

# Morphine, Ice Cream, and Chocolate: My End of Life Wishes

Sara Perry, Oct. 2010, p. 1

If I am seriously ill or injured and cannot communicate what decisions I want to make about my health care, I want my Health Care Power of Attorney (HCPOA) and my doctor to know and to carry out my wishes. I also want my family and friends to know that these are my wishes. This paper is an expanded version of the Five Wishes Document, the Advance Directive I've filled out. My son, Chris, who is my Health Care POA will need to have the actual signed Five Wishes document to show medical authorities he is my HCPOA before making decisions I would want to be made. This paper allows me to be more thorough about my five wishes than I could be in that document.

The first wish invites me to name someone to make health care decisions for me if I am no longer able to make or communicate my own health care decisions. I'm delighted that my son, Chris, has agreed to be my HCPOA.

I want my HCPOA, doctor, and family to know my 5 wishes for three reasons. The first is that it will free them from having to agonize about what to do when faced with difficult choices such as whether or not to attempt resuscitation or whether to add or remove life support. So often I have heard family members tell me they are so relieved they did not have to agonize about what to do because their loved one had made it clear what s/he would choose. They didn't have to second-guess their choice and they could be at peace with the decision because they knew that is what s/he would have chosen. Secondly, if there is something important I have neglected to tell family and friends before I'm no longer able to communicate, I want to take this opportunity to say it. And thirdly, it gives me peace of mind to do everything I can now to

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make sure my end of life wishes are known and carried out when the time comes.

The second of the Five Wishes is The Kind of Medical Treatment I Want or Don't Want. The author of the Five Wishes began the Second Wish with this statement: "I believe that my life is precious and I deserve to be treated with dignity. When the time comes that I am very sick and am not able to speak for myself, I want the following wishes, and any other directions I have given to my Health Care Agent, to be respected and followed."

My bottom line is that I value the quality of my life much much more than how long I live. Although my soul is embodied in this human body, my eternal soul is who I really am. When my mind and/or body are impaired to the point that I am merely existing and not living (as I define existing and living), my soul will be ready for its next exciting adventure beyond my body. I know enough about my soul to know she would get extremely cranky if she were imprisoned in a mind and/or body that was very impaired. I would want nature to take its course. If I were to get an infection, don't give me antibiotics. Make me comfortable and let me pass on. I would not want life-support treatment. And, heaven forbid, if it has been started, I want it stopped. Death would be the end of my life as I know it now, but it would not be the end of my life or the end of me. It would be a new beginning.

The third wish is for how comfortable I want to be. Let there be no doubt about this: I highly value comfort and I do not like pain. I've had more than enough physical and emotional pain this lifetime. I've learned a lot from the pain - especially understanding and empathy - but

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been there and done that. I'll probably get more pain before my soul leaves this body, but I'm sure not going to sign up for any. So, please give me as much morphine as I need to remain physically comfortable. Not any less. Not any more. If I'm crying out, shrieking, groaning, wincing or grimacing, then I'm not comfortable. I realize that Morphine - or whatever pain medication is prescribed for me - may make me drowsy or sleep more. I'd rather be drowsy (or sleeping) and comfortable than alert and not comfortable. If I'm anxious or restless or agitated, then please give me whatever medication will calm me. I would also welcome complimentary treatments like therapeutic massage.

I will definitely want hospice care - preferably sooner than later. I can't begin to count the number of people who have told me over the years that they wish they had chosen hospice care sooner than they did. As soon as I'm eligible for hospice, sign me up, both for my sake and for my family's sake. Bring them on - the hospice team of nurses, home health aides, spiritual counselors, social workers, volunteer coordinators, and volunteers. They know how to make people comfortable and how to enhance quality of life.

For as long as I am able to eat and want to eat, please offer me ice cream and chocolate. Frequently. If I were told I could only have one kind of dessert for the rest of my life, I would choose ice cream. Three of my favorites are Mint Chocolate Chunk, Chocolate Chip, and Snickers. And as for my love of chocolate, please feel free to offer me fudge, gooey brownies, chocolate chip cookies, snickers bars, and so on.

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When my father was in hospice care five years ago, some of the best news he got was that he didn't have to be on a diabetic diet anymore. The doctor said he could eat as much ice cream as he wanted. You would have thought he'd won the lottery. After years of trying to resist his craving for sweets, he had now been let out for recess. According to my mother, who was there at the time, my highly educated, very successful Dad just lit up & said, "Oh goody!" The first thing he said to me on the phone that evening was, "Guess what? The doctor said I can eat as much ice cream as I want!" I apparently inherited my father's craving for sweets. I, too, fight a daily battle of trying to resist them. It's not just a weight issue with me, either. I don't have diabetes, but sugar does a real number on me. In the short-term, it slows me down physically, sends me into serious brain fog, and makes me tired and sleepy. In the long-term, I don't feel as well or function as well. I would love to hear from my doctor that I could eat as much ice cream (and other goodies) as I wanted to.

The fourth wish is how I want people to treat me. From the very beginning of whatever illness or injury I have, I wish to be cared for with respect and kindness. I want people to be honest and real with me. If the doctor has information about my condition and prognosis, I would want her or him to say something like, "I have more information about your condition and prognosis. Would you like me to tell you what it is?" I'd always want to know the truth.

Often when I go into the rooms of hospice patients and they are alone, the TV is on while they're asleep or resting. Which is fine if they were someone who liked to have the TV on at home even when they weren't watching it. But I would hate having the TV on. When I watch TV at

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home, I mute the sound the second the advertisements come on. My son could tell you I'll lunge for the remote control if he doesn't mute it fast enough. And when I've stopped watching whatever is on TV, I turn it off. I'm very sensitive to noise. I would want silence most of the time and music that I find soothing other times. Also, I would prefer to have only one or two people in my room at a time. And I would want to have times when I was alone. I need solitude now and I'm guessing I'll need it then, too.

The fifth wish is what I want my loved ones to know. And for this I will borrow from Dr. Ira Byock *the four things that matter most*: Please forgive me. I forgive you. Thank you. I love you. (This seems like an apt time to put in a plug for Dr. Byock's book [The Four Things That Matter Most: A Book About Living.](#))

Please forgive me.

There are three kinds of apologies I want to make. First, I apologize to everyone who I hurt intentionally. Fortunately, as I've grown older, those episodes have become fewer and further between. But there have been times I have lashed out at someone when hurt or angry, and I wish I could take those negative reactions back and replace them with mature actions.

Second, I apologize to everyone who felt hurt by something I did or said that I did not intend to be hurtful. Or from something I should have done or said that I didn't. I truly believe that loving-kindness is what matters most of all. The American poet and author, Maya Angelou, wrote "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them

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feel.” I strive to be kind and I think I have become kinder as I’ve grown older. But I can be a real yutz at times - a well-meaning yutz, but still a yutz - and I apologize to all those who have felt hurt or angry from words and deeds that arose from my ignorance, limitations, or shadow side.

The third kind of apology I want to make is, well, complicated. There have been times I have had to say or do things to be true to myself that someone felt hurt by. These choices I would not take back if I had the power to do so. Walking down the aisle myself on my wedding day was one of those. I know that my dad really really wanted to walk me down the aisle and that he felt hurt he didn’t get to. I also know that he couldn’t understand why it was so important to me. I am truly sorry that he felt hurt by my making that choice. It was not my intention to hurt him. But this was one of those times I felt I must make a choice that was true to myself even if someone did feel hurt in response to my choice. One of Dad’s close friends called me late one night weeks before my wedding and told me how how sad my father felt about not having the opportunity to walk me down the aisle during my upcoming wedding. He asked me, “Can’t you just grit your teeth and let him walk you down the aisle?”

I considered doing that. But, after much thought, I came around again to making the same choice I had made. I would walk down the aisle myself and choose to be in a partnership with my husband-to-be. The tradition of the father walking his daughter down the aisle and handing her over to her husband-to-be comes from a patriarchal belief system in which a woman is considered to belong to her father until he gives her away to her future husband. There were compromises I was willing and able to make about the wedding ceremony to accommodate

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others' desires, but that was not one of them. Walking down the aisle myself was my way of honoring that I belonged to myself and to God and not to any man.

There were other choices I made that my parents didn't like and/or felt hurt by, like living in Boulder, Colorado after I finished college there instead of moving back home to Washington. They took very personally my choices to become independent, and communicated to me in many ways that they felt abandoned and betrayed by me. Could I have made many of these choices in kinder ways than I did? Absolutely. If I had the power to do so, I would sort through my words and deeds and filter out the over-the-top anger when assertiveness would have been at least as, and probably more, effective. It took many years for the wounds underneath the over-the-top anger to heal. One of the things that I feel deeply grateful for is that my parents lived long enough so that I had time to heal enough to forgive them and create new, healthier relationships with them.

There were choices I made in my ten year marriage and in other relationships that I would take back if I had the power to do so. I was not the bad wife my ex-husband portrayed me to be when he abruptly left after ten years of marriage. Not even close. But I wasn't perfect either. It is downright embarrassing what a jerk I can be sometimes. I hope you all will forgive me for all of those times.

I forgive you...

For all your words and deeds that were intentionally hurtful. For all your words and deeds that were unintentionally hurtful. All is forgiven.

Thank you.

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I have been blessed in many ways during this lifetime. There is so much that I feel grateful and thankful for. I couldn't possibly name everyone I want to thank, so I'll do a To Whom It May Concern or If The Shoe Fits, Wear It kind of thanks. That is, if any of these things I give thanks for can apply to you, then please know I'm thanking you. The list of things I want to thank people for would go on and on and on, so I will spare you that and just include some of them.

Thank you...

For the times you loved me, for the times you were a safe haven for me, for the times you were kind to me, for the times you were tempted to negatively react to me but chose instead to act maturely, for the times you were vulnerable with me and let me be a safe haven for you, for the times you let me be myself with you, for the times you put up with my nonsense and unnecessary drama, for the times you laughed at my witty comments and funny stories, for the times you opened your heart and mind to me, for the times you generously listened to me, for the times you let me be there for you, for the times you were there for me, for the times you trusted me, for the times you were trustworthy, and for many other times I haven't mentioned here.

I love you.

As the Greek philosophers pointed out, there are different kinds of love. I love my one and only child, Chris, in ways that I love no one else. Such is the love of a mother for a child. Not always but usually. My life would not have been as rich, as meaningful, as fulfilling without being

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Chris's mother. Chris, I love you very, very, very much. And I'm pretty sure you know that, which in and of itself means a lot to me.

I love my parents and siblings. My father is no longer present with us physically, but I love him just as much as I did before he passed away. I love my extended family, although I confess some of them I strongly prefer to love from a distance. I love my friends. I love my three cat companions. I love God. What an incredible blessing to have lived, loved and been loved.