

Make Your Wishes Known

by Anne Murphy

I have been participating in Amy Glenn's online course, "Loving Dying and Letting Go," which stems from her book *Holding Space* . We explore topics of what it means to love, what it means to die, and how can we let go?

At our most recent session, we explored the vigil. This is the time where one is transitioning into active dying. A wakeful and watchful time; often described as holy and sacred. For example, a family that I served held a home vigil for their son. For the first couple of days, their son was on the first floor where visitors came and went throughout the day delivering meals, conversing and sharing music. There was always someone by his side companioning him; it was a lively, social space. Two days later, noticing that their son was actively dying, they decided to bring him upstairs to a more private area and limited the number of visitors. That shift marked a necessary step for the family and community as their son was preparing to leave his body. Following his death, this time became a place of refuge in the days, weeks and months that followed and continues to be a balm for their grief.

One of the practices that Amy walked us through was designing our own Vigil plan, and I invite you to follow her suggestions on how to do that.

Exploring this topic with someone else can help with accountability as well as offer support, as this is not always an easy topic to explore.

How to Design your Vigil Plan

Grab a piece of paper, journal or recording device and take some time to consider these questions:

- Where would you like to die and why? Imagine the space, are you inside or out? If you have a choice would you like to die in your home or in a hospital? Does it matter?
- Once you have established your location what else would you add? Who would you want there? How would those people treat you? What would you like to hear, sense and feel while you're dying? Would you like music? Candles? Poetry?
- How would you like people to talk to you or touch you? Would you want them to hold your hand, caress your face or lay in bed with you? Who do you want to companion you while you're dying?
- How would you like your body cared for after you die? Would you like a home vigil? If so, who would do that and what are your wishes. If you're working with a funeral director, how would you like the after death care to proceed?

Once you have written down the questions you want to answer, take some time to let it rest and check in a couple days later to see what you have written and make any adjustments.

Take it a step further and share your wishes with a trusted friend, partner or family member.

Editor's Note: Anne Murphy is a Celebrant, Home Vigil Guide and Death Educator. Anne is trained in the art of supporting individuals and families through the season of death and dying through heart centered and compassionate guidance, education, rituals and ceremonies. She can be reached at anniemurph@gmail.com or www.athousandhands.com.