

Living Well, Dying Well – Hermione Elliott

Jeremy Melder 00:00

Hello, my name is Jeremy Melder, and I'm the presenter from Beaming Green. Before we start, I would like to acknowledge that this podcast is being held on the traditional lands of the Bundjalung people and pay our respects to elders both past, present, and emerging. The Beaming Green podcast is a podcast that will help you take out some of the stress and confusion about how to live your life more sustainably. We do this by introducing you to inspiring people with first-hand experience and expertise who covered aspects of sustainability, from human interest to environmental perspectives, helping you to thrive and enhance your life, and the lives of your friends and family. For most people, thinking about death, our own, and that of our loved ones, brings up fear and anxiety. As a result, those who are dying may feel isolated, because of others inability to deal with death. Unsurprisingly, this is why many have the dying report feeling distant from their loved ones, which is not the kind of experience most of us would choose, most of us would prefer to be surrounded by our loved ones. And for them to be fully present during the final months and days. We asked a couple of people, how they felt about their own death, or others close to them. And have they thought about or discussed or made plans about their own death here's what they said.

Harry 01:46

I guess most people are scared of death. But my view is, if you've lived a good life, and a life is worth living, well, then at the end of your allotted time span, Death comes to inevitable birth and death. And so no, I'm not scared of death. It's a natural part of the human condition.

Michelle 02:08

Hi, this is Michelle, I'm 57. I have been thinking about death more recently and have come to be happy and accept it. Even if I died tomorrow, I can get upset if I think about others dying more so than myself. But I just know that that's the nature of living that that will happen.

Roland 02:31

As a late 30 something chap, my death feels a long way off outside of telling people that I want to be buried not in a casket, but you know, wrapped in a cloth dropped in the ground. Yeah, it's not really a thing I have considered at all I in a broader sense. I'm aware of that journey in this life and my spiritual practice and, and the way that I walk through this life is with a deeper awareness that there is something that comes next, and that my time in this life is important to prepare for that.

Marlena 03:08

Hi, my name is Marlena, and I'm 56 years of age, I have not really started preparing for my death or really thinking about what I want to do to prepare for my death. I feel like at 56, I still have time. And that may not be the case. But it's where my mindset is. But I have been supporting my 91- and 81-year-old parents to prepare for their end of life. I send them questions and ask them to think about them, and to answer them and send them back to me. And ultimately, we'll sit down and have a conversation about what they want. I guess what I hope for them is that their end-of-life experience both in terms of

their final years, but also in terms of a funeral or farewell is the experience that they would want for themselves not what perhaps I would want for them.

Jeremy Melder 03:58

Today, Andia and I are speaking with Hermione Elliot in the United Kingdom, who has brought her wealth of experience and developed a training program as an end-of-life doula. She's established Living Well, Dying Well, which is a not-for-profit organization to further this work. Hermione is passionate about engaging with people from all walks of life, encouraging them to become more informed and confident about being with death and dying. Recognizing it not as something to be feared, but as something natural and normal part of life. Hermione thank you so much for joining us on Beaming Green. You're what called a death doula. Is that correct?

Hermione 04:47

Yes. Death doula. End of Life doula. That's the terminology. Yeah.

Jeremy Melder 04:53

Yeah. So can you tell us a little bit about what took you down this path of being a death doula

Hermione 05:02

I think my path. My journey with this is maybe slightly different from the people I teach. But the key quality I think of a death doula end of life doula is that they don't need to be a medical professional. We passionately believe that citizens as citizens, we have a lot to offer each other in support, at the time of somebody facing death, or a family, learning how to be with someone who's dying. And I really, truly believe that death is a human event and not a medical event. Although of course, we need medical support very often. So, an end-of-life doula is really someone who's called or pulled towards supporting other people through maybe an experience of their own, often an experience where a dying process hasn't gone well. And there's this feeling of, it's got to be better than this, come on, you know, how can we do this differently, or somebody that's had a really wonderful experience with a relative, for example, they really want to find a way to support other people to experience death in a, in a different way, in a way that can be beautiful, that can be peaceful, that can be supported and can be a process of a journey, if you like a process of letting go. So, it's, it's a very broad roll, I would say, um, but those will be the fundamental motivations for many people wanting to become an end-of-life doula?

Jeremy Melder 06:59

Yeah. Wow. Okay.

Andia Cally 07:01

So, I'm just curious, I read a book recently about death, doulas, and in the book, The character was called on to see through people's sort of dying wishes, if you like, which include in saying goodbye to ex-lovers and all sorts of things. I mean, I'm sure it was used for dramatic effect as well. But I'm just wondering, have you been asked ever to do things like that?

Hermione 07:25

yes and no, I think the key thing here is that everybody is different, and every death is different, and every process into death, you know, is completely individual. But one of the things that we're really very keen on is supporting people to, prepare through identifying their wishes, at the end of life, and, and this goes right across the board from medical and treatment wishes to very simple wishes, like, their environment, or where they want to die, or what, what works for them in terms of food, or, you know, having a window open or closed, simple, ordinary things. And then those things that might be left undone not everybody wants to do that. But there's a beautiful book called Chasing Daylight by a man called (SIC) (Eugene O'Kelly, Corinne O'Kelly, Andrew Postman), I think, I can't remember his surname. But he was the chief executive of a multi-national Corporation, very high-profile life. And he was faced with a terminal diagnosis. I think he had three months or so. And that's exactly what he did. He went from the wider circle of people, to communicate with them to thank them too. He wrote hundreds of letters, and then it sorts of came closer and closer. So, acquaintances, friends, colleagues, his nearest and dearest. And he literally said goodbye or, you know, cleared up his life, if you like in such an extraordinary way. And that's not for everyone. He was a meticulous kind of man. That's how he lived his life. He didn't like loose ends. But there is something very powerful about feeling that you haven't got any emotional baggage, really, but anything unfinished, incomplete. I think it's tremendously releasing to feel like I've done my best. Even if I'm not able to be met by the person, or the people I want to make good with. I've done my bit. So, it does happen. I think we do coach people. Very gently, but we would never impose anything. It's a delicate balance. We talk about walking this fine line. That's what we do constantly. Really?

Jeremy Melder 10:12

Yeah, look, one of the things I wanted to ask you is, I, myself have a fear of death. And my partner over here doesn't. And it's kind of an interesting thing to face. This was, as a couple. And, and I was wondering whether you meet couples in scenarios like, like ours, where there is someone that's, you know, really accepting of the process of dying, and one that's almost kicking and screaming and going, I don't accept it, like, like me, there's there is a part of me that he's accepting of it. I'm just being devil's advocate.

Hermione 10:50

But I think we would come across that mostly in situations, not where you're, you know, you're, you're just exploring the subjects. Yeah. But mostly when somebody is dying. Yeah. And one partner or one person is, is okay with it. And, and the others, say, saying no, so that might be the person that's dying. Or it might be their companions or friends. And it's hard. Because, you know, in a way, our role is to support that the person who's dying, to fulfill their wishes as best we can and to support the family to come around them in that support. But if there's a pull, if family members particularly can't bear the thought that this person is going to die, and they would want them to have more and more treatment, or it's a very difficult situation, because it's about them. It's not about the person that's dying. And so, we try to navigate that one very gently and carefully. But yeah, we are all at different places with this as a subject, a willingness to talk about it, a preparedness for it. And even if we think we're prepared, the minute it comes knocking at the door, you can bet your life that oops, no, I'm not ready yet. No. I'm not ready to leave. I haven't done enough for I am scared. You know, all sorts of things come up in the immediacy of that, facing a diagnosis perhaps that's terminal. Yeah. Yeah.

Andia Cally 12:37

So, I'm just curious, because your organization is called Living Well, dying? Well, and I'm just wondering what the relationship you see between the two is, and if you can explain to our listeners what you mean by dying? Well,

Hermione 12:51

well, I You see, we have a very lovely patron, Ambassador, patron, and man called Allan Kellehear, who is Australian, an academic lives in Britain. And he's pioneered something called the compassionate communities' model for the end of life. And he's got the most beautiful sense of this as a subject and he says, it takes 35 seconds to die, and the rest is life. So that's where we come from, you know, our job is to make life as good as it can be, or support people to make their life as good as it can be. And to some extent, you know, wherever possible, just to put the death thing to one side, because very often people become a patient in a hospital, they're consumed by the diagnosis, you know, or, and then endless rounds of treatments, or whatever their own life trajectory kind of gets stopped when you're ill, or in the dying time. So, it's easy to be overwhelmed with all the input that that usually comes into a person's life. So, we feel our role is very much about supporting people to just, you know, experience the smallest or most ordinary things that make our own individual life meaningful. And they are tiny things, it's like, you know, the world sort of shrinks down a little bit when we're dying and just having a cup of tea with a cat on your lap and a biscuit, you know. It is a real quality in that. So, quality is key, I think, wherever possible. And I think if we can set that up and if we can support people to come to terms with the fact that life is going to go on without them. That was the biggest one for me. When I was starting all my exploration, I was grief stricken to think, oh, my God, I'll be gone. And everything will carry on with me. Such a shock we are all so centered in ourselves, how could not possibly. So, coming to terms with that and coming to terms with the fact that we're not going to be with our nearest and dearest perhaps or you know, but really, to some extent coming to make friends, with death I think is a hugely helpful thing, when we really enter the dying time, and we can let go more easily. I also think this thing of letting go needs practice. Because that's what dying is. It's a letting go. A surrender, if you like, into, mostly we don't know what, yeah, and some people who have a spiritual dimension might have a sense of what. But I think the practice of letting go is something we really need to do throughout our life, you know, the earthly world, and the material world is so compelling. And you know, we can be very wedded to our possessions or wedded to our relationships, or very passionate about this or that. But starting to release that attachment if you like. Letting go practice I think is healthy. Yeah. Does that answer your question? Yeah.

Jeremy Melder 16:58

Thank you. Regarding that, though, do you think the letting go? Look, I grew up a part of my life in Sri Lanka. And I think death was in my observation, anyway, was viewed differently to a Western culture. No, it was just seen as it is a part of life. And I find that even you know, in Indonesia, there is just this is a different viewpoint in the in the way they view death. Do you think it's a predominantly a Western thing that we don't really look at our death? in a in a way that's of letting go like you mentioned?

Hermione 17:38

Yes, I, it's, I'm glad you've brought in that sort of cultural perspective, because I I'm sure that for me, I would be talking mainly to the Western sensibility, and the fact that we are so removed from death. And

but that's only happened. I think, in the last 60 or 100 years, really, death was very much integrated into life. And certainly, you know, in Britain, there was people died at home regularly. And it was it was more normal as it were. But I have lived and worked in Japan, and I know that there's, there's quite a big fear of death in Japan, right. And so that's an Eastern culture if you like Asian culture. And so, it was challenging. I worked a lot with the holistic approach to cancer. And that was one of the things I used to do workshops in when I was living in Japan. And it was, it was a big, big issue

Andia Cally 18:51

is one of my observations when my mother was sick and dying, and in the hospital, system was almost that they view death as a failure. And so, they would try really, to keep her alive at any cost without any regard to the quality of her life. And once they realized that they really couldn't do much in terms of helping her medically, they kind of gave up, you know, and they weren't really interested in her. And I just thought that was interesting. And I wondered, like what your take on that is and whether you think that that that perspective sort of influences I guess, what how we say death as well.

Hermione 19:27

Yeah, I'm so sorry. You've had that experience because it is a prevalent experience. I've thought about it so much. I trained as a nurse when I was young, and it wasn't quite like that in those days, I must say. I think what's happened is that we've forgotten that the medical system more than the hospital system, particularly is an acute medical model and thank you, thank you for that. Because if I have an acute illness or have an accident, I will really want to be there. But it's not set up to work with death at all. Well, and it's one of my greatest sadness's and pains, you know, to see that often people are put in a side room out of respect for that person the respect for others, but they kind of left really, and it's there's not always a kind of accompaniment that happens in that situation. And I believe accompaniment is a really important factor. You know, I think creating a safe environment. And a loving environment for somebody to be able to let go into is hugely important. And hospital is not a safe place. Really, there's too much noise, too much activity. So, I completely agree with you. And I think we must accept and recognize that there's been a huge cultural shift. And our medical professionals have very little training, and very little experience of normal dying. So, the dying would be dramatic or horrible often, and resuscitation and CPR is very prevalent, even with frail elderly people, or very sick people. And again, this is one of my greatest pains, that they think that this is the right thing to do to somebody at this point in their life. So, I find it very, very sad. But it also means as a citizen, I must take responsibility for making my wishes known, if I don't want that to happen, I must have the paperwork in place to say, not for me, mate, thanks a lot, you know, leave me to not let me go home. Or let me I want comfort care at this point. And I want to be allowed to die when when that time comes. So, we're in a bit of a muddle with the with the medical model, I have to say,

Jeremy Melder 22:33

Yeah, Yeah, I agree. This leads me to, you know, talk about what we've done, actually, which, you know, some of our younger friends think we're a bit silly, but we've, you know, gone and set up our advanced care plan, and our enduring Guardian, and, and, you know, we've nominated kids and so on, and, and we've got the wills in place, and you know, and we feel like our Well, we that's one less thing to think about or worry about, when is it too early? Or when is it too late?

Hermione 23:07

Yeah, that's a good question, it's never too early. So, you know, your younger friends, I understand it, because that's a new, natural human thing is that death is a long way down. And if I'm young, it's a very long way down. But of course, people die all the time at all ages. So, we never know when it's going to come. Yeah. And for young people, you know, the, the possibilities are that they may have an accident or severe accident or something horrific. There are 1000s of people in long term care, who have been subjected to, I don't know whether it's failed or successful resuscitation, after, you know, severe accidents or things like that, who have left with horrible brain damage, and they don't have a life. They are really in need of constant physical care. And, and often those people are quite young. But if they were to have an advanced decision or in place, a plan in place, then intervention can be stopped sooner. When it's Well, yeah, if we say what it is we want or don't want, then we can really have some control over that. And but I don't think you can ever do it too soon. Really. And very often it is done too late.

Jeremy Melder 24:41

Yeah.

Hermione 24:42

And it's a scramble, you know, at the at the end of someone's life, when it's all very acute and tender and difficult. to have those conversations isn't easy. Yeah.

Andia Cally 24:55

I'm just curious to know how the whole COVID pandemic has affected people's view on death. Have you seen any discernible changes in terms of their willingness to look at it? Or are they more afraid of it? or

Hermione 25:08

I think is probably a bit of both, it's been extremely touching, you know, we've been completely flooded in our media, we every news broadcast, you know, for the last year and a half, a completely flooded with this. And it's brought death right into the room. And I think what's been interesting on what I've observed is among the young people of my generation, too, but many of the younger people are looking at the way people were dying alone, or not necessarily alone with a health professional, perhaps if they were lucky. But without family members around them has been a horrifying reality. And I think so many people have been touched by that and can feel this is so wrong. And how, how could we have thought that that was an okay thing to do? There must be ways of us being with our loved ones, as their dying, even in the middle of a pandemic, surely. And so, the younger talking about it much more in my experience, but I think it's generated as much fear as it has conversation. I don't think we're better as a society about in our relationship to death as a consequence, I really don't know. It's contributed to the muddle if anything, I feel.

Jeremy Melder 26:42

have you noticed an increase in in the number of people that you're talking to, since COVID?

Hermione 26:49

we had a waiting list for our doula training. Yeah. Before COVID. Yeah. And now, you know, we had a crazy year postponing courses, translating the courses online, I can't tell you what we've been through on that level. And now we've got a bunch of bigger waiting lists, that's all I can say. So, we are running to keep up with the demand for the training. Yeah. And which is great on one level, but difficult for people who are having to wait. But the thing that I love about what we're doing is that everybody, from the moment they come on the course of the foundation training, they're finding themselves in a community of people who were okay talking about death and dying. So, remember, these are ordinary people, all sorts of backgrounds. And it's like, oh, my God, I can finally talk about this. And it's okay, you know, and the thing is, they then go out and talk to their friends, or their family or the taxi driver, or the person in the b&b. And there already, we talk about chucking the pebble in the pond, you know, the ripples, keep going out. Every single person that joins the training is being a public service, I believe, and people's experience is interesting. When they do talk to others, it's the same for me, you either get oh, don't be morbid, and the conversation gets shut down. But mostly, you get people so eager to share their own experience of a death in their family or have somebody close to them. In minutes, people come back straight away with a story of either something that went well, or something that didn't go well, or a question. They didn't understand why this was happening. Nobody explained what they needed to expect to happen. A lot of traumas, I think, because nobody explains what to expect. So yeah, lots of talk about it. I really think that just by chipping away, doing what we're doing, we may be able to affect a small social change. I hope so.

Jeremy Melder 29:23

is a course that you're doing. Is it only limited to people in the UK or is it open to others doing it?

Hermione 29:29

No. We have people coming from Europe, America, Australia. Yeah. And but the nature of the course up until last year, has been face to face. And of course, it's chunked into three days sessions. So, it's not easy for people from abroad. But because of COVID we've had to set up a virtual classroom and adapt the training on to an online course. So, we've noticed a difference. demographic, younger people are joining the training and people from abroad. We're now converting the diploma part of the training to an online course. I never, ever thought I would do this, I was so against it, totally against it. So, my values have been challenged.

Jeremy Melder 30:21

It's kind of like, you know, normally you will you would I agree with you, you know, you'd think you'd be doing this in a room and you know, because there's a lot of emotion that will come out, I would imagine me doing this cause I, you know, when I did it 10 years ago with you, I remember, you know, in the room, we all we're sharing emotions. And I'm wondering how that goes over, you know, like, like, what we're doing now via zoom, you know, it's like, how do you how do you connect? And I guess we're all learning how to adapt that we do it this new normal? Yeah,

Hermione 30:52

yeah, we really are. And we've managed it. And it's also how we design the course and breakout rooms and share small groups sharing and, you know, we've managed to create a lovely space. But all the

trainers have a bit they're enjoying it. But everybody, of course loves the face to face. And many of the learners prefer face to face. Yes, we'll probably do a mixture of both going forwards, I think.

Andia Cally 31:23

So, I'm wondering how if you think people could overcome being so death phobic like how that would improve their life in a way, the way that they say life or their quality of life, if at all,

Hermione 31:38

I think that's a job for all of us to do. I think it is a part of life, to be able to, as fully as we can acknowledge death, there are lots of inner kinds of exercises that we can do to rehearse it as if you'd like, in a safe way. Imagery I find is a fantastic tool to help us face death in an imaginary kind of way. And to be able to reflect through imagery on our life and give a context to this whole mysterious journey we are on you know So I think there are there are practices that we can do. But I think if somebody is truly death phobic, that's, that's something that really requires specialist help. I think some psychotherapy is often helpful in those situations. But I think for those of us that may be a little fearful that we can confront it in in safe ways. way ahead of time. Yeah, yeah.

Jeremy Melder 32:54

Yeah, it's interesting because I remember when I was, I was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis. And, and it, it threw me because I couldn't do a lot of the things that I wanted to do. And it made me rethink my life, you know, in terms of what work I did my, you know, my family, all those things. And I'm wondering whether that's also the, you know, when someone's dying, whether they, you know, get to the trough, and go, why did I work so hard and not spend so much time with my family and so on? Have you had Have you got some, something you can share there just to maybe give our listeners some inspiration or hope, you know, because everyone's working so hard and going, why am I doing this?

Hermione 33:45

Absolutely. And it's such and it's such a tough one, isn't it? And I think a confrontation with death it isn't a bad thing. Sometimes all you know, as you've described, Jeremy, an illness is life changing, or potentially life changing? And I think COVID did that for a lot of people. It's like, hang on a minute. Why am I doing this? What what's what, what's my motivation here? And I think a lot of people have gone through a real change of values in how they operate and what's important. And I think that's a very important part of life to stop the clock every so often. And I used to do this every year with my friends, we'd have a not new year resolutions, but a time when we would stop and look back and reevaluate and feel our way into the year ahead to say, am I living a life that is serving me best that is bringing me happiness, but and I did a lot of work with burnout. For example, and I have a friend and colleague, Dina Glauberger, who has written a beautiful book called The Joy of Burnout, okay? And it's exactly what you've described. So, a situation with many situations where people have just driven themselves. She says, you either find yourself in a situation that's changed, and you haven't, or you change, and the situation doesn't. Yeah. And you're continuing along the same path. And she says, you need to stop to listen to the whisperings of your soul. And I love that. Because we sometimes find ourselves so busy and preoccupied, that we don't recognize that we have some control over life, and we have choices. And why aren't we making the choices that make our lives worthwhile and fulfilling? Because when we

do come to death? You know, I hear all the time that sort of regret that you were describing. Yeah. What was what was I thinking? What? Why, you know, it's such a shame to reach that point, before you can recognize, maybe that wasn't a great path, I

Jeremy Melder 36:25

Which is why I think or thought it was, well, we, we both thought it was important to highlight your work and what you do, because I think it's never too late or too early to start looking at these things. Because burnout is something you can stop in your 20s. You know, you can go well hang on a second, I've been going down this path, and I don't need to do that. So that's why, you know, I thought it was important to have you on the show, to talk about this.

Andia Cally 36:54

So, I just wanted to ask as well, whether you've noticed any difference, I guess, if people have a spiritual belief or a faith, whether they feel more comforted in death and dying, then somebody that that doesn't who's agnostic, or

Hermione 37:10

Yes, it's interesting, we have these conversations in our groups very often, you know, and I don't think, I think a religious faith, or practice is no guarantee of having an easier death. I think religious faith is not a guarantee of an easier death, because I think some religions are rather punitive or, you know, challenging the wrath of God and all that kind of thing. And I think many people come to death, terrified. I've seen it even among devout people who practice their religion very devoutly. I think people maybe who have a spiritual practice, which is perhaps more introspective or more reflective or meditative, to some extent, may know themselves in a different way. Without this the sort of structure of a religious practice. I'm not saying that religious practices wrong in any way. It's a fantastic community for many people. But I think sometimes any kind of dogma may really challenge people's experience of death. But ritual is hugely important to you can be fantastically supportive. Because there's a, there's a known there's a process, this is what happens. This is what's prescribed, and it can be tremendously releasing, and then people who have no belief at all. It's so interesting, isn't it? Because, again, some of the most spiritual people I've ever met have been atheists. So, I do Yeah, yeah. high integrity, you know, people who live their life in great integrity, but just don't believe in a deity or the mystery or an afterlife. So, I don't think there are any rules or any kind of, you know, Givens at all. I think everybody comes to it often as they've lived. I noticed that a lot. And I also have seen many times that things can change very rapidly. In the last weeks of life, people who might not have had any belief, somehow when the ego drops away, which does better there's a chink or an opening for some other kind of experience. and a softening. And I've seen many people having experiences of, of a relative, a dead relative coming to meet them or having a sense of lightness of being filled with love or peace. And that can happen quite spontaneously, and it's not happening through the mind. I think that's the thing that's so interesting to me, this is something that's happening on a much bigger level. And it's beautiful to watch, really.

Jeremy Melder 40:34

It must also be quite. for you as a facilitator or the other person facilitating, you must get something out of it too doing this. Can you share some something from that that you've had? You know, in your past? You don't have to give names, obviously. But no,

Hermione 40:51

I think it's a huge privilege. So yeah, I mean, we do the journey I was on a journey with someone. This is not so recent, a few years ago. And it was extremely hard going. He was a healthy man with a terminal diagnosis, which sounds contradictory, but very fit and effect, but a very rapid cancer. And because his heart was so fit, and his physical body was so fit, it took a long time, weeks, and weeks for him to die. So, we were on that journey with him. And to some extent, we're not members of the family. But we are very embedded, you know, times and it's an emotional roller coaster. And with him, it was hard. He also made the choice not to have too much medication, he wanted to experience his dying. So, for some members of the family, that was very traumatizing, in a way, they found that very difficult. So, my role and there were other doulas involved was to really support them to recognize that this was a process that he needed to do. And this was the way he chosen to do this journey. And the last few days were just beautiful. You know, he was in a deep sleep, but still rousable well to the end. And we were able to still talk to him. But he, he was comfortable. And he had a beautiful death really. And what was even more beautiful was after death, we were able to wash his body and dress him. And young teenage and young adult children were part of this journey. And at first, they couldn't bear to be involved. But then one by one, they came into the room and one of them was wanting to be very involved. But gradually, they just sort of were able to come and touch his hand. And they also helped with washing and the men, the men friends and the son in the family moved his body into the coffin. And there was this beautiful sort of male strengths that came in, as women did the washing. So again, interesting in very different cultures, this wouldn't be appropriate. But in this instance, it was a fantastic completion for that family, and he stayed home, and friends came to visit. So, it was a community event his death is wonderful.

Jeremy Melder 43:48

It's a completion for the whole family, isn't it really by going through that process in a connected way that it helps to let go. Whereas I think in in a way, if you look at, you know, some of my observations is that someone dies in hospital, the body goes to the, you know, to the to the morgue, and there's no connection between that. Whereas what you've had is that connection or the family have had this connection through that whole process.

Hermione 44:19

It's all too quick, in institutional environments. There's no time to be and to, we show a lovely little film on the training called blessings. And it's about different families who've cared for the body at death. And one woman described how she brought her aunt home. I think she might have been in the hospice. And she was in the front room. And she would go in every day and be with her and she'd have a cup of coffee in the room and then she said after three days, she's I suddenly had the feeling that it had taken my aunt three days to realize that she was dead. And it had taken me three days to realize that she was dead. And this time of holding, and it will be different for different people, of course, but this time of holding the space for the transition, whatever that is whether you know, whether that's whether the soul leaves, or certainly the energy body changes, and suddenly there's a shell, but there's still a feeling of

life around that person. So, this slowing down, I think, is hugely healing. And people that have gone through that time, being involved in some way. For myself with my mother, I felt like I'd fulfilled a sacred duty. It was so rewarding and fulfilling, to feel satisfaction is something that people think is a bit mad, you know, how can that be? But it is such a deep experience? for many people. Yeah. Yeah.

Andia Cally 46:17

And I love the previous story you told about sort of normalizing it for the children as well, like, you know, so it's not, I mean, I think when we were growing up, it was like, you know, death is the taboo thing, and we don't talk about in front of the children. And that's common. But I think it's great that families are starting to include their children, and normalize this as you know, part of life and nothing to be afraid of

Hermione 46:40

I, I agree, because, sometimes when we don't include children, we're communicating the taboo, we're communicating our fear, if we can gently invite the children in, they're extraordinarily resilient, they're curious. If we hold the space, well, for them, they can experience death as something natural, normal, peaceful. Wonderful. So, we're not passing on this anxiety about death to the children, I think it's quite an important thing to do. But of course, you'd never force a child. And but invite them I think, is very important. Yeah.

Jeremy Melder 47:33

You know, what I'm really loving about, you're sharing this story, Hermione is that, you know, you think about other jobs that people will do, you can go into autopilot and just do it in a day. But in this role that you've got, you're really asked to be present. But at the same time, the payoff for you is also great in terms of that you're, you're giving and taking, and this is such a this, this is the synergy there that's going on. And I really love that because you can't switch off, but it's also a grace, isn't it?

Hermione 48:06

It is it is. And, you know, it's a huge privilege. And the requirement is that we're as present as we can be. Of course, we're human beings, but the, the essence of presence and responsiveness and flexibility is, is really something that we are all learning all the time and what we bring ourselves, the good bits, the shadowy bits, you know, to be aware of how we are in that situation is so hugely important. And you know, the other interesting thing about the role is that it's not always about the person that's dying, we may not have predominant amount of our work with that person. It may be with the family. Yeah. How can we support the family to support that person? So where might one there's a story or an experience that very early on when we were after the training, one of our very first clients was a woman who was quite young with young children. And when we went to meet her, I could see she was terribly ill, but she wasn't talking as if she was ill. She was talking as if there were many years to come. And she wanted us to come particularly, to get to know her children. Her husband had a busy job, so that we could sort of get become integrated into the family. And this is what we did. So, we worked with the children. We worked a little bit with her and her husband. And within two weeks, she started to go right downhill and was admitted to the hospice. And I know without doubt that she could go into that journey. Now. Because she knew her children were being held and supported and the family was being held and the wider family we were involved with too. So, she was then able to let go. But imagine having to leave young children. Yeah. But they were extraordinary. They were quite extraordinary. And I think it was

because they were included at every stage, you know. So, we were much more involved with, we weren't involved with her at all really into other than the initial conversations we had. Yeah,

Jeremy Melder 50:35

Hermione, I really want to just thank you so much for joining us on Beaming Green and sharing your heart and soul in what you do it seems like you've got so much there that you're offering people. And obviously, we'd love to share, you know, with our listeners, your courses that you're offering. And we've got a few listeners from the UK as well. So hopefully, you know, they would like to do your course. And I don't know how COVID is affecting you guys. Like I'm trying to keep up with what's happening here. So, I can't really, you know, say,

Hermione 51:11

Well, we've just had the European Cup final and there wasn't anyone wearing a mask. I was at Wimbledon for two days, nobody wearing a mask. So, you know, it's we're getting quite a few double messages now. Yeah, say, yeah,

Jeremy Melder 51:25

I'll put down in the show notes, I'll put down your links to your courses, if you wouldn't mind, sharing them with me. If there's any more opportunities to talk to you, I'd love to continue this, because I think it's such an important discussion that more people need to get involved in, you know, and I feel thought that 10 years ago when I first did your course, and I still think it's important to do that. So, thank you so much for joining us on Beaming Green.

Hermione 51:51

Well, pleasure. And thank you for inviting me because I think you're throwing a pebble in the pond too. So, I really appreciate that.

Andia Cally 51:59

And so, people can just contact you if they want to take up your services as a death. doula? Is that how it works?

Hermione 52:06

Well, well, we have an end-of-life doula Association now which is off the back of the training. So, they're working with all the referrals and working to support the development of doulas in practice. It's a separate. We're very linked, obviously. But it's self-managing group now, which is great. Yeah. Yeah.

Andia Cally 52:30

Thank you so much for sharing your wisdom. And yeah, we really appreciate ya. Thank you so much. Let me see you both

Jeremy Melder 52:39

Thank you for listening to this episode of Beaming Green. There. If you got something out of this episode, we'd love to hear what your biggest takeaway was. There are a number of ways you can do this; you can leave a review on Apple podcast. Or if you have a Facebook, Instagram, or LinkedIn

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