

# Your Personal Coach

By

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

**Dear Kathleen,**

**My mother is dying from cancer. We've been to every kind of specialist and each has agreed that there is nothing more that they can do to help her. Mom wants to talk about her funeral arrangements but every time she brings this up, my sister and her husband stop her and tell her that everything will be okay and that she shouldn't think about dying. This doesn't seem healthy to me.**

**-- Robert**

Dear Robert,

Losing your mother is one of life's most difficult passages. Emily Dickinson described pain of this magnitude as being "so utter." And those simple, elegant words are all that are necessary to describe the great loss you are feeling.

My heart is sad for you and your family.

You are quite correct that your sister and husband are taking exactly the wrong – though not uncommon -- approach with your mother through this part of her life's journey. In our culture, death is seen as an intruder and something to be denied. Many people have great difficulty coping with the dying process of a loved one and, like your relatives, don't want to talk about it.

I'm certain your sister and brother-in-law mean well, and think in their own way that they are helping. But your mother wants to – needs to – be able to give voice to all of her feelings. This is her death, and she is entitled to go through the process in whatever way she wants.

She is being quite clear that she has made some decisions about her funeral and it's important that those be heard and honored. When it is your sister and brother-in-law's turn to die they can choose for themselves how they will travel that path.

Your mom sounds like she wants a conscious death, one in which she can make decisions and be open and aware of the process. That is a gift and blessing and no one – no matter how well intentioned – has the right to take that from her. It's important that your sister and brother-in-law understand that.

Your family may benefit from the caring support of your local Hospice organization. My experience has shown that Hospice nurses and volunteers give loving psychological and spiritual support, along with their expertise in pain management and other medical issues.

When my own mother was dying in 1992, Hospice helped all of my family in ways that are impossible to explain. It felt as though we simply closed our eyes and fell backwards, only to be caught in the arms of angels that soothed our hearts and helped all of us to make good choices.

I suggest that you talk with your mother and family members about getting the help of Hospice.

Lovingly talk to your sister and brother-in-law. You can help them to understand the importance of letting your mother talk about her death, and whatever arrangements

are important to her. Show them this article. Ask for help from your minister, priest, rabbi, or spiritual director if you have one.

There are quite a few good books about how to best help dying loved ones. Those by Elisabeth Kubler Ross (*Death: The Final Stage of Growth* among many others), Stephen Levine (*Healing Into Life and Death*), and Ram Dass (*Still Here: Embracing Aging, Changing and Dying*) are among my favorites. They are readily available in bookstores and libraries.

Two years ago, Bill Moyers produced for Public Television an outstanding four-part series about dying called *On Our Own Terms*. You can find out more about it at [www.pbs.org/wnet/onourown/terms/](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/onourown/terms/). These and other resources can offer comfort and support to your mother and the rest of your family.

Robert, I hope you realize that this is a very precious and special time in the life of your family. Your willingness to be unconditionally present-- with love and fear, pain and joy-- will give your mother a powerful surrounding container in which to live her life, no matter how long or short that may be.

The death of a close family member can be a most powerfully transforming, and spiritually enriching time, even in its heartbreak and tears. Your mother sounds like a remarkable woman who wants to fully participate in her life, even now at its end. What a treasure she is.

*Send your personal coaching questions to [kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com](mailto:kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com), call 473-4004, or direct questions to the Outer Banks Sentinel, P.O. Box 546, Nags Head, NC 27949*

*Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D. is a personal coach, motivational speaker, clinical psychologist and author of "After the Darkest Hour" and other nonfiction books. She lives in Manteo. To learn more about personal coaching, visit her website at [www.fullpotentialliving.com](http://www.fullpotentialliving.com). (©2002 Kathleen Brehony. All Rights Reserved.)*