

1. Mark your confusion.
2. Show evidence of a close reading.
3. Write a 1+ page reflection.

The 5 Most Common Regrets of the Dying—and What We Can Learn from Them

Bronnie Ware, a former palliative care nurse and bestselling author, shares the five most common regrets of the dying—and her advice on how to live a life full of happiness and joy.

Source: Bronnie Ware, Stylist.co.uk

Life has sped up. A never-ending stream of stimuli is vying for your attention every minute of the day. Some of it is fabulous and some of it is time-wasting.

So how do you decipher how to spend your time?

The answer: you face the fact that you are actually going to die one day and that your time is sacred.

The more awareness you can bring to this, the more it will support you to live well, by being true to the life that makes the most sense to your heart, not the life dictated by society or others.

To understand the sacredness of your time and to realize the power that lies in the decisions you make, it helps to learn from those who have gone before you, from those who have not made the right decisions and have spent their deathbed days in the anguish and pain of regret.

By looking at the most common regrets of the dying, as shared with me during my years as a palliative carer, you might find yourself at a turning point, one where you can recognize the power of your choice from this moment onwards.

Regrets of the Dying: I Wish I'd Lived a Life True to Myself, Not the Life Others Expected of Me

As a child, it was natural to mirror your primary caregivers. It was how you learnt. There was no real choice but to adapt to whatever their beliefs and lifestyles were. Your parents or caregivers may have made plenty of mistakes or done a lot of things right, but either way, they were living from their own life experiences and reactions, doing their best as who they were at the time.

Then the individual calling becomes more prominent, your heart awakens, and you realize that your own beliefs and preferences may not actually be aligned to those you have been raised with. And so begins the healing of realizing you are not living a life true to yourself, but rather the life that is expected of you.

Dying people realized they had not found enough courage to live true to their own heart's voice and it left them in depths of grief for a life not lived honestly to themselves.

Life is calling you now to find that courage and step into your own joy. Realise the sacredness of your time.

Regrets of the Dying: I Wish I Hadn't Worked so Hard

There is nothing wrong with loving your work, and it's brilliant if you do. But whether you do or don't, it is easy to get caught up in never switching off from it properly. This is even more true in a society whose very lifeblood is supported by technology.

Dying people learnt too late that there needed to be more in their lives than work. When it was taken away from them, there was nothing left: no identity to support them, no stimulus to inspire them, no joy.

They realized they needed more work life balance in their lives, and a commitment to other areas of their lives. Most admitted it was fear that had kept them glued to their career: fear of lack with money, fear of judgment from work peers, and fear of failure.

By creating space and also honoring other areas of life, you can bring more efficiency to your working life anyway. And of course, you then bring more joy.

Regrets of the Dying: I Wish I'd Had the Courage to Express My Feelings

When children are sad, they cry. When they're angry, they vent. When they're scared, they say so. When they're happy, they dance.

Expressing your feelings was once a natural part of who you were. As you mature you learn how to be less scared, for example. You learn life skills to help you navigate through various emotions and see things from different perspectives.

A lot of these skills support you. But some of them hinder your natural expressions, until over time, you think it is normal to never be vulnerable or express yourself honestly. Of course, this feels even more normal since most of those around you are doing the same.

It can take immense courage to express yourself, whether that is by being vulnerable and sharing your love or being strong and sticking up for yourself. But it is absolutely vital to do so if you are going to live your fullest life – the one that makes the most sense to your heart, and the one that will ensure you don't join the ranks of dying people living their last days with the heart-wrenching anguish of regret.

By facing your fear and expressing yourself one piece at a time, you can develop the habit of speaking honestly with emotional maturity. You can set yourself free and inspire others to do the same.

Regrets of the Dying: I Wish I Had Stayed in Touch with My Friends

In a world where it is almost impossible to lose contact with friends, thanks to the likes of social media, this regret may seem irrelevant. You can send someone a text to say you're thinking of them, comment on their Facebook feed or Instagram photo, or chat via Messenger.

But how long is it since you've really connected with these people in real life? How long since you've laughed together, cried together, eaten together or just hung out?

Real life connection is the essence of wellbeing. It is natural that some friends may fall away as your lifestyles and tastes change. New friends can come into your life through various channels like work, technology, sport, or shared interests such as book clubs or meet-up groups.

Dying people regretted not staying in touch with their old friends, though, because during their last weeks they wanted to reminisce, laugh about the old days, feel understood, and remember they once belonged in an easier world.

Text messages and brief contact is better than none. But making the effort for real-life time together is some of the best medicine you can give yourself for a regret-free life.

Regrets of the Dying: I Wish I Had Allowed Myself to Be Happier

Happiness is a choice – it doesn't come from being lucky. It is not a denial of the hard times. Without the contrast you can never know how strong you really are, what you can rise to, or what your potential truly is. The hard times have their purpose, to help you discover all that. But how long you choose to stay focused on the hard times and their associated stories is your own choice.

You can choose happiness in many ways. Choose to find the blessings rather than allowing others to dictate your sense of worth. Don't stay stuck in old stories. And always find things to be grateful for, regardless of your circumstances.

Every time you take ownership of your focus and steer it towards something that leaves you feeling a little better, you are opening your heart and life up to more happiness. Life is not a penance. It is a precious gift of time.

The realization that dying people had around this, and seeing how they had allowed other people to determine their worthiness for happiness, brought incredible insights to them, and heart-wrenching regret.

It is your life. Choose your own focus.

Every single decision you can make and every single snippet of courage you can find, to ensure you are living true to your own heart, takes you further away from the anguish and heartbreak of regret. And the more courageous you are, the more the world also benefits. After all, we are all in this together.

Possible Response Questions

- What are your thoughts about this nurse's insights about living a full life? Explain.
- Did something in the article surprise you? Discuss.
- Pick a word/line/passage from the article and respond to it.
- Discuss a "move" made by the writer in this piece that you think is good/interesting. Explain.