

Episode 18: Conversations on Death & Dying for the Sandwich Generation with Maureen Kures [unedited]

Christy Keating 00:08

Hi, friends and welcome to the Heartful Parent Podcast. I'm your host, Christy Keating. In this podcast, we talk about it all, our parenting, our partnering, and our professional lives, because they are all a part of us. And we were never meant to do this alone

Christy Keating 00:41

Hello, parents Hello, hello. Welcome back to the The Heartful Parent podcast. I've got a really interesting conversation on deck for you today. And it may be one that when you first sort of think about it, or hear what it's about, you may go ooh, I'm not sure I want to talk about that. And I would understand that because most of us do not like talking about death and dying. And you may also say, why are we talking about death and dying on a parenting, partnering and professional life podcast? Well, I think the reason will become abundantly clear as we go. But I would so invite you to open your mind and heart to this important topic and this really phenomenal guest.

Her name is Maureen Kures And she has over 35 years as a registered nurse in oncology, bone marrow transplant, plant, ICU and hospice. Throughout her nursing career, she was privileged to provide end of life care for many, many people. And when she ended her nursing career, she became the founder and CEO of radiant mourning, m-o-u-r-n-i-n-g. And as the CEO of radiant morning, she is on a mission to guide families to decide, document and discuss their final chapter plans to bring peace to those who live on right those who are left behind. Too often, she saw the devastation that occurred when families hadn't had candid conversations with those who matter the most. And she knows that it can be different when we talk about it and when we plan for it. Maureen is a certified advanced care planning facilitator with Honoring Choices Pacific Northwest, before I go solutions based in the UK, and is also an end of life doula with the gentle passage doula collective, she has so much wisdom in this space.

And so in this conversation, we really dig into two primary things. And the first is how do we talk to our aging parents and relatives, especially for those of us who are in the sandwich generation, right, stuck between taking care of our parents and taking care of our kids. And I shouldn't maybe stuck isn't the right word. But sometimes it can feel that way. Right? And so we talk about what are the conversations that we need to be having with those aging family members, to make sure that we are honoring them and their wishes. And then we turn the conversation to what are the conversations that we can and need to be having with our children at all the different stages that they are, you know, the conversation is obviously different for a five year old and a 25 year old, but what Maureen shares is that our children,

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even our young children are not just capable of understanding and talking about death, but that it's important that we do that with them, to remove the fear and the sort of taboo nature of it. I love this conversation. Maureen's shares some beautiful stories. I share a few stories. And I hope you enjoy it. Maureen, welcome to the heartfelt parents podcast.

Maureen Kures 04:04

Oh, thanks, Christy, for having me.

Christy Keating 04:07

I am really excited to have you here. Even though I know the topic that we're about to dig into some people might be like, really, really? We're gonna listen to you talk about death for you know, 40 minutes or whatever. But yeah, I think this is such an important conversation. As you know, I know I'm preaching to the choir, you know, that?

Maureen Kures 04:28

I do. I think it's an important conversation to you know, that's why I have them. But it is a taboo topic that no one likes to talk about.

Christy Keating 04:36

Yeah. I want to start from the very beginning, which is really asking you how in the world did you end up talking about this all the time and having this be the focus of your professional life?

Maureen Kures 04:50

I'm a nurse and my first job out of nursing school that I could get was working on an oncology unit. and I was terrified because I came from a family that didn't talk about death and dying. When someone died, we went to the funeral. But we didn't talk about grief, we didn't talk about anything. So here, I was going to think that I'm working with dying people, I'm gonna get out of here as fast as I can. But what I found was that it wasn't as scary as I thought. And that it, it really changed my perspective. And so my whole nursing career, I wanted to be a flight nurse, I had it all mapped out down to, you know, each year when I was going to do and it just went out the window, because I fell in love with this community, this death and dying wasn't as scary. So all of my nursing career pretty much, except for a little stint in pediatrics, where my kids were young, really was around end of life nursing. I never thought it would be.

Christy Keating 05:52

Yeah, I can't imagine that's the kind of thing most people go into their nursing careers thinking that they're going to do, right. And then I know that you're not actively nursing. Now, obviously, we you are now helping people with this, these conversations that have to take place at the you know, during this end of life, period, or, or in anticipation of the end of life period. I want to hit in two different directions today. Okay, as we talked about this, so the first, and you and I were talking a little bit, you know, off the air before we hit record on this, but I am one of the many, many people that is in, you know, what's

called that sandwich generation where I have aging parents and family members. And I have young kids. Right. And for myself, in particular, I don't have any siblings, I don't have any cousins. Like there's no, it's just me and my husband, to take care of my, you know, two parents and my three aunts. And that's really, that is scary. It's not the death is necessarily so scary. But being responsible for that is really scary. So I want to start with, you know, because I'm certainly not the only one in that position, what 10, those of us who find ourselves there do to make things easier? And what conversations do we need to be having with our loved ones who are at various stages of the aging process?

Maureen Kures 07:29

Right away, I would address that elephant in the room with your parents. I don't know if you talk to them about these issues at all. And a lot of people, I don't know how old your parents are, I have an 86 year old mother that doesn't like to talk about any of this. I've got my affairs in order, but she does. I mean, she'll tell me that all the time, but she doesn't want to address it, she doesn't want to talk about it. So I would get your parents together and say, you know, mom and dad, here's the deal. It's me, and I want to make sure that as you're aging, I can honor what you want. And the only way I can do that is to know what you want.

So I want to know, I you might already know this, do you have advanced directives done? You know, do you have that power of attorney? Do you have your estate planning done? Can we have a family meeting? If they're resistant to that you might wait and tell? Either someone that they're close to dies? Or maybe a celebrity who just recently died? Henry Belafonte I think yes, I think you know, Henry Belafonte just died or President Carter's in hospice. If that was you, how can I make sure I support and honor you? Can we start having those conversations? Because it's just me, I don't have any siblings and and I'd really like to be able to do to honor your wishes. Yeah.

Christy Keating 08:54

You know, I am so lucky in the sense that both of my parents are like, I have a pretty good sense of what they want. We do talk about this. And having known you for a number of years, I've made sure that I have talked to them. And as an attorney, I made darn sure that they had a will and all of those things in place. I've had perhaps less explicit conversations with my aunts who I will also have some responsibility for. And I know there are a lot of people listening to this who are thinking I have no idea what my parents want. I have no idea if they have a will, I have no idea if they have an Advanced Directive. I don't even know what an Advanced Directive is. Right. Right. Are those folks? What again?

So you've just given some great suggestions about saying, hey, you know, using current events or a friend who has died? What do we do when those people that we love say, that's not you know, something to the effect of it's none of your business? I've got it figured out. Right? Because there's also this taboo about talking about money and You know, that sort of, I think plays into all of this? And maybe you can talk about that a little bit like, how do we know that

Maureen Kures 10:04

You're speaking my mom's language. You know, that's that generation where you kept everything close to the vest, you did not talk about your finances with anyone, you did not talk about grief, it's really can be challenging. So with my mom, I'll just use I'm going to use my mom as an example. It's been very challenging over the years, because I know that I'm the executor of her will I have four siblings? And I know that I am. I think my brother and I are co executors, which I don't know about co-executors, but I definitely discourage co Power of Attorney for healthcare. Yeah, it is not a good idea. But I'm her healthcare decision maker, and she won't talk to me.

So when something happens, just COVID, let's just take COVID, let's hope we never go through anything quite like that again. But if there is, if your parents won't talk to, you got to respect that, because it's their right to talk to you or not. And if there's any, any little crack in the wall that you can squeeze into, you know, if there's maybe a health diagnosis, or maybe find out that their blood pressure was high at the doctor's office, that I would start, gosh, mom and dad, you know, I worry, I'm a sandwich generation person. And if you don't know what that is, that was my ideal target market. When I first started my business, I thought, that's who I am. Everyone should be talking to their parents about this. But that's not who really, parents don't always want to talk to their kids about it. But if you can say, you know, I have my kids to worry about. And I'm also really concerned about you, I want to make sure I do right by you, or me and my siblings, we you know, would you have a family meeting with us.

And if they say no back off, and then try again, later on with something else, if something else happens, or Aunt Millie has a health issue, you know, just keep trying, it might be that they'll never say anything. And that's okay, it's harder for the person that has to make decisions. But just keep trying keep trying in a gentle way, and really honored their response to it. My mom diagnosed with COVID, in November of 2020, she was like promising us she wasn't going out and about, my sister would catch her at the grocery store. They live in St. Louis.

Maureen Kures 12:32

But she ended up with COVID. And so I called her and I said, you know, Mom, it's off the table now for you, you cannot not talk to me. Because five hours from now you might not be breathing, and I need to know what you would want. So I laid out three scenarios for her. If you're not breathing, five hours from now, you want everything done, you want to just the whole nine yards to make sure you survive ventilator everything that can be done, or you would want to try. But it would be for a specific period of time, maybe try for a week. That would be you could have even gotten on a ventilator back then. But if after a week, no improvement, you'd want to be taken off, or you want comfort measures only. And I said I'm going to hang up now. And I'm going to call you back in an hour. And I want you to think about this. Because we don't have time to not think about it now.

So I called her back in an hour. And she told me comfort measures only. And we talked a little bit about that. And she sailed through COVID Thank God. But that was the only time we've really talked a lot

about that. Yeah, exactly. She wants to age in place and die in her home. I said, Well, Mom, you've never discussed finances with us. Do you have the financial means to do that? You know, because how can we support you to be able to age in place, that means you'd have to bring in a caregiver because she didn't want I mean, my sister and my mom love each other dearly, but kill each other. And she hates the weather in Seattle. She's a Southern California native never will leave. So I said, that gives us the option of bringing in a caregiver, and that costs money. So let's talk about that. And she did open up a little bit. But so when those opportunities arise if you have to be forthright, because it's something serious, just say I'm gonna give you three choices and call back in an hour. And then that gives them time to process it. And also it puts them in control.

Christy Keating 14:35

I love that it they still feel like you're not sort of barreling over them in that conversation. You know, as you were just describing that. So I just turned 50 And my oldest dearest friend sent me a book for my birthday called stupid things I won't do when I'm old. And it occurs to me and I I read it, I can't remember all of the different stupid things that, you know, this guy was complaining that his parents or whoever it done that he wasn't gonna do. But this feels like one of those things that I would chop like stupid things I won't do personally, is not talk to my kids about this. You know, I know that there's generational reasons for that. But I have to imagine that was also super stressful for you.

Maureen Kures 15:24

It was really stressful for me. And, you know, I have three siblings, and we all get along really well. But we all have different outlooks and different levels of emotion. And I said to my mom, okay, now that you've told me that, will you send out a text message? So everyone has it in writing? That if anything happens to you, during COVID, this is what you'd want? And that's what you've instructed me to do? I have the power to make the decision. But I want to keep peace with my siblings, too.

Christy Keating 15:56

Yeah. You know, as an only child, that's something I don't think about a lot. Although now I have more than one child. I certainly, I think it would, would occur to me, but when we don't have those conversations, it's not just about us, right? Or not, we're affecting the person who is in charge of those decisions. But also all of those relationships, because we all know, it's and we've seen the movies about it, like death, dying, inheritance, all of that stuff can get real ugly, real quick,

Maureen Kures 16:28

real fast. Yeah, it does. And, you know, it divides families for the rest of their lives. Yeah. And that's actually why I went into the business I did, I'd known for ever that I wanted people to have. I said, even if you don't get your estate planning done, which I think you should, but I mean, I was telling people for 25 years, get that healthcare power of attorney documentation completed, you just want to have that one person that can legally speak on your behalf. Because if it's someone with multiple siblings, or multiple children, and that's their next of kin, all those children are their next of kin. Yeah, and all the

children have to agree. And usually they don't, that's like, I could have seen disagreement because of emotions, where of course, we're all gonna be really emotional. When my mom dies. My dad died a number of years ago, and just the emotions then, but I don't want to ruin the relationship with my siblings. Right? Because of not agreeing on what to do with my mom.

Christy Keating 17:33

Right? And that is something that, you know, she obviously has a lot of power to remedy before it even happens. Yes. Which is why like, okay, note to self, I'm going to also make sure when the time comes that the people that need to know, you know, at this point in my life with my children young, like my husband knows, right, but eventually that will not be him as much as it will be. My my children need.

Maureen Kures 18:02

Before I started my before I had even thought of starting my business, my three sons, they're all They're all like best friends with each other, they they get along so well. And they were all either in college or grad school, and they were all heading back. And I said, we're having a family meeting because I thought I don't want you know, my husband and I just turned 55 It's time for another meeting. I said, we're going to have one every five years. You know, I said, I don't want you guys to have to guess if something happened to us. I want you to know everything from me and I told my husband we're doing this with kids, but I thought I'd get pushed back but we didn't because I've talked a lot to my kids a lot over the years about death and dying and when people have died we've talked about it and that I said I want you to know directly for me if you would ever have to make a decision on my behalf and I wanted them to know who my decision makers were and why I chose them and so we had a family meeting at the holidays I said I want four hours of your time it might take two hours it might take six but I want you to block out four hours and we actually had a lot of fun there was a lot of laughter a lot of tears mostly on my part.

Yeah, you know, I we they know where everything is they know where all the files with our insurance policies with our passwords how to access everything or estate planning and then we went through our Advanced Directives which is the power of attorney for health Care and living will and and what we would want if anything happens it because I said I don't want you guys ever like going after each other because you disagree what should be done. I don't want you to hear right for me and we're going to talk about it every so many years and then as we Your dad and I get older, we're gonna do it maybe annually or if we have a health diagnosis, right, that would be life limiting. I would do it annually or more often just so they always know my wishes.

Christy Keating 19:58

Yeah, what An incredible gift to give them I mean, maybe not the traditional holiday gift.

Maureen Kures 20:05

But you know, I found out one of my son's Okay, so we were laughing because even though my son was it had gone to college in Montana, he's like, Okay, I've gotten the like country music from living in Montana. But if I'm ever in a coma do not play country music. Yeah. We were laughing about what kind of music we'd wanted. And my middle son who played a lot of sports and had a couple of concussions, he said, If anything happens to me, I want my brain donated to Boston University CTE study so that maybe they can learn something, I would have never ever in a million years thought of that.

Christy Keating 20:41

Well, isn't that an interesting thing to think about that, you know, our kids to think they might have wishes to for what happens if something were to ever happen to them? Which is a really interesting segue into this sort of the second question that I wanted to go into today. Because death is such a difficult topic for so many people to think about, in general, to think about with relation to their parents, but then when they think about talking about death, or exposing their kids to death, it tends to shut people down. And so how do we? And this may seem like a dumb question, but why is death such a scary thing for so many of us in our culture, through hell,

Maureen Kures 21:31

Because we don't talk about it because we don't know it. Death used to be communal people died at home, and they had the family and the neighbors and the relatives all in and out and helping with the process. And then the body was laid out in the parlor for people to come pay their respects. And then with the advent of modern medicine, and antibiotics, and it's switched to save lives, instead of letting people die naturally. And so we don't, it's scary, because we don't know it. Like most people. I talked to a guy that was almost 65. And he said, You know, I've never ever seen a dead body. And I said, most people haven't. Yeah, open casket funerals very often anymore. I'm Catholic. I haven't been an open casket funeral in 40 years, probably.

And there's mostly cremation. There's other forests. And but people, you know, we don't know death. So it scares us. And but I'll tell you kids are not afraid of it. Yeah, they're not afraid of it. Like parents or parents are afraid to talk to their kids. But the kids aren't afraid of it. Like we, you know, I'm going to share a story. I have a nephew who's 30 Now, but he was I think, nine years old, and he was visiting us and my husband is a cardiologist. And we were at dinner, and he was saying uncle Peter, do any of your patients die? And my husband talked around it? And then he said, But Uncle Peter, do any of them die? Oh, Peter, you know, another story talked around it. And on the third time, he said, But do any of your patients die? said yes to him. Some of them do. You know, he deals with older people. And as we age, we're eventually going to die, all of us will eventually die.

So yes, some of his patients do. And he's like, oh, okay, great. You know, and he went on with the next conversation, Ali want to know, and it really just hit home again, how kids aren't afraid of it. They just become afraid because we make them afraid to talk.

Christy Keating 23:28

But, you know, there are so many times in doing the work that I do and in hosting this podcast that I've been like, oh my gosh, parallel pellet parallel parallel. So it feels to me like the same thing in talking to kids about sex. Right? for them. It's just information. Right? It's just part of life. And you know, and they it's not a big deal, especially when we start with them when they're young. And yet we are so Oh, you know, panicky about talking about it. And it strikes me that talking about about money, which, you know, I interviewed John Alvarado on this podcast about money. And, you know, that's one of those things it's so hard for parents talk to their kids about and this feels like yet another one, that there's all these taboos, and we have all these fears. And the kids are like, yeah, just information. It's just information.

Maureen Kures 24:19

It's just information. You know, I always say with kids, get them goldfish, that is the best way to teach about death because those things rarely do they live long. I know some can. But you know, they're gone in a week to a month or whatever. And so we used to have the burial. And we go do the whole little funeral ceremony, but he teaches kids about death. I think that's one of the good things about animals. It's hard, but that's why I think goldfish you can't get really attached to a goldfish like you can a dog or a cat.

Christy Keating 24:49

True. Okay, this is totally making me giggle as you're mentioning goldfish, because I just have to share this story. So when my older daughter was in kindergarten When we got her a goldfish, or, or if we had a fish tank, I don't know if it was a goldfish, some kind of fish for her birthday, and she knew that fish lived in water. Right? What she didn't know. And what I apparently didn't explain is that fish actually have to be in water all the time. I walked in to her bedroom, and the her fish was in the tank, and it was dead. It was not doing well. It wasn't. I don't think it had died yet, but it was not doing well. And I was like, oh, you know, she'd had this fish for a few days. Oh, my God makes me what happened? Well, I took it out to play with it. She says, and I felt terrible. I felt really, really guilty about this word fish. Because it was my failure to communicate this critical information. But that was her first experience with death. And I giggle about it because it's just funny and horrifying at the same time. But it was also really a great learning experience for her about, sometimes things happen to our bodies. And we can't continue Right, right.

Maureen Kures 26:22

Yeah, I just would encourage any parent if child asks a question, answer it, that's age appropriate for them. You know, they they really do have such a curiosity. Yeah, I know, I was sheltered so much from all that I knew, like I was in second grade when my grandpa died. And I knew he was, well, I had the concept of dying, but I didn't really have any idea what it meant. And I knew he's sick, and something was gonna happen. But he had made my grandmother go out and buy this little brown fur coat. You know, I grew up in Southern California. I don't know why I ever had a brown fur coat. But I had wanted

this I had told him about it. He was sick in bed in the heart. I don't know if he's in the hospital then. But so then I got it in my mind. But I'm gonna wear that brown fur coat. Because if I do, he'll never die. Even though I had no idea what dyeing was. So I just, well, pretty soon he died, and he wasn't there anymore. And I couldn't understand it. Because I've worn my brown fur coat every single day. And Jill, and I think how different it would have been if my mom, it was her father had just sat me down and talked about what was happening with him.

Christy Keating 27:33

Yes, and yet, and I think there may be parents listening, saying, I mean, that's a cute story. And it's also kind of sad, because you're right, nobody talked to you about what that really meant.

Maureen Kures 27:44

And then no one talked to me about it after like, we went to the funeral. And then that was it. And that was the end of it. And I loved my girl. But I still have that brown fur coat hanging in my closet. Oh, my goodness back in my closet. I just think I might not have been as afraid of death. As I was at 22 getting my first nursing job.

Christy Keating 28:04

I had never seen a dead body for many, many years. I remember, I did attend one open casket funeral, early on in my legal career and was just did not even know what to do with that. And then I had to attend autopsies and homicide scenes. And that gives you a whole different perspective on Yes, death in the body. But I knew that it was one of those things that I knew I needed to do something different than was done for me. I wasn't really sure what that was. And so when my grandmother was dying, about five years ago, she lived on the East Coast, and I ended up going out to be with her and taking my two girls with me mostly out of necessity, you know, because I didn't have childcare and my husband was trying to work and I just quit my, my law job and and then we all ended up my husband was there my parents and my two girls who at the time were not quite two and eight, I think nine were with me as my grandmother died.

And they saw her sort of go from lucid and talking with us and having a meal to, to actually being in the room when she died. And I thought that would be a terrifying, horrible experience. And one it was such a privilege for me to sort of Usher her into that, you know, into her death, but also for my children. Yeah, so to see that and to be a part of that. And to talk be talking about it. It took weeks my grandmother was very stubborn. And now I think about that as such a precious wonderful time. But I often recount that story to people and they think oh my gosh, I would never let my kids watch somebody die. And so I'm sort of curious from that. All the work that you've done with death and all the families that you've worked with, you know, what should families do in that circumstance,

Maureen Kures 30:08

I think they should do whatever they feel comfortable with. But I would highly encourage, like, what a gift you gave your kids, it will help take the fear away from them. And as people die, they won't be so afraid. My kids went to a small school, but they had a principal that died. And no one you know, they did have meetings, parent meetings, and about how to handle it. And the parents were terrified of talking to their kids about it. But then my, to my youngest son, his fifth grade class, in the years that he went through eighth grade, three of the parents between fifth grade and eighth grade died, it was fifth grade, and seventh grade died, two women, one of them was my best friend here in Seattle.

But I remember being at this parent meeting, and it was a religious school. So we had the priests there. And parents were just like, Oh, we don't know what to say. They're asking if we're going to die. And and everyone was just in a state of heightened emotion and fear. And I remember saying, What did you say to them? Oh, I told them no, absolutely not, we're not going to die. And I said, well, but there is the possibility that we will die. And I said, so I've had the same conversation with my kids. But I had had it all along. But I said, you know, I told them, there's the possibility that I will die, or your dad will die before you graduate from high school, but the probability is very, very low.

Most likely, we are both going to be alive and well by the time you graduate from high school, but there's always that possibility. So ask me what questions you need to ask. And we'll talk about it. And we had a great conversation. And so as I even saw some their friends, like being really fearful about this, my kids were like, oh, there's your parents, there's a good possibility. But I mean, there's the possibility, but probability is really low. So hearing I repeat what I said, and then they were talking to them, but watching the fear in these kids, that it could happen to their parents, but not addressing it in a way that they can understand was really hard to watch. And I think like just going back that kids can handle more than we give them credit for.

Christy Keating 32:25

Yeah, that's just really drives home for me the idea that, oftentimes in our attempt to protect them, we might be increasing their anxiety and their fear and their worry. And nobody, you know, if I asked any parent, if I said, Well, do you want your kid to feel really anxious and worried and fearful as they move through life? I don't know a single parent that would say, yeah, that seems like a great idea, right. But sometimes the way that we avoid that is counterintuitive, especially in our culture, where we don't talk about this.

Maureen Kures 32:58

Well, I'm going to share a quick story about the two mothers that were mothers in my youngest son's class of kids in my youngest son's class. And one of them, as I said, was my closest friend from the first day we met when our kids were in preschool. And my oldest son and her oldest son, were good friends. I mean, they were best friends. They still are very close. The day she was diagnosed with cancer. I said, Do you Do you want me to help talk to your kids? No, no. I'm gonna be okay. They'll know. They

know I'm sick. But I'm not going to die from this. So I'm not going to talk to them. Well, then my son. I mean, she was like the second mom to all of my sons. But my son came and said, Mom, this is G. She really sick. And I said, well, she's been diagnosed with cancer. And, you know, luckily, it's one that she has a good chance of surviving. Well, she didn't have a good chance. she relapsed after there's chemo, but she would never talk to her kids about what was happening to her.

And I said, you know, Barbara, I'll help you. I'll do this. I, you know, we can role play so that it'll be easier for you. Nope. There. I am not dying until her like final lucid breath that she took. She still denied that she was dying and never talked to her kids about that. And watching her 11 and 14 year olds struggle through and then another mom in the class that I didn't really know so well. She died of cancer the following summer. And one of my friends was driving with her son that was between second and third grade, I guess. And they were driving by this cemetery in our area. And this little boy said to my friend, you know, that's where my mom's buried. And my friend said, really? And he said, Yes, she wanted us to know where her physical body would be in case we ever missed her. And that we could go there and be With her physical body, but really, her soul lives in us forever. And so she told us really, she's going to be in our hearts and our souls forever. And that will we can talk to her anytime because she lives in us.

But if we needed to be near our physical body, we could go there. And I was just like, as my friend was telling me, she's like, why couldn't our friends say that? And they said, because it would have been admitting death. But watching those two kids of the woman who had the courage to have that, I don't know how she did it, that courageous conversation her kids, you know, sure, there were moments that it was hard for them. But they grew up with a whole different perspective of death and dying than my friend's kids did. And so to watch that was really hard. They all come out on the other side, but it was a hard journey. And I think, Gosh, what would I have done? I mean, we never know what we did. But I, I always hoped that I would have been more like that woman that shared what was happening with her and helped her children prepare.

Christy Keating 36:11

Yeah, I mean, those stories are both heartbreaking, because of course, you never, children are not supposed to lose their parents. At a young age. Parents are not supposed to lose their children at a young age, right?

Maureen Kures 36:24

That's not the way it's supposed to go. That's not that natural way.

Christy Keating 36:27

But again, and I think, you know, the, the word that keeps coming up again, and again, in this conversation today is that idea of gifts. Right? That was a gift that that Mom gave to her children, you know, the the family for our family meeting that you had, maybe as I said, maybe an unconventional

holiday gift, but a gift nonetheless. And so I'm walking, like, as I'm thinking about this, for me, from my perspective, and I, I don't want to decide what anybody else should do. But it certainly felt like a gift to, to me and to my children to share my grandmother into death. And so I'm sitting here thinking to myself, or what are the next gifts? With in this area that needs to be given? Right? What conversations need to be had with my parents, with my children with my, you know, husband?

Maureen Kures 37:24

I really think the more that we can gather family, I mean, now you it's just you and your parents and your aunts. But gather them together and say I want to I just want to gather you together and talk about this. And you know what? When the time's right, I want to bring my kids in and have them present for part of it for what's right for their age. You know, if they're late teenagers, young adults bring them in, because they can handle it. And then they feel like they're part of the conversation. And they they'll have a better way of handling things as life progresses, because life's gonna progress for all of us. None of us know when our we're going to take our last breath, where we're going to live our last bout of life, but the more we can talk about it, the more we can have the hope that it's gonna go the way we want, and that those around us will have peace with it. You know, there's grief, no matter what people are gonna grieve, whether they're young, whether they're old, whether they're sandwich generation, when someone that matters to us dies, we're gonna grieve, that's just the natural process.

But to be able to grieve in a healthy healing way, is so much better than grieving with regret, I should have done this, I should have done that. If only if only, we're going to always have a little bit of that I always say regrets sort of unnecessary if we say that things we need to say and do the things we need to do. But there's studies that people that have really engaged hospice, in their end of life early on, not for the last week or two, which is what most people onboard hospice, but really embrace the whole hospice experience. They work through that very emotional grief, in a healthier way, they come out of it with a healthier outlook than those that don't, that don't have these conversations that don't know like my uncle. I was his healthcare decision maker. And it was really hard. He was 87 and a half he moved down to Palm Desert and just dry up driven up to Seattle two weeks before he died. He didn't wake up one morning, and we had had so many conversations about what he would want, even though we thought he'd lived to 100 driving up and down the West Coast playing golf and everything. It was easy for me to tell the doctors even in my grief at knowing that my beloved uncle was not going to be of the This world much longer. The doctors wanted to do surgery and go in and evacuate a brain bleed that he had. And I kept asking them questions, will he be able to live alone? And independently? Will he be able to play golf, Willie, they kept saying no, but we might be able to get him speaking again, I'm like, that's not good enough. He gave me very clear instructions on what was acceptable and unacceptable for him if I could possibly make that happen.

And so it was very hard, very emotional. But it was such a gift he gave me because I knew exactly what he wanted. And I can stand firm, with that doctor that was trying to get me to do something else to say, No, I have to honor this is what he wanted. And this is what I'm honoring. And his daughter, he chose

me because he knew it would be hard for his daughter. You know, it was a great gift for both she and I, because she was on board. But she didn't have to have that conversation with the doctor, she didn't have to be the one making that decision. And that's the gift that parents give to their adult children. It's the gift that we adult children give to our younger children and to those that matter most to us by letting them know our wishes. So I think get those decided, have the family conversations gather in anyone that you consider family, those that matter most to you. And to share.

Christy Keating 41:18

That is such a lovely note to end this conversation on and sort of wraps up so beautifully that theme that we kind of stumbled on here, which is gifts. I have to add to that and say, Maureen, it's been a real gift to have you here talking about this with us because it's not something we talk a lot about. And I think we all are walking I know I'm walking away from this thing. Even with all the things I know and the things that I've done, there are still some conversations I know that needs to be had. So thank you. Thank you for being here.

Maureen Kures 41:53

Thanks for having me, Christy.

Christy Keating 41:56

Alright, y'all, I hope you enjoyed that conversation with Maureen. You know, as I said at the beginning, I know that it can be really difficult to talk about death and dying, particularly in the context of our personal lives, right, like our parents, our children. That's not always a fun conversation. But I hope that we made it maybe a little bit lighter for you.

I feel terrible because Maureen and I were talking and I was so wrapped up in her stories and in her just gentle, loving generous nature, I neglected to give her the chance to share a really important resource that she has available for you. So if you go to start the talk now.com You can download her Starter Guide which is entitled, does speaking of dying scare you to death, seven prompts to get the conversation started. It is a fabulous, useful download that really can help you if you know that there are conversations you need or want to have with, you know those people in your life who are aging. And I think it can also help all of us as we think about the conversations that we would like to have, when the time is right with our own children right about our aging.

I would love to get the word out about this podcast and all our amazing guests to as many parents and caregivers out there as we can be sure to like and rate this podcast. I'm so grateful to all of you who have shared five star reviews so far.

Keep sending out the love.

And with that, I will sign off for the week and I will see you next week. Take care.