

hospice letter

Taking ‘A Sacred Walk’ Toward Caregiving With Donna Authers In 7 Steps

"Caring for a loved one who is approaching the end of his or her life is one of the hardest things you'll ever have to do," said Donna Authers, author of the book "A Sacred Walk: Dispelling the Fear of Death and Caring for the Dying."

In a recent press release, Authers detailed her own journey of coming to grips with her life-long fear of death, and embracing the role of a caregiver with the passing of her grandmother. "My grandmother's faith strengthened my own, and I was able to realize that I haven't seen her for the last time," she said.

Another strong believer in the importance of caregiver support, Authers advised, "Focus on your loved one, but don't ignore yourself and your own needs in the process. Remember that both of you are still alive at this moment, and use the time to draw even closer together."

The following tips are taken from Authers' book as seven important thoughts for all caregivers to consider as they spend time with their loved ones nearing the end of their lives:

Hospice – it's for the living

Although most associate the word 'hospice' with dying, the process, which includes providing support to caregivers and family members as well as the patient, may take months. "Hospice care is superior," said Authers, "it provides welcome support that a hospital can't."

‘God with skin on’

"The skills you'll use to walk a friend or relative home are practiced and honed every day –something I call being 'God with a skin on,'" said Authers. "By developing patience, kindness, gentleness, and other selfless qualities, you'll be ready to help when someone you meet has been unpleasantly surprised by life."

Anticipate a loved one's needs

"To ease the burden, don't ask what you can do to help," said Authers. "Anticipate it." Practical acts of kindness are helpful, but, "Don't

underestimate the value of your time, attention, and presence, either."

You need care too

"As a caregiver, the responsibilities on your shoulders are immense, and they – like grief – are more bearable when they are shared." Authers urges taking full advantage of one's support network and to reach out if you need more help as a caregiver. This does not always have to be other family members who may be too emotionally invested, but perhaps a pastor or counselor. "The more at peace you are, the better you'll be able to cherish the time you spend with the loved one for whom you're caring for."

Death is no secret

"One of the greatest services a caregiver can offer is identifying those fears [of death] and making sure they are alleviated," said Authers. "By dispelling the misconceptions, you will enable everyone to focus on the tasks at hand, and you'll also help ensure the unnecessary fears of death are not perpetuated."

Harness the power of forgiveness

According to Authers' research, mental health professionals find the number one inhibitor to finding peace is our inability to forgive. "It's bittersweet when people wait until they are on their deathbeds to restore a broken relationship," observed Authers. "Sweet because a burden is being released, and bitter because it didn't happen sooner."

Good grief

"Grief manifests itself in different ways for different people. Express your emotions when they rise up, and be thankful for your tears – they are a blessing because of the love they represent," shared Authers. She feels expressing your feelings of grief, rather than avoiding them, helps bring closure.

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