

# A Soul Departs

BY JENNIFER BRODIGAN



© iStockPhoto/TheaDesign

**I**F YOU HAVE COMPANIONED a loved one through the end of their physical life, you are familiar with some aspects of the journey. Some are painful, while others are joyful expressions of the most intimate demonstration of love that we can share with another person. I want to give some perspective about how Reiki can provide comfort as the time to depart approaches by sharing my story of walking the end-of-life experience with my dad.

In everyday life, we don't openly talk much about the death of our physical bodies. It's going to happen; there's no way around that. Since it's an eventuality of life, why are most people so frightened by the process and hide themselves

away when someone they know has entered their closing chapter? To spend the final months, weeks, days, hours and minutes with a person whose life is ending is very much like being a midwife waiting for the birth, the rebirth. It is a beautiful experience, a great gift given and received by those intertwined in this dance of the soul.

At times, I can comfort and give Reiki to end-of-life patients and their loved ones in the Oncology Department at our local hospital in Salem, Oregon. I enjoy being part of that phase of life and the letting go of unfinished business that often holds the dying person's soul from returning home to the heavenly

realms. It might sound morbid to hear that I would enjoy giving Reiki to the terminally ill and their family. It's not scary or morbid; it's a sacred journey. It's different than what we experience in our private Reiki practices.

If the thought of spending the last moments of life with someone whose soul is about to depart freaks you out, give yourself grace and know that you are perfect as you are at this moment in time. You possess other talents that the world needs, polish your gifts to the best of your ability and use the unique gifts God gave you to their fullest.

If you can hang in here with me as I tell you a story, maybe, you will see a glimmer of the beauty in walking the end-of-life experience with someone you love when their time to depart approaches.

Dad was my biggest Reiki fan and the first person to receive Reiki through me after I completed Reiki I&II the first time. During that Reiki session, Jesus appeared in all his glory to strengthen us for a family tragedy that came a few days later. Over the years since then, Jesus made his presence known during other Reiki sessions. Sometimes Dad would be the one aware of his presence; at other times it was me. Miraculous experiences of the mystery of God—experiences that human language cannot describe.

In May 2018, my dad received a diagnosis of late-stage esophageal cancer. Dad at age 82 was no longer the 6-foot, 4-inch giant outdoorsman I grew up with, but he was still strong in will and immensely proud. Dad didn't want anyone to see him as he became sicker and weakened, so he asked for a promise that I not tell my kids, grandkids or others in our family. Dad didn't want peo-

ple to look at him with sad eyes or try to convince him to attempt conventional poisonous treatments that would have caused useless suffering. He wanted the quality of life over quantity of life. I honored his wishes, and we didn't tell our family until several days before he passed. Yes, that was a heavy promise to carry, but I understood, respected and accepted why he wanted it that way.

Dad lived over an eight-hour drive away. During times when I couldn't be with him, we shared distant Reiki. Reiki was the only treatment that brought him relief from the pain and constant spitting up. Cancer of the esophagus causes the spitting up of vast quantities of really, repulsive fluids, so most of the time he kept a spit container in hand. During one of our nighttime distant Reiki sessions utilizing a video phone call, we were so connected that he didn't realize that I wasn't sitting next to him.

Dad was laying back in his recliner; the coughing and choking were diminishing as he floated deeper into the Reiki energy. Without opening his eyes, he picked up the spit bottle from between his legs to hand it toward where he thought I was sitting. As he passed the bottle toward me, he said, "Honey, I'm sorry to interrupt. Over on the kitchen counter next to the coffee making there's another cup like this one. Will you take this and get me a clean one?" "Dad, I would if I was with you, but I'm in my home." He opened his eyes, looked around his living room and said, "Wow! I was out of it, wasn't I? It felt like you were right here." We laughed the whole time as he made his way to the clean bottle and back to his chair. Having Reiki skills to share is a tremendous blessing of comfort to both the giver and the receiver.

On Thursday, September 6th, I drove to Dad's thinking that there was enough time remaining that I would come home the following Monday, work two days

and return to stay with him until the end. His condition had dramatically changed since I had been there two weeks before. I did not go home. He passed twelve days later. Those final twelve days were divinely orchestrated, filled with answered prayers and special moments. One of my prayers had been to be with Dad when it was time for his soul to transition on and that there would be no interruptions or distractions of tending to the needs of anyone other than my dad.

During the first few days of my return, Dad was able to walk. As an outdoors person, being cooped up in the house was not healthy for his mind. Each day we'd go for drives to one or the other of the two nearby lakes or drive through neighborhoods in which he grew up. Outings down memory lane for each of us; spending precious quiet time together as life slipped away. Merely being quiet with a loved one while they face the reality of their mortality is a powerful act of love for both people—a two-way exchange. I give you the quiet, loving companionship you need to allow you the space necessary for life's pleasures, happy memories, mistakes, regrets and unfinished business to be spoken and released. You give me the gift of being the one entrusted to listen to your most inner thoughts.

All too soon the strength to go for drives was gone, followed by the strength to get out of bed. The time came to tell our family and his friends, most of whom hadn't suspected that his dramatic weight loss and spitting were due to illness since Dad had told them it was a side effect of a new diabetic medication that he was trying. Now everyone in his life was hurting and in need of explanations, questions answered and comforting conversations.

As we entered the bedridden phase a morning routine developed. Each morning and night I would wash his

face, neck, hands and wrap his feet in hot wet towels to temporarily massage away the diabetic nerve pain. It was humiliating for him to accept that level of care, but each time the first hot, wet towel touched his skin, Mr. Bigger and Tougher than John Wayne could ever be, melted into sighs of relief and gratitude. That loving care is as much, if not more, of a gift to the giver than the receiver.

I had given Dad Reiki so many times each day that I no longer could distinguish a beginning or end to it. Reiki doesn't require a formal declaration of, "I'm going to give you Reiki now, or I'm done giving you Reiki." During that time of our journey, we were in a constant state of prayer and Reiki. Each time I helped him to the bathroom or helped him put clothes on or off and cleansed him, it was with the grace of prayer and Reiki. Sometimes I just sat next to him to soak up the Reiki energy that flowed into both of us. It sustained us during this time of complete mental, physical and emotional exhaustion.

On his final morning, the rattle in his chest was louder; I could hear it from my bed. It had been a long run of nighttime up and down and listening. The end was near, he could only partially open his left eye to look at me. Speaking was no longer possible. He struggled to move his shoulders, sore and stiff from lack of movement. I sat on the bed at his left side to lean over him to rub his shoulders. When I couldn't bend over him any longer, I laid next to him and rubbed his head, neck, shoulders and chest.

Words weren't necessary to communicate how good it felt to be touched; he melted into my loving caresses. Human touch is powerful medicine, an ointment like no other. At this point in our journey, I didn't knowingly give him Reiki. I wasn't sure that I could be a pure conduit for the energy. To be a pure conduit

we must get out of the way and put our will aside. I doubted my ability to detach from the outcome. I didn't want my Daddy to leave, nor did I want the suffering to continue. Fill him with all the love I could give was the answer to my dilemma. Reiki is love, Divine love. We had spent so many days immersed in Reiki and Divine love, that there was nothing more for me to do.

When I felt it was time to move on to our morning bathing routine, he struggled to move his left hand. I knew what he wanted, no words needed. I put my hand in his. He firmly squeezed my hand, once, twice, three times. One, *I*; two, *love*; three, *you*. He could not open his eyes; he could not speak perceptible words. That was his final physical communication with me. *I love you*. He didn't need to tell me how good the washing and massage felt. It was a mutual exchange—the communication of love. It was a day of resting and waiting, of being in attendance to his soul.

At 9:35 p.m., he breathed his final breath in this lifetime. Dad and I have shared many lifetimes; surely there will be more. Our soul is eternal, an aspect of God without end. It is only our physical bodies that have an end date.

I sat on the edge of the bed talking with him, crying, praying and listening for Divine guidance to direct me as to when the time was right to begin the ritual of honoring the vehicle that had transported his soul throughout this lifetime. My prayers answered I had the luxury of all the time I needed to slowly perform this ritual without the distraction of having to tend to the needs of others.

When the time was right, I filled a glass bowl with warm soapy water and slowly washed his head, tenderly wiping the creases around his eyes, nose, ears and mouth—working my way down his neck, shoulders, arms, hands and each finger, drying him along the way. Down his legs, feet and each toe, I lovingly cleaned him while giving thanks for the lifetime of memories shared.

I repeated the process slowly with lotion. All the while, feeling and sensing the detachment process of the soul. Being mindful and fully present, giving the soul as much time as it wanted or needed before moving on. The soul can linger for quite some time; it's a process not to rush, if possible. With the cleansing completed, I crossed his arms over his chest, straightened the bedding and tucked him in.

The men from the funeral home had the same reaction upon entering his bedroom as had the hospice nurse who had arrived earlier—each of them had let out a loud sigh before they said, "It feels so good in here. He looks so peaceful." Prayer answered.

I was leaning against the back of the couch, about six feet from Dad's bedroom door as they removed the gurney upon which his body laid. As they moved passed me, Dad's energy trail literally knocked me onto one foot. I instantly thought, "No! I didn't wait long enough!" As soon as that thought passed through my mind, I heard Dad say, "Catch you on the flipside, Hun!" Oblivious to others in the room, I responded aloud with an offhand, "Catch you on the flipside, Dad!" ❀



Jennifer Brodigan is a Holy Fire® III Karuna® Reiki Master Teacher who lives in Salem, Oregon. She is also a certified Spiritual Director registered with Spiritual Directors International. You may contact Jennifer at [jennifer@reikithesholygift.com](mailto:jennifer@reikithesholygift.com) or (503) 881-1010. Her web site is [www.reikithesholygift.com](http://www.reikithesholygift.com).