**The Top Five Regrets**

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Little did she ever imagine that her blog on internet would become a sensational success story in no time. Bronnie Ware began searching for a job closer to her heart and she found herself working in palliative care. During her eventful eight years as caregiver, she spent her time in tending to those who were dying of terminal diseases. They belonged to different economic status, social profile, age group, caste, creed and color but their regrets were invariably the same. Listening to their painful stories, unique and sorrowful, Bronnie’s own life was transformed. She was no longer the same woman. Later, she wrote a blog post, outlining the most common regrets that the people she had cared for had expressed. The post gained so much momentum that it was viewed by more than three million readers worldwide in its first year. At the request of many, Bronnie subsequently wrote a book, The Top Five Regrets of the Dying, to share her story. Bronnie has had a colorful and diverse life. By applying the lessons of those nearing their death to her own life, she developed an understanding that it is possible for everyone, if we make the right choices, to die with peace of mind. Bronnie expresses how significant these regrets are and how we can positively address these issues while we still have the time. The Top Five Regrets of the Dying gives hope for a better world. It is a courageous, life-changing book that leaves readers feeling more compassionate and inspired to live the life you are truly here to live.

The first of the top five regrets enlisted by Brownie was, “I wish I’d had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me”. This was the most common regret of all. When people realize that their life is almost over and look back clearly on it, it is easy to see how many dreams have gone unfulfilled. Most people had not honored even a half of their dreams and had to die knowing that it was due to choices they had made, or not made. Health brings a freedom very few realize, until they no longer have it. People fail to follow their dreams, their natural flair, their passion to pursue a career of their choice. They also can not choose their love nor can they transform their love into lifetime relationship of matrimony only because of social pressure. Our choices are dictated by others. So are our priorities in education, career and spouse. There are others who steer the course of our lives and thus superimpose their decisions. At the fag-end of our lives we sadly realize that we didn’t truly live our lives. Others did it. The second regret enumerated, “I wish I hadn’t worked so hard”. This came from almost every male patient that she nursed. They missed their children’s youth and their partner’s companionship. Women also spoke of this regret, but as most were from an older generation, many of the female patients had not been breadwinners. All of the men she nursed deeply regretted spending so much of their lives on the treadmill of a work existence.

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The third most painful regret, “I wish I’d had the courage to express my feelings”. Many people suppressed their feelings in order to keep peace with others. As a result, they settled for a mediocre existence and never became who they were truly capable of becoming. Many developed illnesses relating to the bitterness and resentment they carried as a result. Fourth sad realization, “I wish I had stayed in touch with my friends”. Often they would not truly realize the full benefits of old friends until their dying weeks and it was not always possible to track them down. Many had become so caught up in their own lives that they had let golden friendships slip by over the years. There were many deep regrets about not giving friendships the time and effort that they deserved. Everyone misses their friends when they are dying. Last but not the least, “I wish that I had let myself be happier”. This is a surprisingly very common one. Many did not realize until the end that happiness is a choice. They had stayed stuck in old patterns and habits. The so-called ‘comfort’ of familiarity overflowed into their emotions, as well as their physical lives. Fear of change had them pretending to others, and to their selves, that they were content. But deep within, they longed to laugh properly and have silliness in their life.

It’s not surprising to see what made the list as they are all things that touch each of our lives as we struggle to pay attention to and make time for things that we truly love. It’s important to remember that whatever stage we are at in life, there is no need for regret. By nursing our regrets, we only burn our blood and they provide us nothing but suffering for ourselves as we begin to allow the past to dictate how we should feel now. Instead, we can use the past as a reference point to understand what adjustments we would like to make while moving forward. The adjustments do not have to come out of pain, sorrow, regret or judgment, but simply a choice to do things in a different way. Life is a journey towards eternity and we are learning all the time. We can very quickly slow down learning process by getting stuck in the idea of regret. When it comes to making changes, we must learn to be at peace with the past and remember that every day is a new beginning and each moment is a new choice.

The regrets of the dying can certainly help us understand how sacred time is. We can realize that the pain of breaking through any amount of resistance would never be as heart-wrenching as lying on our deathbed with regrets. This can propel an ever-expanding habit of courage that has shown us how we are all more capable than we realize. We just need the courage to get out of our own way and don’t let others decide our destiny. Whether those other people are family, peers, or society, makes no difference. The utter heartache of dying with that regret, because you didn’t bring enough courage to the choices you made, is a painful way to end your life. Brownie plainly stated that witnessing this regret on repeated occasions, in people from all walks of life, was powerful beyond measure. To grasp that you made the wrong choices and then be too ill to do anything about them, is a shockingly difficult realization to accept. By realizing our mistakes, we learn and grow wiser. None of us are perfect, nor are we meant to be. So the more we understand this, the more patience and compassion we develop for other people and ourselves. We’re all just doing the best we can with individual gifts to contribute to the whole bigger picture.

There is no fixed formula for how we have to live our lives. When we stop using the successes or failures of others as a gauge, we set ourselves free to live how it makes the most sense to our own heart. We are all different and the more we embrace those differences free of judgment, the more our own heart feels confident to be heard and honored. But when we find the courage to let go of living a life not true to our own heart, we naturally become kinder to others too as we recognize our own struggles. We must live to remember that it is only through mistakes we learn. So the more we can support others to have a go, knowing they will only be encouraged not judged, the more confident they become to push through further resistance bringing them ever-closer to their own potential. Rather than seeing people as fools for having a go and failing, we can look at them with admiration for their courage and wait with joyful anticipation to see what their next attempt will be, since it will come with the wisdom of past learning. Life is certainly very sacred. We must learn to bring as much consciousness to the choices we make on a daily basis. We ought to realize that we only live once and thus we must take courageous action. We are all truly worthy of the joy which life offers us, almost every other moment. We just need to discover it within us.

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