

## Pauline Grace transcript

So my dad Wal, he was a great dad, but then I guess everyone will say that hopefully about their parents. and even though he tried not to spoil me, he did. and we could communicate with like just a glance or a smile or a smirk and we knew exactly what was going on, he was a great bloke and um he lived to the ripe old age of 90 and he always said if he could do 3 score and 10 he was happy.

So I was really fortunate with my dad, he came to live with us about 2 years before he died cos he was getting a little bit frail. and I wanted to keep an eye on him. And then um he had a fall and it was just at the beginning of COVID, so I cared for him at home. And we kind of quickly realised that he was dying, and he knew that he was dying he was basically just closing down. Which left us lots of time for conversation, And I asked him what he wanted for his funeral and how he wanted it to go, he organised like the songs, And he was my biggest fan cos i changed my career, I became a professional glass artist, and a glass blower, and I do remember him saying to me "kid, when you burn me, will you put me ashes into a heart?" and I went "yeah of course I will.." and he went "great kid, i don't care what you do with me after that you can do whatever you like" So we were able to spend time laughing and crying and planning and plotting, and also kind of like giggling at how people were going to respond to his funeral, yeah I think we did him proud and he was part and parcel of that process.

So as I mentioned it was during lockdown, the beginning of lockdown in COVID when my dad died and he died on a Sunday morning, 3 o'clock in the morning and um I remember having to call the kind of district nurse or GP out to confirm his death and er they said oh well we'll help you arrange to take the body away now, I said, I don't think you will! And they said you must ensure he leaves today. I said I don't think i do, cos i'd already had a conversation with Carrie and i'd done some research with dad whilst alive and I understood that as his next of kin I had responsibility for his body and that I didn't have to get rid of him. So dad stayed with us for a day, He was in the bed, with the windows open, it was Winter and he was fine.

I feel really lucky and blessed that I was able to have dad at home after he died. Because at the moment of death you see an instant change in somebody The energy goes and you're left with your loved one, but it's not your loved one it's them with something missing. obviously the heart's not beating anymore, and so his complexion changed and he looked so peaceful, like he looked relaxed. I knew he wasn't asleep but I knew that he was no longer in any pain or any distress and he was fine. And his body changed subtly during that I don't know 24 hours and I'd go in every so often and kiss

him on the head and he was cold to the touch, but not unpleasantly and he was snuggled up in his favorite duvet, wearing his favorite pyjamas. So it was still dad but it wasn't. Umm and then actually letting him go, and it felt like letting him go in that state connected me with the fact that he was dead (nervous laugh) which sounds bizarre but we're so far removed from death and dying as a society that we're not actually used to having dead people around. And there's nothing unclean, there's nothing unhealthy, there's nothing to be afraid of, it's just a perfectly natural process. And that enabled me to say goodbye, and also kind of compute that he'd gone.

Grief is a complex messy thing and um that moment of seeing him die, but then hours of watching his body change after he'd died really helped, but especially I have to say, once he was in the funeral home um I was able to come in and bathe him and anoint his body with oils and dress him I know it sounds bizarre but to anoint his body with oils felt like such a deeply personal ritualistic thing to do that i'd read about in some sort of book but here I was being able to do it. And again that was a part of the saying goodbye process, was wonderful.

I looked after my mum while she was dying and she went with a kind of traditional undertaking service They didn't want me to visit her, because they had to 'get her out of the freezer' which is how they described it to me and um we wanted to dress her body the way that she wanted to be dressed for the funeral and we weren't allowed to do that ourselves - they did it and it felt very much like they were in charge and it was process and they wanted to keep control and not allow us pretty much any access at all which is, now that i've had this experience with dad it just opened my eyes into what's possible and also they have such a monopoly and um it felt much less personal so no i don't think all funeral directors are the same. In fact I know they're not because I've experienced two contrasts.

Lots of people are frightened about talking about death and dying and especially with an elderly relative they don't, they fear that they're gonna offend them. But we were able to have some really quite candid conversations and I remember dad saying to me "what happens when you die?" I said " I dunno! I don't think anybody knows! I said but I think what happens is you go to sleep. And you just don't wake up" and he was like " well that'll do for me kid"