FOUR FINAL *life lessons*

NOBODY TOLD VETERANS ... UNTIL NOW

WRITTEN BY DEBORAH GRASSMAN

Dignity® MEMORIAL

Dear Veteran,

THIS PAMPHLET IS ABOUT YOU. I have been asked to write it because I am a VA hospice Nurse Practitioner, and I have taken care of more than 10,000 veterans as they faced the end of their lives. I have seen and learned things from them that you may not know about – things that no one has previously told you. So I encourage you to let their words and lessons inform and inspire you.

The lessons veterans have taught me are a bit different than civilians. As you well know, the military training you received still exerts its influence on your life even though you may have left military service decades ago. Does it not make sense that military service might influence your aging and death too? You may have faced death before when you were in the military; death is no stranger to you. As you well know, looking death squarely in the eyes is not easy, and so people (even veterans) often avoid facing their fear of death. Paradoxically, the fear of death ends up controlling them. Think about it: if something is so scary that you can't even talk about it, then that "thing" is exerting a lot of control over you. Don't let that happen to you. The time surrounding death can be very precious. Don't waste it. In fact, USE it to take you into inward places that might surprise you with personal discoveries that you (and your loved ones) will forever cherish.

Just like in the military, preparation is the key. Let's start by looking at how military service may both help and hinder your preparation for the final chapter of your life. There are several military influences that have affected your life, but the first one that we're going to cover is probably the most pervasive.

STOICISM

One of the lessons that dying veterans have repeatedly taught

me is that stoicism is necessary in some ways and a hindrance in other ways. Stoicism is necessary on the battlefield, even essential. After discharge from military service, stoicism continues to be helpful because it allows veterans to fight hardships and also provides protection from untrustworthy influences. “Sucking it up” and “biting the bullet” are important ways to achieve self-mastery so goals can be achieved without getting diverted with every fleeting emotion that surfaces.

Ironically, veterans also say that stoic walls sometimes create problems, especially at the end of their lives. Perspectives shift when death is near. Things that seemed important yesterday fade in priority today; things that weren’t previously important now seem urgent to complete. Regrets surface; opportunities for healing emerge. Stoicism, however, might interfere with these opportunities. It might prevent veterans from experiencing feelings, expressing love and connection with others, or asking for help.

If you are facing a life-threatening illness, it is only normal to feel sad. Grief is the normal expression of loss. Tears are the natural expression of grief. You don’t need to feel ashamed of tears – there’s no need to feel ashamed of what you are going through. Rather than telling that lump in your throat to go back where it came from, consider letting the “lump” come forth through the cleansing action of tears. This will actually release energy – energy that you need to attend to important matters. If tears don’t seem to come, find another way to express the emotional pain you are feeling. The one thing you don’t want to do is to deny any emotional distress you may be feeling. Denying grief by trying to bottle it up causes you to disconnect from the part of the self that is trying to deal with the reality of the anticipated loss. When you tell your grieving self: “Go away. You’re not wanted here,” you are banishing it into isolation and loneliness. Ironically, this is the very part of yourself that is able and willing to deal with the pain of the situation. You are

actually exiling the very part of the self that can help navigate the difficulties you are facing!

Because of the military training you received, physical limitations and emotional displays might embarrass you and create fears that others will perceive you as weak. It can make you feel helpless and vulnerable. You may view “letting go” as admitting defeat or an act of surrender, something “good soldiers” don’t do. Stoic control can prevent you from acknowledging failing health, weakness, or other changes. It might mean not listening to your own body or working beyond the point that your body is saying it is tired. Anything threatening control or independence can incite anger and defensive fight/flight responses. Fear of being at the mercy of others also causes resistance. Yet, mature mental health includes identifying your needs and asking for help when it is needed. Both require vulnerability. Stoicism often keeps you from saying what you need or allowing others to meet your needs. This mask of invulnerability sometimes won’t even

allow you to admit you have needs. This attitude can cause frustration, not only for yourselves but for your families or professional caregivers who want to provide you with support and help.

Aging is a humbling experience that challenges independence and control. You lose much of your control, pride takes a blow, and independence is gradually taken away. Sooner or later, the stoic wall has to crumble. Later means fighting to the bitter end; sooner means a weary soldier is finally able to surrender to hope for a peaceful death. Daily, I see veterans let go of control, allowing themselves to become completely human, growing in humility as they learn how to ask for help and how to become a gracious receiver, discovering connection and compassion in the process. This takes courage, and it is as heroic as facing any enemy in battle.

Let me give you an example of what I mean. One day, a doctor asked me to convince a patient named Steve to attend our emotional support group. *"He's depressed,"* the doctor said. *"The group will cheer him up."*

Steve had a cancer that had spread throughout his body. His treatment had failed. Luckily for Steve, I'd grown beyond my earlier stage of trying to "cheer up" depressed patients by encouraging them to erect their stoic wall. I entered the room ready to accept his feelings, willing to explore them with him. With downcast eyes and a flat voice, he told me how alone he felt.

"I'm a fighter and my family keeps telling me to keep it up," he said. *"If I stop fighting, I'll be letting everyone down."*

Recognizing the stoic wall for the isolation it was creating, I carefully and cautiously asked, *"Are you ready to die, Steve?"*

He shrugged his shoulders noncommittally.

"You need to know it's okay to die. If your time has come, then it's a matter of getting ready," I said gently. *"Maybe you could tell your family that you're tired of fighting and that you need their help so you can die peacefully."*

He looked in my eyes for the first time, moaning, *"But I don't know how. I've never died before. I don't know how to do this."*

Slowly I drew in close to him. *"You didn't know how to be birthed into this world either, but your body knew how to bring you here. Your body has an inner wisdom. It knows how to take you back home. Trust it. Open up to it."*

He nodded for an instant, then pulled back. *"I can't,"* he said, shaking his head. *"That would be giving up. I can never surrender."*

"Surrender isn't good on a battlefield," I acknowledged. *"But this isn't a battlefield, Steve. Dying is a natural part of life. It's a very important part of life."*

Hesitantly, he nodded cautiously considering the possibility. We talked about the difficulty of preparing for death, the obstacles interfering with confronting it, and the advantages of both him and his family getting ready for it.

"Would it make it easier if I told them in your presence? Then you could talk about it together."

He smiled gratefully and told me he was expecting his daughter to arrive soon. When she did, I greeted her and let her know there was something important we needed to talk about. *"As you've probably noticed, in spite of everything we're doing, your Dad's getting weaker. He's weary. He's ready to die, but*

he's afraid he's letting you down if he doesn't keep fighting."

As I spoke, his daughter started to cry. I paused, giving her time to absorb what I was saying before I continued. *"He's nearing the end of his life, and he needs your permission to let go of the fight and open up to the reality of his approaching death. He's got a lot to face and he wants your help."*

Several months pregnant, his daughter slowly turned to her father, kneeling down before him. "*Daddy, I'm so sorry for telling you to keep fighting. I was being selfish because I didn't want you to go.*" Tearfully she explained why. "*I just wanted my baby to know you. But now I realize that he will know you because I'll tell him about you. Your love for me will be the same love I give to him.*"

Steve reached out to her and they silently held each other for a

long while. Later, they were able to talk openly and intimately about their lives together. Peace, rather than fear, prevailed during Steve's final days. The reason for the peace? Steve had the honesty, courage, and humility to open up to the reality of his experience.

Lesson Number One

Recognize that courage is not about covering up or "grinning and bearing it" nor is it about "being strong" by hiding behind stoic walls. Serious illness changes everything. Consider using different coping mechanisms now to deal with this new situation. Rather than erecting a stoic wall that might shut you off from others (and even yourself), consider using stoicism like a door that you can open or close at will and as often as you want. At first, this may go against your military grain, but it will get easier with practice, especially as you discover the vitality and emotional intimacy that ensues as you let go of the need to hide your real self. Realize that there is no shame in being human, and there is freedom in being able to acknowledge it and fully experience it, especially the grief that you may feel right now. This is not a weakness; rather it requires strength and courage.

Consider asking for help. You've given to your country; you've given to your family; you've given to your community. Now is the cycle in your life that allows others to give to you. Think of it like this: You have a new job. Your new job is to become a receiver. Not only that, you are to receive without protest! In other words, your new job is to learn how to become a gracious receiver. Are you willing to learn how to do that? If so, your family and professional caregivers will thank you. Your inward self will also be liberated, and you will discover this will make things much easier for you.

DANGEROUS DUTY MILITARY ASSIGNMENTS

Stoicism permeates military culture, whether you served in combat or not. For those who have served in combat or other dangerous-duty assignments, you may have been left with traumatic memories. For some, the memories crystallize into a constellation of symptoms known as Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). These symptoms include: exposure to a traumatic event experienced with fear, helplessness, or horror; after the original trauma is over, the trauma is re-experienced through recollections, dreams, flashbacks, hallucinations, illusions, distress at cues that symbolize the trauma, or physiologic responses when confronted with cues reminiscent of the trauma. The distress of the re-experienced trauma causes people to exhibit avoidance behaviors and use emotional numbing in order to block out the trauma. In spite of their best efforts, however, there are times when the trauma is re-experienced anyway and the person exhibits symptoms of arousal such as: difficult sleep patterns, irritability or outbursts of anger, difficulty concentrating, hypervigilance (staying on guard and unable to calm down or relax), exaggerated startle response to noises or being touched. When these symptoms last for at least a month and cause significant impairment, a diagnosis of PTSD is made.

You may have successfully suffered war experiences by learning lessons that have helped you live your life, deal with trauma, reckon with PTSD, and face aging issues. You know what eases your symptoms. You might have a network of friends with PTSD who can provide support. Your family members may know how to respond to episodes of PTSD because it's familiar territory for them.

On the other hand, you may be a veteran who has suffered PTSD without really integrating it. Maybe you compartmentalized the trauma, banishing it into unconsciousness or possibly you used a stoic wall to shield you from the

symptoms. The symptoms, however, usually leak out anyway: hollowness, aloofness, workaholism or its opposite (job-hopping or joblessness), or addictions. Unfortunately, as you age, it may be harder to try to "white knuckle" the symptoms.

I have been with 10,000 veterans as they have died; most of them served in dangerous duty assignments. In many ways, they face death the same as civilians do; in other ways, they face it differently. Some have told me, "*I've faced death before in the war. I'm not afraid of it anymore.*" Other veterans have said, "*Every day since the war has been a gift, each day a day I didn't think I'd have.*" Another veteran adds: "*I must have been spared in that war for a reason. I've lived my life trying to live up to the reason. If I don't do that, it means my buddies died for nothing.*"

As you well know, many of your comrades have not fared so well. Traumatic memories sometimes drive them into behaviors that sabotage their lives in subtle and not-so-subtle ways. Raymond is a good example. He was in a local hospital with end-stage liver disease, the result of excessive alcohol usage used to self-medicate his PTSD he sustained with the Vietnam War. His doctor phoned me, requesting admission for him to our Hospice and Palliative Care unit.

I had a mental image of what Raymond probably looked like based on his diagnosis: swollen abdomen due to accumulated fluid, mentally dull from built-up toxins, and the ruddy, disheveled appearance of a man who no longer took pride in himself.

That night, I dreamed I went to meet Raymond, and he arose from his hospital bed, tall, handsome and well-groomed, in a three-piece business suit. Then I awoke, puzzled by my dream. Raymond arrived later that day; he looked sick and ungroomed like I had expected.

The Hospice team held a meeting at his bedside to learn more about Raymond. He told us he had PTSD and had been a drifter since Vietnam, finding it difficult to establish relationships or maintain a job for long periods. "*I don't know what got into me. I wasn't raised like that. I should have done something with my life,*" he told us. I asked him if there was anything from the war that might still be troubling him.

"*I try not to think about it,*" he said. "*But what keeps coming back is the eyes of my comrades. I saw peace in the eyes of the dead; I saw fear in the eyes of the living.*" Our whole team sat in stunned silence as we let ourselves experience war vicariously.

Later in my office, I kept reflecting on the profundity of this casual comment and the detachedness with which it was said. I let its chilling truth penetrate my illusory, warless world. Now I understood the meaning of my dream. It was not this Raymond I had seen, but the Raymond he might have been. I had met the Raymond who had not gone to Vietnam. That's when I realized that war robs people of many things; but possibly the most significant is a young person's hopes and dreams.

Lesson Number Two

Heroes go into dark places and find light. You and your family have endured much darkness and you've borne much light as you've had to find your way back from war. If painful memories start surfacing, don't cover them up. Instead, talk about them with other trustworthy people who can bear your pain with you. This might be a family member, friend, or spiritual advisor. But, it also could be a professional healthcare provider or volunteer. Trust the motion of your being; give the silenced memories a voice. If people want to express gratitude for your service to our country, consider accepting it. If you want to, you might even share some of your experiences with them. Your story will not only help you, it will help the listener. If tears come, let them. Tears are meant to be shared too.

GUILT: AN EMOTION THAT MIGHT SURFACE AS VETERANS PREPARE TO "MEET THEIR MAKER"

All of us have done things we regret. Hurting each other and ourselves is just part of the human condition. Combat veterans sometimes come to the end of their lives with unresolved grief or guilt related to military duty. Perhaps this is best captured by a poem entitled, ***Atoning***, by Ron Mann displayed in the National Vietnam Veterans Art Museum in Chicago:

Hoping and wishing
you can settle
this whole thing in your mind
about this war
resolving it within yourself
before the time of atonement comes,
weeping and crying at the end of your life.

If you harmed or killed someone during your military

assignment, you may or may not have already come to terms with what happened. If the assault still triggers guilt, you might want to consider bringing it out in the open. Forgiveness can bring peace with a painful past. Although the past cannot be changed, the relationship to the past can. Forgiveness is the means to that end. Making peace with unpeaceful memories begins by acknowledging guilt without trying to gloss over it or pretend it away.

Guilt takes many forms. Although some veterans feel guilty about the killing they had to do, others feel guilty for not killing: "*They had to take me off the front lines. I was such a coward.*" Some non-combat veterans feel guilty because they don't feel that their sacrifice was enough. For example, one veteran was a talented trumpeter assigned to the Navy band, playing as ships left harbor for Vietnam: "*Here I was with this cushy job playing an instrument I loved to play. It wasn't fair.*" Military nurses and medics can also experience guilt about the life and death decisions they made. One nurse said she was not afraid of hell: "*I've already been there. I have to live every day with the faces of those soldiers who didn't have a chance during mass casualties. The doctor left it up to me, a 21-year-old nurse, to decide which ones got surgery and which ones were left to die.*"

Survivor's guilt is common. It can interfere with your ability to enjoy life. One World War II veteran said, "*When I landed on the beach, there were all these dead bodies. The sand underneath them was pink with their blood.*" Then he tearfully added, "*They didn't get to have grandkids the way I did. It's not fair that I should have this enjoyment when they can't.*"

Some Vietnam veterans struggle with forgiving the government for using and betraying them. Korean and Vietnam veterans might have to forgive the American public for ignoring or scorning them. Soldiers may have to forgive the

world for being unfair and for having cruelty and war in it; they have to forgive God for allowing the world to be like it is with war in it.

If self-forgiveness seems like a lot to expect from yourself, it is; but it's also essential. To withhold forgiveness means to cut yourself off from a compelling force deep in the soul that seeks it. If that forgiving force is denied, vitality and peace remain elusive. If you have been unable to achieve forgiveness, you might arrive at the end of your life filled with bitterness. Stockpiling transgressions of others (blame) or self (guilt) is the recipe for making bitterness. Bitterness is a poison that contaminates even the most innocent heart. It is not too late to make a different decision. If you find yourself bitter, you can decide to learn how to forgive your transgression or your transgressor.

Wanting to forgive is an essential, often forgotten, element of forgiveness. Affirmation or prayer can help achieve this: "*Dear*

God: Help me want to forgive myself for _____ ", or simply say in the mirror "*I want to forgive _____ (myself, person, situation)*" until you mean it. Then, you'll be ready to do the work. This kind of readiness is important, and readiness takes some cultivation. Be patient with yourself and respect whether or not you are ready to forgive. "False forgiveness" serves no one and can be counterproductive. For example, telling yourself: *"I let that go a long time ago"* or *"It's over and forgotten,"* it can become an excuse for not doing the work of forgiveness. If you are unable, unwilling, or not yet ready to forgive, patiently wait for another opportunity and reconsider it later. As health issues force external changes upon you, internal changes will also ensue. These changes are often good, fostering growth and opportunity. Just open up to the possibility of forgiveness. That may be all that is needed to allow it to happen.

Unforgiven guilt can sabotage lives; it can also undermine peaceful dying. If you suffer from unmourned grief from fallen comrades or unforgiven guilt from acts you did or failed to do during military service, you might want to consider creating a ceremony to lay these burdens down; you've carried them long enough.

Another healing possibility is to visit veteran memorial monuments; they can be a catalyst for healing bitterness because the monuments often serve as a repository for shame, precipitating the courage to seek forgiveness. For example, a photo of a young Vietnamese father and his daughter was left at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. This note was attached to the photo:

> *Dear Sir, for 22 years I have carried your picture in my wallet. I was only 18 years old that day we faced one another...Why you didn't take my life I'll never know. You stared at me so long, armed with your AK-47, and yet you did not fire. Forgive me for taking your life. So many times over the years I have stared at your picture and your*

daughter, I suspect. Each time my heart and guts would burn with the pain of guilt....Forgive me, Sir.

Lesson Number Three

You may experience troubling military issues that could be an understandable source of guilt or distress. If so, don't try to rationalize away the guilt. Once you decide you want to forgive yourself, someone, or a situation, be patient and allow the process to unfold. Seek support from someone familiar with the forgiveness process: social workers, clergy, counselor, books, and scripture. Consider visiting a military memorial or participating in an Opus Peace ceremony of healing. Remember that forgiveness may be the simplest and hardest thing each of us are asked to do; to not forgive, may be the most foolish.

AGING AND FACING THE END OF LIFE

Facing death is no easy matter. As we age, it becomes harder and harder to ignore and deny that our physical bodies will not inhabit the earth forever. It takes courage to let go of this world and all that we know and love in it so we can open up to the unknown mystery of the "Great Beyond." It takes honesty to acknowledge our mortality. Mostly, a good death requires

humility. Aging, sickness, dying: they humble us because we start to realize that we can't control everything, even our own bodies.

You are probably nearing the end of your life with varying degrees of courage, honesty, and humility. These qualities have emerged because you have already successfully faced many adversities in your life that required these qualities. Courage, honesty, and humility will help you face the ultimate loss: laying down your own life.

There are probably many changes that you may be experiencing right now. Change always involves "letting go" of something. This is not easy, but it is the major task that you and your family is being asked to do if you want to successfully navigate the days ahead. Things you might have to let go of include: usual routines, independence, financial stability, pride, control, sharing important events, and ultimately, your very world and all you love in it.

Commonly, people report that they feel helpless and uncertain at a time such as this. However, there are many things you can do that will bring comfort and strength. Whether you have one day or several years to live, the things listed here can help so that whenever death comes, you and your family will be prepared.

Although it is hard to talk about death because it brings your fears out in the open, it can be very helpful to do so. Talking with your loved ones means you don't have to face the task of dying alone; it can be a shared experience which is both strengthening and comforting. You may worry about what happens with your family after your death. Talk to them about their plans for how they are going to deal with the changes that are going to occur in their lives. You will not only be giving them valuable and practical input, you will also be helping them gain

a sense of security that they will be able to manage after your death. If you haven't made funeral and burial plans yet, start thinking about it now. Getting funeral arrangements taken care of can take a load off your mind. Not talking about death can be like the elephant in the middle of the room that everyone sees but no one acknowledges. Remember: if something is so powerful that we can't even talk about it, then it has a lot of power over us. Paradoxically, talking about it can relieve everyone's fears. Although it is initially painful to talk about, it gets easier as fears start diminishing. You might be pleasantly surprised to discover that there are many burial benefits that you and your family are entitled to. You might also be surprised to find out that some funeral homes and hospice agencies are specially trained in caring for veterans. They can help you learn about your benefits and even help you navigate the VA system. Yet, none of this will be known to you if you don't get the elephant out of the room.

Your needs are changing, so what you do will need to change as well. It can be very burdensome to try to keep doing things the way you used to do. Family members may also be urging you to keep up your old routines because it helps them maintain the facade that you can live forever. Instead, give yourself permission to do whatever you choose to do or not do. Don't feel guilty that your strength is different or that your interests are changing. Your energy is precious now. Don't waste it. Consider some of the following:

- Review photo albums with your loved ones so you remember your lives together. This will probably cause tears and laughter. Don't be afraid to experience both.

- Write letters to others that can be given to them later. For example, if you will miss your son or daughter's graduation, wedding, etc., write a letter expressing your hopes; it's a way you can be non-physically present that day. Give the letter to someone who can give it to them on the occasion. Imagine the surprise on your son's or daughter's face when their deceased parent shows up for the wedding or the birth of the first baby! You will be giving your loved one an irreplaceable gift they will forever cherish.

- Celebrate important birthdays, anniversaries, or holidays early this year. There's no reason why Thanksgiving can't be celebrated in July!

You probably feel helpless with many of the things that you are experiencing right now. Helplessness is not easy for anyone to experience, but it is especially difficult for veterans. Veterans are used to protecting, fixing, and controlling. If you are a combat veteran, helplessness is even harder because that feeling may trigger past trauma and how helpless you felt at that time trying to control the situation. Rather than trying to

control or to fight feelings of helplessness, let yourself feel helpless; indeed, there are many things that are happening that you have no control over. Your task now is to learn to let go.

There are seven tasks that you can do that will ease feelings of helplessness and bring you more peace. These seven tasks are: **Forgive me, I forgive you, Thank you, I love you, Goodbye, Let Go, Open Up.** Consider how all of us have done things that hurt each other; none of us are saints. Now is a time to reflect on people you may have hurt and consider asking for forgiveness. Think about those who have hurt you, as well as any hurts you may be holding on to. Consider letting them go, offering forgiveness. Think about whom in your circle of friends and family may benefit from an expression of your love. Think about those people who have impacted your life. Who might benefit from an expression of gratitude for having touched your life? The next task is the hardest but probably the most important and that is to say goodbye: to all those you love and want to hold on to, to say goodbye to this world and everything in it; to say goodbye to all that's been the same. Let yourself grieve these losses. After you've done these five steps, then your new job is to relax and let go of the world with your loved ones in it and open up to a world without your loved ones in it (however you conceive that new world to be).

Your loved ones need support too. They should follow the above steps from their own perspective: forgiving, thanking, and letting you go. They don't want to let you go and they may not know how. This can actually have a negative impact on you. You may have to educate your family on ways they can now help you. This is a letter that one veteran wrote to his well-intentioned friends who were urging him to do things he could no longer do as he entered the last few weeks of his life:

Dear Friends,
Thank you so much for wanting to support me. I know it's not easy for you. You might not even realize exactly how to provide the kind of support I need because my needs are different now. I'm writing this to help you know my new needs. I have a need for rest. I don't have much energy. It's hard for me to direct my energy outward. This is a big change for me and I know it's hard for you to get used to. Even small, short conversations are hard for me. Just answering simple questions can be taxing. I have always thrived on responding to people and trying to be helpful, so it's hard to not do that now. Know that my lack of energy and response is not because I don't want to. I'm simply unable.

I'm using my energy in a different way now. I'm letting go of connections to my external world and am more aware of my inner connections. I'm told this is as it should be because this helps make a smooth transition.

There are lots of thing you can do that will be very helpful:

- *When you visit, just sit and be available to me. If I need something, I will let you know. Please don't ask me questions unless absolutely necessary. I can't summon the energy that an answer demands.*

- *Talk to each other. Family members are almost always present. They can catch you up on how I'm doing. They can answer most of your questions.*

- *Send me cards or letters. My family can read them to me when I feel up to it. They also provide a visual reminder of your love for me.*

- *Support my family. I'm at peace. Each day, I let go of more worldly cares and open up to God's love and care and future for me. My family still struggles to let go of me. You will be helping me if you will provide them with support. They will still need you after I die.*

So you can even help me later by supporting them and helping them support each other.

- *Pray for me. I feel your prayers. They provide me with strength and comfort. Hold me close to your heart and know that physical presence may not be as important now as our heart connections.*

Thank you for caring for me. I feel your love. Take comfort in knowing I feel at peace inwardly. I know it's painful to let me go. Rather than holding on to me, look to God to help you let me go.

Lesson Number Four

You are experiencing many changes. The best way to navigate these changes is to learn to "let go" of facades that pretend that changes are not occurring. Your energy will start waning; don't waste it on superficialities. Bring your feelings of helplessness and fears about death out in the open, and encourage your loved ones to do so as well. Provide your family with resources. A hardcopy of this booklet is available at your local Dignity Memorial Funeral® Home and can also be downloaded by visiting ***www.DignityMemorial.com*** or the Opus Peace website at ***www.OpusPeace.org***. Initially talking about death will be painful, but it will lessen the power of fear, making things easier sooner than you might think. Let others help you. Make your funeral and burial plans. Think about the simple formula for dying healed: Forgive me, I forgive you, I love you, Thank you, Goodbye. Then, let go and open up to all that you are experiencing.

A FINAL WORD

You have had many great adventures in the past. Remember when you were recruited and inducted into the military? You were probably filled with both dread and excitement. You dreaded leaving the comfort and familiarity of your family and friends as you headed to far-off lands in unknown territory.

You may have had some anxiety about leaving the security of your home and town. But there may have also been a bit of adventure that sparked interest and anticipation about what you would be encountering. In many ways, facing death is like that. It is the next big adventure scheduled on your transfer orders. Open up to it. There is a still small voice inside you that whispers peace and wisdom to you. Trust it. Summon the honesty, humility, and courage to listen to that deeper part of yourself. It knew how to bring you into this world, and it knows how to carry you out of it.

To obtain more copies of this booklet, please visit ***www.DignityMemorial.com*** and click on Find a Provider to contact the location in your area. Your local Dignity Memorial Funeral Service Provider offers this booklet and several others at no charge to the community to support and comfort those coping with, or helping others cope with grief and the complex emotions accompanied by grief. Alternatively, you can download a copy on their website or on the Opus Peace website (***www.OpusPeace.org***).

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Deborah Grassman

is the co-founder and CEO of Opus Peace, a non-profit organization whose mission is to help people re-own and re-home lost pieces of self so wholeness can be restored. Deborah is a Nurse Practitioner whose career at the Department of Veterans Affairs spanned nearly 30 years. She was the Director of the Hospice program and personally took care of 10,000 dying veterans. She retired from the Department of Veterans Affairs and now provides education and consultation throughout the country. Deborah is the author of two books, *Peace at Last: Stories of Hope and Healing for Veterans* and *The Hero Within: Redeeming the Destiny We Were Born to Fulfill*. Her website, *www.OpusPeace.org*, is a comprehensive source of educational materials and tools, including this pamphlet.

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