

17 Things I Learned from Carol's Death

By Rosie Finn

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In March of 2019, I watched my dear friend, Carol Trasatto, attempt to fight cancer and lose. For the two months that I was in the trenches with her, I learned much about death and dying. About life and living. Shortly after she died, I wrote a note to myself of these lessons.

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1

The dried rose, the ticket stub, the ballet toe shoes you wore in third grade, and the *Doors* poster that hung on the back of your teenage bedroom door are precious to you and to no one else.

Practice:

Release attachment to the past. These are "things" that are holding a vibration of something long gone. While pleasant memories are lovely to revisit, the stuff is holding us back. Take a couple of days to go through your collection of memorabilia and see if it brings you alive — and then ask why — and let it go anyway.

2

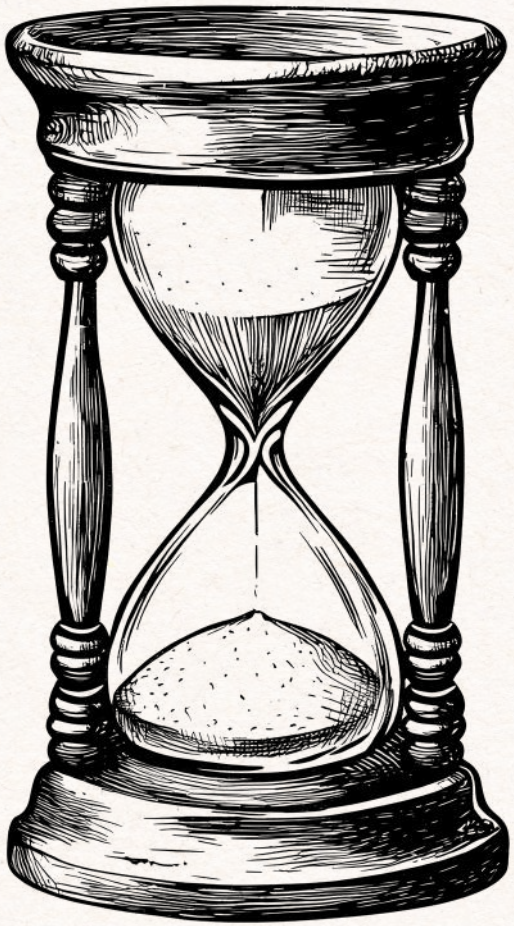


There wasn't anything about Carol (or my mother, father, sister, brother) that I found out about them *after* they died that I wouldn't have rather found out about them *before* they died. The secret lovers, the hidden treasures, the past connections to people, the magical journeys, the accomplishments — **share it now.**

Practice:

Think about the parts of your life that you have kept hidden from your close loved ones. Is there some significant story in your past that you have not shared? Something you are saving for them for after they die? Don't. Share it now. Create a celebration of life with your friends, family, mate, and dance around the fire or the Zoom chat and share. **Share what you think they will find out about you after you are gone. What will your stuff tell them? What significant thing have you been hiding?**





3

Tinctures don't last forever.

Practice:

There are expiration dates on things for a reason. Go through your medicine cabinets, pantries, and closets for expired items. If you have canned goods close to expiration, give them to the food bank. Carol, an herbalist, had gallons and gallons of tinctures I'm sure she meant to share. *Alas, we dumped and dumped for days.*







4

You will never wear that 1980s denim jacket again, or your wedding veil or the embroidered silk jacket.

Practice:

Go through your clothes and let go of things you have kept for nostalgic purposes. *Better yet, have a fashion show—online—of crazy outfits you have kept that you are ready to give to someone who will use them.*



5

Make a will. Without a will, your estate will probably go into probate. This means different things in different states. In Washington State, that means $5,000 to a lawyer, no matter how simple your affairs are. Even if only one person is clearly set to inherit your stuff, and even if you write it on a napkin, it will still go into probate, cost thousands, and take months.

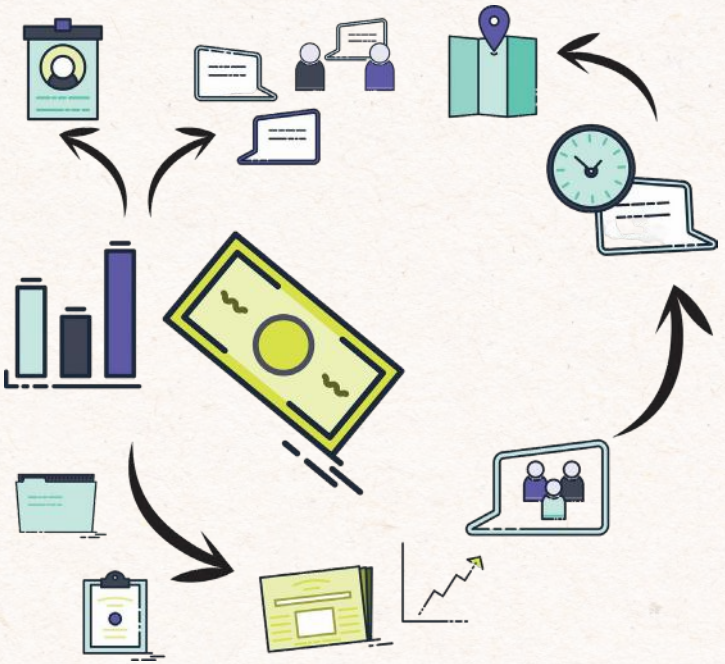


If you have under $100,000 in assets, there is a workaround that lets you avoid probate, but there is a learning curve. It is complicated; there are forms, and you will probably need to hire a lawyer anyway.
The absolute simplest solution is to MAKE A WILL.



Practice:
There are sites online to make a will. Print it out. Fill it out. Get two witnesses. Take it to a notary. *In Olympia, there is one at Ralph's.*





6

Make sure the beneficiaries on IRA's, bank accounts, and life insurance policies are up to date. Believe it or not, one of Carol's IRA's went to her ex-husband, whom she divorced over thirty years before she died (It is possible it was intentional). *The most difficult part was that her brother had to track him down.*

Practice:

Double-check your policies. Who are the beneficiaries? Consider if that is who you really want to receive your assets. No one else needs to know. This is a private matter. And if you feel like you "should" give it to so-and-so, consider this your chance to act with the highest integrity.



7

You don't need a bank deposit box for your car title. Closing out an estate is a lot of work, even one without a home. *I deeply appreciate my brother, who handled my parents' estates. Forever, thank you, Steve!*

Practice:
Simplify *where* you keep stuff. Keep important papers in two or three locations to be safe. *But five, six, or seven different hideaways are unnecessary.*

8



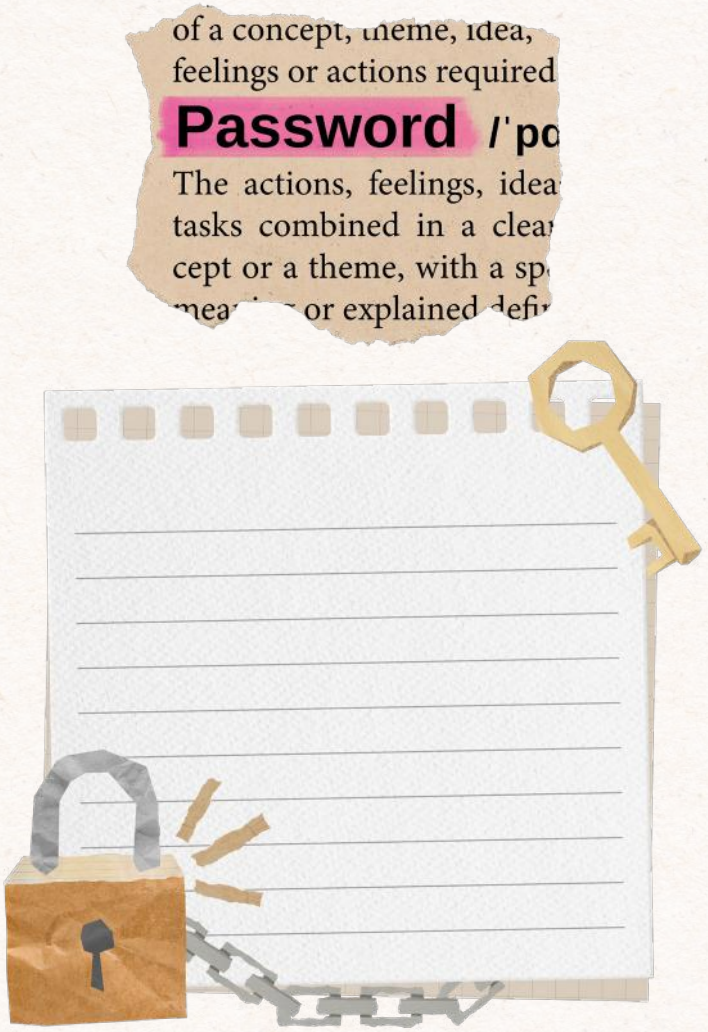
You don't need to hide your cash stash so that Sherlock Holmes can't find it. Most of us have a cash stash, especially those of us who prepped for Y2K. Carol and I were living together then, and we learned a lot about preparing for different kinds of emergencies. Having cash on hand can be helpful (although who knows where we are headed with cash).



I knew Carol had a cash stash, so of course, I looked for it. It took weeks of at least ten people clearing out her tiny home to find it. I think she would be proud. I, on the other hand, not so much. She hid it inside a can, inside a shoe box with old stuff, inside a tub with old sheets. Easily missed and easily thrown away. *If you want to hide precious valuables and money, at least leave a clue.*

Practice:
Where do you keep your cash stash? Your valuables? A portable locked safe can be a good idea. *Hidden — but tell your trusted friends where it is.*

9



Passwords! Passwords! Passwords! These days, our lives run on passwords. Many of us have found cute ways to use the same password for multiple accounts. We have systems. We have computers that remember our passwords, but that doesn't always work. There are security questions. *Thank goodness Steve remembered Carol's first car (Camaro).*

Practice:

Somewhere, write down your passwords and keep them up to date. Know that everything needs to be canceled when we die—the New York Times subscription, your scientific herbal journals, and your dental plan.

10



Make a living will with a durable power of attorney — both for health and for finances. These are two separate things. This doesn't matter after you are dead, but it is HUGELY helpful during the dying process. As we were going into the ER with Carol, we were making sure this was done for health, but we didn't do one for finances. It's so much easier to do it while you're not driving to the ER. If she had not done this, her brother, who was taking care of her ailing parents, would have had to come out. *This simple piece of paper made it so much easier for her friends and me to make decisions in the hospital during the weeks when Carol could not. If she had done one for finances, it would have made a few things easier as we cared for her. As it was, we made do with the moments when she was somewhat aware.*

Practice:
Go online and get the forms. They need to be notarized, so this takes planning and a trip to a notary.



11

You don't need to keep any records past seven years, and most things can get thrown out after three years.

Practice:
Go to **Irs.gov** and find out how long you need to keep your taxes and receipts. And recycle, burn, or shred the old ones. **Don't leave this for others to do. Papers are a pain in the butt to deal with.** Little notes, odd receipts, and papers to go through can take a lot of time. Separate important stock documents from storage unit receipts from twenty years ago. *(I won't go into too much detail here, but yes, this happened.)*





12

Our healthcare system is in disrepair. We have to advocate for ourselves or have someone advocate for us. This was a shock to me as a non-disabled, privileged, white girl. I know we are all learning this right now. Last year (2019), we had to wait over a day for a bed to open up on the cancer floor. She was already dying. Her cancer doctor, whom we met for the first time (Kaiser), told us to go straight to the Emergency Room after spending hours trying to find a bed for her anywhere within an hour's driving distance of Olympia. *Even Seattle had no open beds. It was flu season.*

> **Practice:**
> **Learn to advocate for yourself and your loved ones.** Practice asking for what you need. Clear emotional blockages to asking for help. *Practice by asking for help in simple situations — when you need directions or want to find something in the grocery store. Most of us want to help.*


Know Your Person

13

Know "your person" and know if you are another person's "person".
Marriage usually makes this clearer; however, I wouldn't assume it. Have a conversation with those you are closest to about your wishes for dying. These can change, but mostly, identify those in your life who will step into the dying support role and those for whom you will be called into the dying support role.

Carol and I have a long, complicated history. We were lovers and broke up, lived together, and then moved out. We had a business together for 17 years and were, throughout, the closest of friends. Over the last couple of years of her life, we were still dear friends, but not as close. When we stopped doing our newsletter together, I needed a real break. I pulled away from the work and from her. She told me about people in her life she thought would be there for her. I was a bit taken aback when I realized that all her other close friends were either dealing with big emergencies or didn't feel as close to her as she thought. That's the moment when I realized I was her person. Sadly (in hindsight), I was resistant at first. It took me a few days to process that all of her friends and family (cont.)

13 (cont.)

were turning to me for decisions and updates. I learned several powerful things from this experience.

First, being someone's person is always a gift. It doesn't matter who they are or when you find out. To be someone's most trusted person is a gift. It may entail a lot of work, putting off your own life or making changes you would rather not make, but there is nothing more precious. This lasts beyond the grave. It is **always** a gift.

Second, if this takes you unaware, step into it fully. Some elders have no one — you may be a distant niece or cousin. And there you are — finding yourself in the role of "their person". Say yes. Quickly and without hesitation.

> **Practice:**
> **Make an inventory of the most important people in your life.** Reach out and ask the hard questions. Find out if you are their person. Recognize your person and share that with them.



14

Death isn't scary. Watching a person die is a profound experience. Some of you have watched many people die. The breath stops. Stillness. Then the room drops in temperature as the soul transitions out of the body. *Not scary, at least not to me.*

15

Our souls stay connected to our bodies after death. Body bags, cremations, burials, and morgues matter. This surprised me. Carol walked up to the gates a few times in life — twice in the month before she died. While she was in the hospital, the chemo drugs rendered her speechless, yet she was trying to communicate. I knew her well enough to make connections and could sense what she was saying. I might not have gotten everything right, but I knew I got a lot right. Nods of her head. Peaceful expressions. Stuff found. As she was dying, I was surprised to be able to hear her so clearly — like she was whispering in my ear. *Many of you know that, as part of my work, I can often sense and connect with other souls — so this isn't scary for me. It's quite normal in my world. I'm not psychic. I trust my inner senses and have been gifted with practice with clients for over twenty years.*

After she died in the ICU at Saint Pete's, once they unplugged the respirator that was keeping her in a pseudo-state of life, the staff gave us four hours to be with her body. We washed her body in oils, and a beautiful group of women cared for her body—some of us called family and friends who couldn't be

15 (cont.)
there. I kept listening and listening to what was next.

When it was time to take her to the morgue, a kind and sweet woman arrived with a white body bag and asked if we wanted to be there while they put her body in it. At first, I thought I would just leave, but then I heard Carol—and felt fear in her soul. This surprised me. So I stayed and zipped up the bag for her. Whether this was for her or for me, in the end, my attention to the smallest considerations in her passing left me with a feeling of grace. *This was one of those moments that I am glad I stayed for.*

When I think of my out-of-the-body experiences in life, experiences that I believe are the closest thing I know to dying, I can imagine the disorientation that a soul might experience with a sudden death or just an unexpected death. *Carol did not think she was dying. Between being diagnosed very late in her experience with cancer and the discontinuity of doctors in her life, there wasn't one doctor she could turn to for understanding her chances. In light of this, she was not supported in the realization of her dying process.* She had the spirit

15 (cont.)



of a warrior and wanted to fight, and she died fighting. It was ironic that she wasn't prepared for death, since she had done Buddhist workshops on dying, had mounds of books on dying, and had even led a class on it. Her legacy in the form of her book *Conscious Caregiving* is dedicated to supporting those in dying situations. But life is ironic, right?



I had a strong feeling, especially after feeling her connection to her body still intact after death, to hold off on cremation for at least three days. The funeral home, *Funeral Alternatives of Washington,* was accommodating *(even if they questioned the decision).* As we were about to put her body into the oven, I again felt an overwhelming sense of fear coming from Carol. There were five of us there, and we started to sing. Singing is such a calming vibration for a soul. I immediately sensed her relax. *Intuitively, I felt like she still wasn't ready for that step, but Carol was never much for change. Part of her Taurus Moon-Ascendant nature.*

16

Buddhism knows a thing or two about death.

This may be obvious to many of you, but I am a Catholic, Hindu, New-Age, Swami Kripalvinanda student. Buddhism, aside from the 10-day Vipassana sit I did in 1986, is outside my wheelhouse. A few days after Carol died, I clearly heard her ask me to do a Buddhist death meditation practice for her. I knew a friend who had done this for her friend, so I asked this friend for the practice. She respectfully shared it with me. It was long and complicated, and I resisted immediately. But a day or two later, Carol asked me again so clearly to do it, and she said she had no one else to do it for her. Thus, I began. It took over two hours the first day, looking back and forth at my handwritten notes—notes with prayers and rituals and mantras and movements, gods and goddesses I'd never heard of, sounds I'd never made before. There were things to burn and bells to ring. It is a forty-day practice called *Phowa*.

I don't think I can begin to share how profound this practice was — even for me, who was less than a novice. Synchronicities connected to the intentions

16 (cont.)

and prayers happened every single day. One day, I found an old journal of hers — it was a journal she kept during a Buddhist retreat studying . . . *Phowa.* There were all her meticulous, thorough notes on the practice.
Since she took her notes during a sacred initiation, I don't feel free to share them here, especially since I am not a practicing Buddhist. But I can share that a well-intentioned layperson can do the practice, preferably one who already has a meditation practice. ***Here is an introduction to the practice by Joan Halifax.*** →

Most (all?) religions have beliefs about dying — where we go, how we go, if we go. As we enter a dying time — during this pandemic — whether we have a sense of the end of our own life or someone close to us — or have a sense of the collective "waiting for the death wave", the introductory meditations to Phowa may be deeply supportive to us and to others around us. Sometimes sensing a death wave coming can lead to anxiety. Almost all my clients have asked recently if they or loved ones were going to die. While we may still have a greater chance of dying in a car accident than of COVID-19, the feeling of







16 (cont.)
death is in the air — Jupiter (openings)-Pluto (into the underworld) — and might be all year as Jupiter goes back and forth over Pluto.

Practice:
Doing the practices that are preparation practices for dying or for the dead can help alleviate anxiety. Like going into the eye of the storm or using a homeopathic, facing what is to come *(for all of us at some point in time)* can ease the fear.

17



Community matters. One of the beautiful things about Carol and her passing was that she gathered community around her. She may have spent much time alone, but she was generous with her gifts and worked to create harmony in this world through community. As we witnessed her passing, she was rarely alone, and none of us needed to be alone in the journey with her. This was a beautiful part of her passing and is a passing gift. The circle of friends who were part of being there while she was realizing she was working with cancer again, to providing spaces for her to live during the snowstorm, to being there with her in the hospital — overnights and all, to being there in the process of her dying, to being there in the process of her after-death, to being there in the process of clearing the stuff of her life, to being there for creating a heartfelt community celebration — we did this together. We didn't leave all the decisions up to one "mate," and the sharing, the gathering, and the creativity this inspired left a lasting mark and enriched all of our lives.

17 (cont.)

So, these are some of the things I learned from Carol's death. I was surprised by the chaotic state of our health care system and how deeply we can stay connected to our bodies after death. How complicated our legal system is around death and how much work it is to clean out another person's stuff wasn't surprising as much as it was enlightening. And even as I write this, I have to admit that I have only done a few things on the list. During this quarantine, join me as I take a week to care for each item. This is a way of tending to our lives that shows consideration for those we will leave behind—hopefully not for very long. **By tending to our dying state of affairs and remembering that we can't take it with us, we tend to the people we care about most —our "persons" who will step into the role of completing our worldly karma.**

May you find yourself steeped in community,
enveloped in joy and fulfilled in a legacy of love.

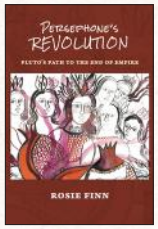


Rosie Finn

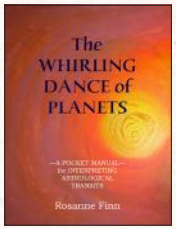
Rosie Finn is an astrologer, teacher, and author. She practiced Western and esoteric astrology for twenty years before turning to Eastern astrology, and holds the Jyotish Visharada (CVA) credential.

For 18 years she wrote the monthly newsletter *Plants & Planets* and gave monthly talks in Olympia, Washington. Her books include *Journey-work of the Stars*, *The Whirling Dance of Planets*, and *Persephone's Revolution: Pluto's Path to the End of Empire* (2024).

On her Substack, she shares insights on history, astrology, and personal anecdotes.









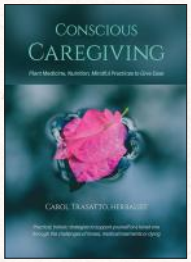
Carol Trasatto

02/27/1955 —03/24/2019

Carol was a dedicated community herbalist—teaching, writing, consulting, and promoting a holistic approach to the way we think about healing our lives.

Many knew Carol through *Radiance Herbs & Massage*, where she worked and served the Olympia community since 1992. Her well-researched plant knowledge was shared through the *Plants & Planets* newsletter and talk for 18 years, in addition to being shared at conferences throughout the country.

Carol's gift for future generations is her compassionate, practical guidance in her book, *Conscious Caregiving: Plant Medicine, Nutrition, Mindful Practices to Give Ease*, available through Amazon.





Debi Bodett

Debi Bodett is an independent freelance graphic designer living in Olympia, WA. She brings a practicing artist's approach to graphic design, primarily using a camera to collect materials.

Her work is grounded in the belief that thoughtful, inspired design can influence how we connect with people. She believes everyone is unique and has a special gift to share, and she enjoys supporting others in what they do best and empowering them on their journeys.

Debi designed a website for Rosie and Carol when they offered *Plants & Planets* and briefly helped Carol design the cover of her book.

She's a self-proclaimed resource junkie and sees value in making it easy to connect people with valuable resources.

