories while creating new ones.

1 Create a memorial DVD

Thanks to video and digital technology, families can select photographs, slides, and action shots of their loved one and put them to favorite music on a DVD that the "star" can enjoy now.

Helping to plan the DVD gives a dying person a sense of control at a time when they are losing control over many things, said Carol Weaver, director of enrichment at a hospice for the past 10 years. "They're leaving a living legacy for their children and grandchildren," she explains. "And it's something for family members to keep and cherish."



2 Record a life review

We all want to know that our life mattered. That's why the formal "life review" has become a popular process. Prompted by prepared questions, a dying loved one is encouraged to talk about life experiences, from early childhood on, while the family records the conversation.

"Just give suggestions, like when were you born? What was the favorite toy you played with? What are you afraid of?" Weaver says. "Not just facts and figures. Evoking emotions presents a more comprehensive view of their life."



3 Share a personal message

Sometimes it's awkward to tell even your most beloved relative or friend how you really feel. Another way: Make an audio or video recording of yourself sharing reminiscences and feelings. Weaver recalls a young woman whose taciturn grandfather wouldn't let her talk about her feelings for him. Putting them on tape, she told Weaver, allowed her the opportunity to have closure.

"Patients are reassured that their life had meaning, and that they are loved and respected," she adds—even those who are reluctant to hear it face-to-face.



Weave tangible memories

Tributes can take non-media forms, too. For example, family and friends who live too far to visit can contribute to a quilt made up of fabric squares that capture memories and sentiments. Send everyone a square to embellish or decorate with ink, embroidery, or other mementoes. A T-shirt collector saw his favorites assembled into a blanket, which was passed on later to his son.

Another popular trend: Huggable memorial teddy bears made out of a loved one's clothing.



Record day-to-day living

Some of our happiest family memories are of everyday life: Going fishing, watching a child's music recital, playing ball. One grandmother asked for a videotape of herself baking cookies with her granddaughter. Try turning on a camera set up on a tripod during dinner on a good day. Play back these relationship-building moments later, on not-so-good days.



Leave a work of art

Few of us ever get to write that novel or record that hit song. But the creative process can take on urgency when time grows short. One 35-year-old hospice patient wrote a book for his five-year-old son, explaining every step of his illness. Weaver says her hospice's bereavement department still uses the book.

Music was a big part of life for another 39-year-old father who was debilitated by strokes. With the help of his music therapist, he surprised his eight-year-old daughter with a song about a father putting his daughter to bed. The song ended with words she'd always say: "I love you all the way to God and back."

"This is a CD just for her, she'll have the rest of her life," Weaver says.



Make a wish list come true

Many of us carry around a "bucket list" of things we've always wanted to do, or would love to do one more time. Often you can find ways to turn even unlikely wishes into realities, with a few modifications.

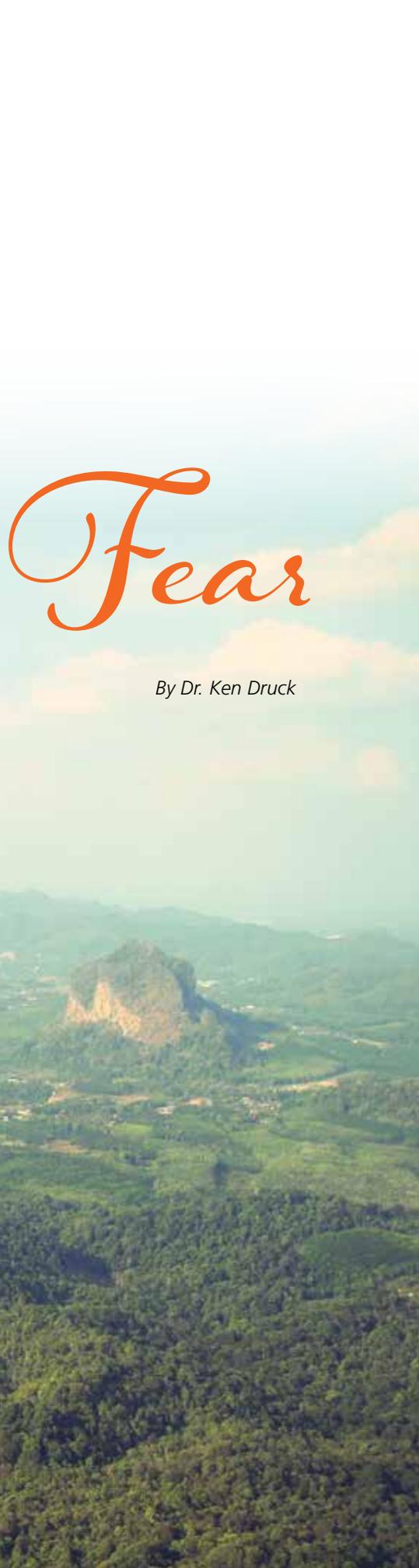
One 92-year-old hospice patient, a former flight instructor who once owned an airport, wanted to fly again—something he hadn't done in more than 40 years. His loved ones arranged for him to go up in a four-seat plane with a flying instructor, his daughter, and a nurse. In mid-flight, he leaned over and said, "I haven't felt this young in a long time." He even took over the controls for 20 minutes.

You can bet those are 20 minutes both he and his daughter will cherish forever. ✕

Marlene Prost is a Pennsylvania-based freelancer who specializes in writing about health care issues.

Making Peace with *Our Biggest*





Fear

By Dr. Ken Druck

Our fear of death begins when we're kids. Perhaps we had to face the mystifying idea of impermanence when a beloved pet, parent or grandparent died. The stark reality that this loved one was really gone—and gone forever, was both devastating and terrifying. From early childhood, when we're introduced to the concept of “futureless-ness”—that is, old age and eventually death, there are few things as difficult for us to deal with. Facing down the fear of dying requires great strength, humility and spiritual fortitude. But, as you will see, it's worth the effort.

Summoning the courage to quell our fears and come to terms with our mortality may be one of the most challenging things we ever do—but it may be one of the best things we can do to improve the quality of our lives. Freeing up the space in our minds and hearts where fear has resided and replacing it with newfound peace, courage and understanding is one of the greatest gifts we can give ourselves.

Here are several things that have helped me, and those I've had the honor and privilege of working with over the years, to make peace and even find joy as they near the end of their lives:

1. Treat Conquering Fear as a Process

Loosening the grip of death's terrifying, paralyzing and often, depressing hold on us comes with learning to calm our hearts and our thoughts, deepen our faith, bolster our courage, surrender our need for control, give a voice to our fear and reimagine the greater possibilities. The goal is not to obliterate our trepidation about dying or to never again be afraid. This may not even be attainable for most folks. We can, however, learn how to contain, channel and ease our fears. And this alone will be enough to lighten our hearts. ▶

2. Allow Humble Unknowingness

We do not know with 100 percent certainty what happens when we die. Or where, if anywhere, we were before we were born. Unknowingness is a natural part of the human experience. We can try to fight it, pretending we know exactly what's going to happen when we pass, or we can remain humble, seek deeper understanding and keep the faith that there may be something greater in store for us when we pass from this life.

3. Don't Try to Outsmart, Outrun or Outmaneuver It

The fear of death resides in our DNA. We're programmed to live... and to do everything in our power to survive. Since the thought of dying can be overwhelming, we try to run and hide from it. Opening ourselves to the possibilities of life after death is natural. And so is conducting honest inquiries into the true nature of life and death.

Our capacity for true inner strength, faith, reflection and spiritual awakening is limited if the only thing we do is recite rituals and pray to be saved by a higher power. Assured a ticket to life everlasting in heaven, we cling to blind faith and forgo the opportunity to cultivate "organic" faith. The benefits of faith derived from courageously dealing with, rather than "spiritually bypassing," our fears make all the difference when it comes to making peace.

4. Embrace Uncertainty and Choose to Believe

That we undergo a transition from this life when we die is indisputable. There are "believers" and "nonbelievers" who claim to live with a clear sense of certainty about

exactly what that is. And then, there are people like me, who are uncertain about the true nature of life and death—but choose to place our bets anyway.

I choose to believe, for example, that when I die, I'll be reunited with my daughter Jenna, who died tragically while studying abroad at age 21. I remain hopeful and humble, vigilant and patient, in my uncertainty about the mysterious nature of death.

5. Believe That Love Does Live On

I have found some measure of peace, and my heart is calm most of the time. But there are times when I'm visited by fear, doubt and profound sorrow. Staring into the abyss, scared that I might be telling myself a story to stave off sorrow and fear... I find the idea of a great nothingness to be quite frightening. However, these occasional lapses into despair, when I feel defenseless, are offset by the times when I feel at peace.

Accepting life's terms, reconciling that we don't get to live forever and being eternally grateful for the blessing of having lived, gives me peace. So does being intimately connected to my daughter in the spiritual realm, bonded by an undying love. From the day of her death in 1996 to this very moment, I've experienced the love that never dies.

Telling Jenna that I love her—feeling her love, and even her presence, has soothed my heart and assured me that love is greater than death. And that love does go on. While my daughter's death has been a source of unspeakable pain in my life, it has also calmed my fears about death. Whatever and whenever that transition is,

I will hope to be joining her, my parents, grandparents and others I have loved someday. And that's OK.

6. Pay the Good Forward

When we make strides in reconciling the fact that we're here on lease, we can decide to live from gratitude and pay the good fortune, blessings, gifts and miracles we've been able to experience forward to our kids, grandkids and future generations.

Leaving a legacy of love is in direct contrast with living from fear, jealousy, bitterness and resentment. Those who fail to face down their fears of dying think nothing of taking it all down with them when they die. They become reckless and/or indifferent to the kind of future they're leaving behind for future generations. The peace afforded to those who choose to look beyond their own lifetime and pay the good in their lives forward allows them to let go when it's time. And to do so knowing they have left a legacy of love from which others will benefit.

And keep in mind, the following ideals of what I call "courageous living" can be of great help when facing down the fear of death:

- Stay humble, and find peace in your unknowingness. You're a part of something so big that it is unfathomable. The true nature of the universe—where life comes from and where it goes when you die—is an unfolding mystery. Just ask the stars.
- Cultivate a calm mind that allows naturally arising fears and doubts to come and go. Learning to breathe and release even your primordial fears is a form of surrender.

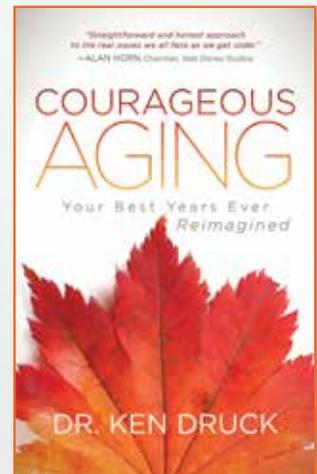
You can make peace with life itself as it really is.

- Keep the faith that whatever you believe in your heart is true—or what you wish to be true. It's okay to abide by a hoped-for narrative without knowing if it's entirely accurate or not.
- It's also just fine to have faith in a divine truth without apology or justification. Do so while respecting and honoring the rights of others who may have a different view.

The Process of a Lifetime

Dealing with death occurs over the course of a lifetime. When it comes to accepting the inevitable, we are all works in progress and a certain amount of existential unrest is part of being human. The seasons, changes, losses, and transitions of life demand upgrades in our operating systems. Summoning courage, faith, understanding and humility requires great determination. Allowing for, and accepting, life's terms, as well as voicing our objections to the parts that are sad and scary, is all part of the journey. May you find peace. ❀

Dr. Ken Druck's book *Courageous Aging: Your Best Years Ever Reimagined* offers practical and inspirational guidance on making peace with, and finding joy in, every stage and season of life.





Sibling Rivalry... or Revelry?

By Melanie Haiken

Coping with a parent's illness is hard enough. But in too many families, resentment, guilt, past problems, and hurt feelings among siblings amp up the stress level. "Every issue from the original family can come back into play," says Francine Russo, author of *They're My Parents Too: How Siblings Can Survive Their Parents' Aging without Driving Each Other Crazy*. "And as the parent's condition worsens, the feelings get more intense."

How to escape old rivalries in a crisis and come together for the common good?

If You're the Sibling Who Lives Nearby...

Understand That You All Accept Things At Different Paces

Someone who lives close to parents and sees them frequently may be more aware of their declining health. So when bad news arrives, it may come as a much bigger shock to more distant brothers and sisters. The opposite can also occur; a sibling who visits after an absence may pick up on a new symptom that you've grown used to without "seeing" it.

Talk About Who Wants To Know What, And When

When a parent's health reaches a crisis or decision point, when do your siblings want to be called? Do they want

to be included in consultations with doctors and social workers, possibly by conference call? Or are they comfortable with you making the decisions and relaying information?

Some distant siblings may want to be informed every time there's a new test result or medication change, while others may find that level of involvement overwhelming. Respect their wishes – but first you have to know them.

Consider Bringing In A Neutral Party To Aid Decision-Making

A family meeting or conference call with a social worker, geriatric care manager, or hospice coordinator helps everyone feel included. This objective third party can lay out the realities and suggest ways to work together.

"A professional who's experienced in family relations can keep any sibling issues that are coming up from overwhelming the discussion," Russo suggests.

Share The Care (Even When It's Hard)

For some hands-on caregivers, it can be hard to step back and let others in. If you're feeling resistant, ask yourself why. Because you're worried others are less capable? Because you're seeking validation from a parent who's always withheld approval?

"It takes a lot of soul searching to examine your motivations, which may not even be conscious," Russo says. But if you can let go of past needs, you can better accept help in the present moment."

If You're the Sibling Who Lives Far Away...

Trust the Messenger

Beware of “distrusting the messenger,” the phenomenon where a healthcare professional delivers difficult news to the local sibling, who in turn communicates what she's been told—and is promptly dismissed. “Fear, combined with old family patterns, can lead us to have responses like ‘Oh, she exaggerates,’ or ‘She's a drama queen,’” Russo says.

Unfortunately, responding with doubt or loads of skeptical questions puts the messenger on the defensive. So if you find yourself reacting this way, take a deep breath and remind yourself that your sibling is doing the best he or she can with a thankless job. If you feel you need to hear the news directly from the doctor, ask to do so. Otherwise treat the communicator with trust.

Don't Take “I'm Fine” For An Answer

“Most people have trouble saying they need help, so you may need to probe harder than asking ‘Are you okay?’ or ‘What can I do?’” Russo says. A few ideas:

- Send small gifts, particularly those geared towards stress relief and self-care: A gift certificate for massage, fresh fruit, a relaxing CD.
- Treat your sib to a nice dinner when you're in town.

- Time your visits so that you can give your sibling a break away.
- Help pay for respite care or your parents other financial needs.

Let Your Sibling Vent

An empathetic ear may be what your sib needs most. “Just by being available to listen when your sibling tells you how awful her day was, you're making an enormous contribution to her emotional health,” Russo says.

But take care to avoid the pitfall known as “anger-guilt gridlock.” It's natural to hear your sister's complaints as accusations and go straight to guilt. But that's not her goal. She just needs validation of her feelings. By setting aside your reaction, you can give that to her.

Focus On The Ultimate Goal: Your Parent's Care

Stop tension in its tracks by reminding yourself that right now, the focus should be on your parent, not your own drama. Concentrate on your shared concern for your parent. That's good for everyone's well being. ✂

Experienced family caregiver [Melanie Haiken](#) writes about health and travel from Marin, California.



The Best Plan *for You*

By Domenica Rafferty

Life often feels out of control for many of us, even when we are not facing life or death decisions.

Making plans is our way of moving forward and making decisions that feel right. Making plans often alleviates fear or anxiety when facing major changes while allowing us to open up our creativity and imagination to experience life on our terms.

When confronted with our own mortality, some of us will attempt to “get our affairs in order” by meeting with our accountant, lawyer, clergy or funeral director and overlook one of the most comforting resources available during life’s most challenging time.

Hospice invites us to be involved in the planning of how we want to live during the limited time we may have left and how we want to die in comfort and dignity.

Many patients with life-limiting illnesses have used hospice to help manage symptoms so that the end of life can be a time of dignity and

comfort for patients, families and friends.

A popular misconception is that hospice is for the last few hours or days before death. Patients are eligible for hospice care if diagnosed with six months or less to live and can leave hospice care at any time.

Unfortunately, most people don’t receive hospice care until the final weeks or even days of life which causes many patients to not fully experience the care and quality of the hospice relationship.

Dr. Ira Byock, a leading palliative care physician and author of *Dying Well* and *The Best Care Possible*, emphasizes that “we can relieve the suffering of almost everyone that we care for if we have the time to prepare.”

Hospice staff are on call 24 hours a day to help patients in pain and can also train caregivers on how to administer emergency pain

medications that take effect before nurses arrive.

Hospice doctors, nurses, clergy, health aides and volunteers assist the patient with planning and implementing the best care possible for a person with a terminal illness.

For some people, such plans might include having extended visits with loved ones, visiting a favorite place, or organizing family photos.

For others, the most important thing might be to live out their days in peace and comfort in their home or a hospice facility.

Hospice aides can also relieve some of the burdens on family members during a patient’s final weeks and months by assisting in personal care, while hospice volunteers can provide caregivers with a few hours respite each week.

The preparedness of hospice offers the time to create the best plan for your life. ❖

Getting through grief...

*with a little help from your friends**

By Susan Newhof

Bill and Peggy Jacobks anticipated a festive celebration on New Year's Eve 2016, but during the day, Peggy developed severe respiratory problems. She didn't want to go to the emergency department and decided, instead, to wait until she could get in to see her doctor on Tuesday.

Peggy didn't make it to the doctor's office. She died in the car on the way. Bill remembers the date and time and repeats it often.

January 4, 2017 at 11:58 a.m.

"I say it because that makes it real," he says. "Each time I say it, it's kind of a memorial service for Peggy." They had been married 47 years.

Funeral home personnel encouraged Bill to talk with counselors at the Scolnik Healing Center of Harbor Hospice and inquire about the free grief counseling services there. Within a week, Bill joined a group session and began talking with others who were also struggling with a big loss in their life. The first several days after Peg's death were difficult, he recalls. He couldn't stay awake. He couldn't sleep. And he started arguing with God.

"I said, 'You give us this wonderful love in our life, and then you take it away. Is that a cosmic joke?'" He chuckles

a bit. "There is some grim humor here, as there is in most dramatic things in life. For the first month, I couldn't even complete a sentence without bursting into tears, and the people in my grief group tolerated that. They also suggested I do individual counseling and introduced me to Harbor Hospice grief counselor Beth Bolthouse."

Bill had recently retired after teaching for 23 years at Muskegon Community College. Not being a teacher any more was a big change to adjust to. Suddenly, he realized he was no longer a husband, either. He needed to create a new role for himself, and he credits Beth and other members of the Scolnik Healing Center for helping him move along in that process.

"There is no way to *fix* grief," Bill explains. "What works is being with other people who are also suffering from a loss. They understand what you are going through and are supportive. That was very important." He also learned he could reach out by e-mail to a Harbor Hospice counselor at any time, which helped him through lonely, painful Sunday nights.

Several months after Peggy's death, Bill started writing poems. Some were humorous conversations with God.



** With thanks to Paul McCartney and John Lennon for their inspiring 1967 hit With a Little Help From My Friends.*

Many were full of powerful emotions that he needed to put into words. As he describes it, armed with a little glass of gin, tears running down his face, words filling the paper, Bill's grief began to get "tamed."

These days, Bill lectures on such things as art, politics and iconic women in history. He wrote a narrative play on the Easter Rising in Dublin, which was performed this past spring at the Red Lotus Center for the Arts in Muskegon. And he self-published two books of his poems. A third is in the works.

"Grief counseling is extremely important," he advises. "It is healing. And I would tell anyone who is grieving to go. There is no judgment, no pressure. Counselors are there to listen and support. Tell them what you feel. Share your pain with them. You can do that because you can trust them. The groups are confidential. Your pain, your stories and your struggle are safe. And if you can, write a journal. Keep notes on anything you think of, so you'll have a record of what you went through. It's very therapeutic. It gives you an outlet for your grief. Nothing can *fix* it, but it will help." ❧

Trying to help someone?

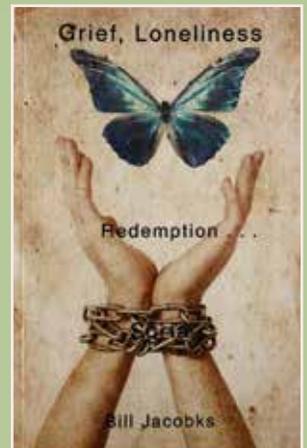
Everyone grieves *differently*. Counselor Beth Bolthouse suggests the following ways you can help:

1. **Listen**, regardless of whether it's been a day, a year, or 10 years. There is no time frame for grief. If someone tells the same story over and over, that's what they need to do, and it's ok. Don't try to stop it or fix it. If you do not want to hear it, you are not the right person for them to talk to.
2. **Have empathy**. Empathy is not sympathy. Put yourself in their shoes and imagine what it is like for them. You do not have to agree, just empathize. It validates their experience and their feelings.
3. **Reach out**. If they turn down invitations to do things or to talk, keep inviting. If the grieving person wants to be alone, don't reject them. Be present. Be comfortable with their silence. Don't judge.
4. **Loss—especially a traumatic loss—changes a person on the cellular level.** People will not be the same after a big loss. Adapt to the grieving person's new way of being.

The following poem is from Bill's book Grief, Loneliness, Redemption...Sorta:

Friends in Grief

We talked of the past
And it became ours
We talked of our love lost
And it made us cry.
Our souls locked arms
Against the awful
Onslaught of the troops
Of loneliness.
We fought together.
We didn't win...
But we didn't lose, either!



Age has its *advantages!*



By Susan Newhof



Did you know that when you reach the age of 70 ½, you are required to withdraw some of your savings from your tax-deferred retirement plans, such as a traditional IRA? Regardless of whether or not you have withdrawn money before then, after you reach 70 ½, you must take an amount referred to as a *required minimum distribution*, or RMD in order to create annual taxable income on those savings.

Your investment advisor can calculate how much you must take, based on your savings and other factors, and in most cases, you will pay taxes on the money you receive.

There is, however, a wonderful way to complete your required minimum distribution and NOT pay taxes on it. You can give your distribution *directly* to a charity such as the Harbor Hospice Foundation.

"All you have to do is ask your investment advisor to send a check to the charity of your choice," says Harbor Hospice Foundation board member Eric Lans, who is a certified financial planner for First Financial Advisors, Inc. "Your advisor cuts the check—or checks—and sends them directly to the organizations. It's that simple!"

The distribution will appear on your federal tax form, but the portion that was sent *directly* from your investment account to charities will not be taxed.

Mary Anne Gorman, who retired in 2016 after 28 years as executive director of Harbor Hospice, says her charitable giving has become more focused, and she appreciates the tax benefits of giving *directly* to an organization.

"I'm giving more consideration to supporting the charities that I am confident are having a positive impact in our community," she explains. "Contributing to the Harbor Hospice Foundation helps me achieve two important goals. It enables me to support the work and mission of an organization that I know is making a difference in people's lives, and it reduces my taxable income."

The new tax law that doubles the standard deduction provides an additional incentive to give directly to charity. You can give up to \$100,000 of your required minimum distribution per year tax free. If you don't itemize, you'll still get to take the full standard deduction, and *your charitable donation will not increase your taxable income*. That's important because additional IRA income could impact taxes on your Social Security and could even impact your Medicare premiums.

"Just call your investment advisor and say '...send a check to the Harbor Hospice Foundation!'" explains Lans. "It's a great way to take advantage of the new tax law and support the very best in skilled, progressive hospice and palliative care in West Michigan."

Age has its advantages, and one of them is that you can support the organizations you believe in and reduce your taxable income at the same time! ✂

Note: If all this talk about taxes, distributions and deductions has your head spinning, contact your financial advisor or tax preparer and ask them to walk you through the process. Or call Ammy Seymour, director of development for the Harbor Hospice Foundation.

“Palliative Care is an all-out team effort to work with patients experiencing serious illness and its burden on them and their family to ensure comfort and thereby reach their desired quality of life.”

Gerald Harriman, DO
Medical Director,
Harbor Palliative Care



Embrace the Time

Palliative care is a medical specialty of supportive care for individuals with advanced illness. The focus of palliative care is to effectively manage pain and other symptoms of a serious illness, even when the underlying disease cannot be cured.

Individuals with a serious illness face difficult and complex choices. Harbor Palliative Care will work with patients and families in a respectful manner to help set goals that are designed to match their treatments in order to achieve their best quality of life.

Harbor Palliative Care offers an interdisciplinary approach to care. Our team includes a palliative care certified physician, nurse practitioner, nurses and social workers. Other professionals maybe included according to each patient's need.

Harbor Palliative Care supports you and those you love by maximizing your comfort. It also helps you set goals for your future that lead to a meaningful, fulfilling life while you get treatment for your illness.

Harbor Palliative care will work with your physicians to assure that your symptoms are relieved and your pain is treated effectively and compassionately.

HARBOR

PALLIATIVE CARE

To learn more visit EmbraceTheTime.org