



## The five life lessons I learned about aging and end-of-life, *plus* the one I can't live without

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*Hello there!*

*Thank-you for signing up for the Dance Past Sunset newsletter. I appreciate your interest!*

I started the show in 2014, and since then I've hosted *the most amazing guests, brilliant and interesting* people who taught me all kinds of things about *aging, end-of-life*, and even the *afterlife*.

Some of my guests were PhDs and MDs, and others were artists and philosophers, but in every instance they were *wise people*, and I learned *more than a few a profound truths* from them.

Now I want to share *five of the most important* of those lessons with you, *plus the one* I am finding *I can't live without*. I hope they are as useful to you as they have been to me.

With warm regards,

Host of Dance Past Sunset





## **Lesson #1: Natural death does not happen in an instant, rather, it can take hours or even days for “death” to take place.**

Forget what you've seen on TV where the doctor pronounces time of death at 10:29 AM (and 33 seconds) while looking at his watch. That's a scientist trying to scientifically measure something finite when *it is anything but*. Sure, we can detect when brain waves stop, but we used to think a stopped heart meant death, *and we were wrong*. Rev. Olivia Bareham, a death midwife who has been present for many deaths, tells me that death occurs much more slowly, taking hours or even days for the person to “pass over.” I think of it like a rosebud unfurling into a fully open blossom. *When is it a fully open rose?* I'm not sure (no one is), but it is wise not to rush things. *Slow down. Don't let the hospital or anyone else push you around.* Respect with your final words, kindness, and courtesy the person who is taking the most courageous and uncertain voyage of their lives, and give them a good (and patient) send-off.

**Learn more** on [episode #35](#): “Home Sweet Death at Home” with Death Midwife Reverend Olivia Bareham on how to conduct a respectful, safe and beautiful home death and funeral

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## **Lesson #2: Cremation is NOT the greenest way to go**

Like a lot of folks, I used to think cremation was the easiest and cleanest way to dispense with my body once I was done with it. For me, it was the default choice. That is *until I learned more*. Our bodies are some 70% water. Cremation is like trying to burn a water balloon -- it isn't as easy as it looks (*Ever taken a look at a crematory?*) It requires *a lot* of fossil fuel. *You'd have to drive your Prius a long way to undo the carbon footprint of just one cremation!* Joe Sehee, Founder of the Green Burial Council, tells me the greenest way to go, *and the most natural*, is a simple burial in a biodegradable shroud or casket. Personally, I like the idea of becoming soil. It nourishes the flowers, plants and trees around me! It appeals to the environmentalist in me, *and maybe you too!*

**Learn more** on:

[Episode #14](#): “Green Burial. As Below, So Above” with Joe Sehee, Founder of the Green Burial Council

[Episode #8](#): “Going Out Green” with Jeff Jorgenson, Founder of a green funeral home

[Episode #36](#): Where, How and Why to Choose Green Burial with author Ann Hoffner



### **Lesson #3: You have more choices than they want you to think**

Many funeral providers offer various "packages" of commonly selected goods and services that make up a funeral. But when you arrange for a funeral, you have the right, *guaranteed by federal law*, to buy individual goods and services, even those not offered by the funeral home. Rachel Zeldin of Funerals360 (formerly "I'm Sorry to Hear") says we are not obligated to accept a package that may include items we do not want. It's called *The Funeral Rule*, and it is implemented and enforced by the Federal Trade Commission to protect funeral consumers. *Want a guitar shaped casket not offered by the funeral home? I do!* If the funeral director is willing, you can buy it elsewhere and bring it to the party or, *ahem*, funeral.

**Learn more** on [episode #6](#): "How to Get Started with End-of-Life Planning" with Rachel Zeldin of Funerals360, Death Planning Entrepreneur

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### **Lesson #4: Hell isn't what it's cracked up to be**

Ok, I know I'm treading on thin ice here, but I was pretty happy to learn from Gary Amirault, a rogue Bible scholar and myth buster, that even mainstream Christianity is rethinking the whole idea of hell. Gary believes that in our lifetimes we will see the "*fire and brimstone, gnashing of teeth, lake of fire*" version of hell (the one we've come to know and love) translated right out of the Bible altogether. Of course, it will take a loooong time for some to let go of the notion that our heavenly father chooses to cast *most of his children* into a place of eternal, conscious torment at the hands (or, rather, the pitchfork) of a vicious devil, but I was only too happy to let go of it *now*.

**Learn more** on [episode #28](#): "What the hell is Hell?" with Gary Amirault, rogue Bible scholar and myth buster.

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### **Lesson #5: How to know when someone is dying**

Veteran hospice nurse Barbara Karnes has been present for hundreds of deaths, so she knows it when she sees it. *The excessive sleeping with eyes half closed. The avoidance of food and water. The quieting of the spirit.* These behaviors are normal and natural. Just like animals that "know" when their time has come, *we do too*, and we naturally seek out the places and behaviors that ease our passage. *It's not a bad thing.* Barbara's book "New Rules for End of Life Care" is *must have* for anyone with an aging parent or other loved one approaching the end.



This book, and the video that accompanies it, is *the one thing I found I can't live without*. As I navigate the end with my own mom, Barbara's wisdom has helped me immensely.

**Learn more** on [episode #29](#): "New Rules for End of Life Care" with Veteran Hospice Nurse Barbara Karnes

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## Bonus Lessons

Yeah, *I know*. I said five, but I just can't pass up mentioning one of my favorite people and guests, *Dr. Karen Wyatt*, America's Spiritual MD and author of "*What Really Matters: Seven Lessons for Living from the Stories of the Dying*."

[In our interview](#), Karen tells of a dream where her angelic host comforts her by saying "Even your flaws are perfect. The tapestry of life is...perfect." *What a comforting thought to close with*. I am reminded of how many "mistakes" The Beatles made while recording...mistakes they embraced and that eventually became a beautiful part of their music and magic ([hear my interview](#) with Beatles expert David Dedrick).

*So embrace your mistakes and give yourself a hug from me while you're at it*. Thank you again for signing up for the newsletter. I hope to make it worth your while to read from time to time.

*BW*

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"And in the end, the love you take, is equal to the love you make."

Lennon & McCartney