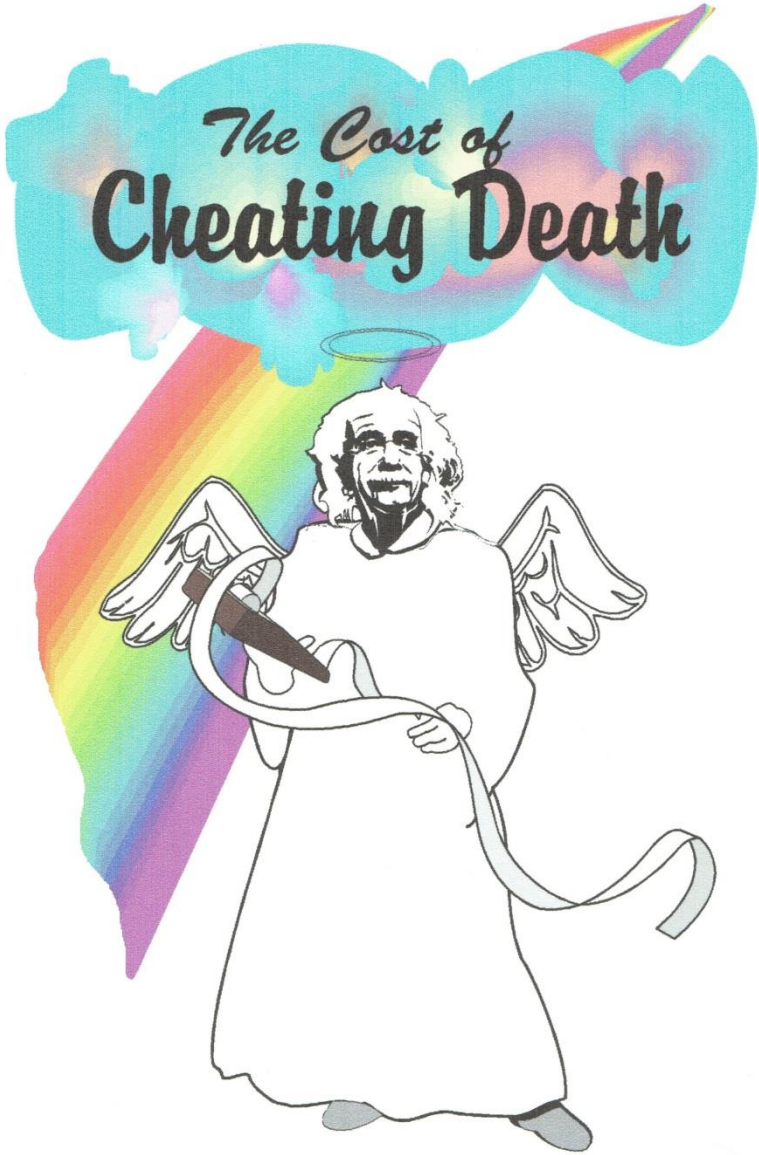


The Cost of **Cheating Death**



A story by Rosemary Phillips

The Cost of Cheating Death

By Rosemary Phillips © 2003 and © 2016

Published by Quills Quotes & Notes (.com)

Printed Version ISBN 978-1-928040-10-9

Electronic version ISBN 978-1-928040-02-6

www.quillsquotesandnotes.com E-mail: rosemary@qqandn.com

Originally published as an article in the Vancouver Sun, March 10, 2003, and on the Quills Quotes & Notes website, The Cost of Cheating Death is now rewritten, updated as much as possible, and republished as a booklet and an E-book.

Other books and stories by Rosemary Phillips

Writing, Editing, Typesetting, Artwork, Illustrations & Paste-up for Ptarmigan Press:

Touchpoint Reflexology by Yvette Eastman 1985

Rolling with the Times by Wallace Baikie 1985

A History of Strathcona Park by Wallace Baikie with Rosemary Phillips 1986

From Gypo to B.T.O. – the first 25 years of the BC Truck Loggers Association – by Wallace Baikie with Rosemary Phillips 1987

A History of Sport in BC (1930-1989) collated and written for the BC Sports Hall of Fame and Museum (1989) in preparation for the design of exhibits for their new location at BC Place Stadium.

Sliced Bread (1999 published through Loonbook – Out of Print)

Grand Forks Valley Walkout – Trail Guide (2005) for GFCTS

A Song to Remember—for the BC Boys Choir - 2014

Published by Quills Quotes & Notes

One Seed (First Edition 2002, Second Edition 2010)

Une Petite Graine

Persian One Seed and **English and Persian One Seed**

Colour You Healthy

The Whales' Secret

Happy Feet Foot Massage

The Day the Wind Changed

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The Cost of Cheating Death

A fantasy based on actual events, woven with facts and figures.

By Rosemary Phillips

Scene 1 – Transition Station D

“May I have your attention please,” began a gentle yet youthful female voice over the PA system. “New arrivals will be entering Transition Station D shortly, through Light Tunnels Three and Six. All those who have received their telepathic notices regarding incoming family and friends, please join us for celebrations and welcoming parties.”

An elderly angel, with a shock of unkempt white hair, sat quietly at a chalkboard. He muttered to himself as his hands furiously wrote, erased and rewrote multiple mathematical equations. He was oblivious to everything around him; the parkland, green lawns and flowers, and birds singing joyfully in nearby trees. Albert had chosen to take on the job of Transition Angel for a while in an attempt to understand humans more, as to why they just don't seem to grasp relativity. Very few had understood him during his own sojourn on planet Earth and it puzzled him. He shook his head frequently in dismay and could often be overheard saying, “Will they ever understand?”

At this moment he was totally focussed on the problem at hand and didn't hear soft footsteps approaching him along the gravel path.

“Hello, are you Angel Albert?” asked the young man as he came to stand beside him.

“Yes,” replied Albert startled, as though waking from a trance. “Who's asking?”

“Darion, sir. Darion. Nurse Angel Florence suggested I introduce myself. She'd like me to join you on your next assignment.”

Albert stopped working on the board, turned, and focussed his eyes on the young man, inspecting him from head to toe.

“That's good news. It'll be nice to have a bit of company. I seem to spend most of my time talking to myself. It'll be wonderful to have someone to talk *with*. Why not sit for a bit and tell me about yourself. When did you get here?”

Darion sat down on a nearby bench. “About two months ago. I've been going over my life on Earth and cleaning up some loose ends. Now I'm ready to get into some volunteer work.”

“So why choose to be a Transition Angel?”

“Well, when I was on Earth I was a mountain climber and guide. I helped people over difficult terrain when they went on expeditions. I would like to continue that kind of work.”

Albert chuckled. “You might say transition work is quite similar, helping people through a difficult change, through death and dying and their new life in what many call Heaven. It’s not always easy.”

“I was fortunate. My own transition was fairly easy. I had a rare cancer of the blood. When it was all through my body I was sent to a hospital in the U.S. because I couldn’t be helped in Canada. My family came frequently to stay with me. It was really hard on them. I withered away. And the pain! It was terrible. I was drugged, and machines kept me alive.”

“How did you get through it?”

“Well, one day I heard a voice whispering in my ear telling me I could climb mountains *without* my body. That was when everything came clear to me – that really my life wasn’t about to end, it was about to begin!”

“I wonder who that was? The voice I mean.”

“I don’t really know. It felt familiar though. Well, anyway, I talked it over with my family and we decided to pull the plugs and let me leave that painful body, to have my freedom. We had a great party – everyone was in the room, and my sisters rubbed my feet as the machines were turned off, one by one, and the plugs got pulled from their sockets.”

By now Albert had put down his chalk and turned to Darion to give him his full attention. “What did it feel like?”

“You know, I felt no pain. It was like being wrapped in a warm pink blanket – of love. I floated above my body and said goodbye to everyone. They were happy to see me go. And there were light beings, like angels, who took my arms and led me through this beautiful tunnel of light. Even my grandparents were there, smiling and happy. I found myself in a peaceful garden on a mountainside. I felt totally embraced by love, like I had never felt before. It was like time didn’t exist. Whenever I had a question, the answer was right here, in my head, just like that. And I could see so many things, and be in so many places, just by thinking about them.”

Albert was getting to like this young man. He nodded his head in understanding. “Then what did you do?”

“I rested for a bit, and went to climb some mountains, the likes of which I’ve never seen before. Wow, they’re magnificent. That voice was right. I don’t need my body anymore.”

Albert threw his head back, slapped his knee and laughed out loud. “So now you want to help others?”

“Yes. I know many don’t have it as easy as I did. I’ve seen some who really struggled and resisted. I’d like to be that whispering voice in the ear, you know, to give a bit of comfort and reassurance they will be OK - just like I got.”

Albert stroked his chin and sat silent for a few moments. "Well, Florence was right in having you come with me. She's really on top of things. I guess that's why she's in charge of this Station. I'm the one who gets sent on the tough cases. I guess it's because I'm patient, and, because I'm very good with figures - I take running tabs of all the expenses. You see, Florence is pulling together a report to the Transition Council. She's noticed that Free Will, Fear of Death and New Technology are interfering with the natural cycle of life on Earth. It's becoming quite a problem, particularly over the last fifty years, what with all the new machinery and drugs. People seem to think death is failure, and that machines and pills will fix everything. Now a heart attack, meaning an opportunity to go Home, is treated as cardiac arrest requiring resuscitation." He paused, then said quietly, "Ah, here comes Florence now!"

Both turned to see a serene woman of pure gentleness and beauty gliding towards them on the pathway.

"Hello Albert," she sang, with a voice full of love and as beautiful as that of a nightingale. "It's always such a joy to see you. How are you?"

"Wonderful as always," he smiled softly.

"I see you've met our young novice Darion here?"

"Yes, fine young chap. He'll be perfect for the job. And, let me guess; you have a new assignment?"

"Yes, as a matter of fact I do. His name is Rob Hasalot. He's due to transition at four o'clock this afternoon. Here are your co-ordinates."

She handed Albert some sheets of paper and he scanned them carefully.

"Mmm."

"He lives in a plush condominium beside a golf course and when you get there he'll be watching a golf game on his big TV screen. He may be a bit difficult; in fact, he'll most probably not hear you or sense you at all."

"Why's that?"

"Well, he's been very focussed on his own world of material gain - of having a lot, and taking for himself. He hasn't a clue about any world other than his own. He has no spiritual beliefs. His religion has been money. And he thinks the World and Nature are for Man to conquer for Man's benefit and profit."

"Mmm. Pity. What's his health like?"

Actually quite good. He's in his mid 70s. He keeps fit playing nine holes of golf every day. But, he's finished his life here, done what his soul set out to do, and now it's time for him to leave. You see, his family needs to have certain experiences they can only have if he's not there. It's their

destiny. Well, that's the order from the Transition Council anyway. And of course, his soul is going to be in for a bit of a shock when he gets here and goes through his Life Review time. He needs all the help we can give him."

The silence around them was interrupted by a young woman's voice. "Sorry for the intrusion folks. Could Nurse Angel Florence please join us at the Transition Hospital? Your services are required."

"I guess we have a difficult case coming in," said Florence, "someone who's going to need some special attention in adapting to their new life. But, before I go Albert - we need a printout of all the cost figures on this Rob Hasalot case. So, here's a calculator for you with a printer and tape. Seems the Transition Council is anxious to get their report, and they want a clear picture of the monetary costs. And here's an iPad for you Darion, to keep a record of the emotional, physical and spiritual costs. I'm sure you understand what I mean."

"I sure do," replied Darion eagerly.

"Well, let's get going. Are you ready Darion?"

"Yes, but I have just one small question. How do we get there?"

"Well, you go really quiet inside yourself, just think of where you want to go, and you'll get there, no problem. But before we do go we'd better check this machine. Darion, why don't you punch in some figures? Let's see – the square root of 777.77..."

Darion took the calculator and moved his fingers quickly over the keys.

"It should read 28.888528. Right Darion?"

"It does too!"

"Good, it's working. Let's go then."

As Nurse Angel Florence glided away she turned and called musically, "Remember Darion, just think about where you are going and you'll be there."

Scene 2 – Planet Earth

In a flash the two angels found themselves in the living room of a very elaborate home, a golf green visible through the huge picture window. Albert wandered around the room while Darion stood back against a wall to quietly observe.

It was five-minutes-to-four. Rob Hasalot sat with his feet up in his recliner watching a golf game on the TV while his wife Iona sat on the couch, knitting. Albert turned up his inner-light to make himself more visible but Rob and Iona were too focussed on the golf game to notice.

He walked over to Rob, leaned over his shoulder and whispered in his ear, "Hello Rob, it's time for you to come Home."

No response.

Rob and Iona were completely absorbed by the TV. Just as the leading contender was making his final putt to the 18th hole Rob felt a searing pain in his left arm. Within seconds it engulfed his heart.

"Oh, oh," he exclaimed as he slumped sideways in his chair.

"Pain," keyed Darion on the iPad.

Iona thought Rob was cheering on the golfer, then realised her husband of fifty-five years was unconscious. She ran for the phone, keyed in 9-1-1 then began CPR (that course she took many years ago was finally coming into practice). Albert stood casually by and tried linking again to Rob's mind. It was full of golf, things, and more things, bank accounts and business.

"Rob!" yelled Albert. "Can you hear me?"

Silence.

"Rob," he tried again, this time a little more softly. "I'm here to take you Home. Your family and friends are waiting for you on the other side of life, in the other world. Can you see the light?"

Silence.

Iona kept breathing into Rob's mouth.

"Rob," Albert pleaded. "Can you see the light? I'm here to take you Home!"

Silence.

Within minutes an ambulance pulled up at the front door. Two paramedics rushed in with equipment and a direct link to the hospital emergency department.

"He can't die," Iona pleaded. "What would I do without him?"

"Panic. Fear. Uncertainty," continued Darion.

One paramedic was already in communication with the local hospital and described the circumstances; "We have a 75-year-old male, weighing about 240 lbs., with M.I. (myocardial infarction)."

The other paramedic checked for vital signs, and noting there weren't any, began shock treatment.

"More fear and uncertainty," typed Darion.

"Oh dear," said Albert to Darion as he pulled out the calculator and inserted the roll of tape. "Here goes. One more chalked up for Free Will, or is it ignorance and fear? One ambulance call - \$80 (\$530 non-resident); two paramedics; bedding, got to be washed; mask to be sterilized; rubber gloves, two pairs; one syringe; one shot of Lidocaine; oxygen; another syringe; one shot of nitro-glycerine..."

The paramedics picked up the still unconscious Rob, put him on the stretcher and carried him out to the ambulance.

Iona grabbed her iPhone and called her oldest son. While running out the door she cried, "Bill, your dad's just had a heart attack. Meet me at the hospital."

She got into the back of the ambulance and sat to one side while Albert, along with his adding machine and yards of paper tape, followed by a quiet Darion, appeared beside her.

"Heart palpitations. Blood pressure rising. More panic and fear," added Darion.

Scene 3 – Emergency Room

Moments later the ambulance doors were opened and Rob was rushed to the emergency department. Iona ran behind and at Admissions answered all questions and handed over Rob's health card.

"One emergency bed, \$1,065 (\$1,970 non-resident); attending physician, \$352.08; nurses; rubber gloves," continued Albert, his fingers almost invisible with their incredible speed. "E.C.G., \$65; syringe; three vials of tPA (tissue plasminogen activator) at \$6,400 per vial, that's \$19,000; sheets to be washed; I.V.; charts; garbage to be dealt with... Oh, my goodness," continued Albert, "this is going to be a costly one."

"He'll have to have a few tests," announced the physician in attendance. "We'll need an angiogram, and possible angioplasty, complete blood count, kidney function, liver function, sodium/potassium, blood gas, chest x-ray..."

"Angiogram, \$327.50; anaesthetist, \$132.76," muttered Albert, keeping Darion in the know. "Blood tests, \$127.53; chest x-ray, \$65; MRI angiography, \$1,200, for possible ventricular wall aneurysm..."

Iona headed out the door to meet with the family in the waiting room. Her two sons and their families, all in shock, surrounded her when the physician approached to speak with them. "Do whatever you have to," cried the oldest son, "whatever it takes to keep him alive!"

"Fear, stress, disbelief," continued Darion.

"We'll do our best," replied the physician, "but there are no guarantees. He has had a very severe heart attack and we're having a difficult time stabilizing him."

Iona and family were left to wait, and wait.

Diagnosis - occlusive coronary artery disease, multi-vessel involvement requiring quadruple coronary artery by-pass graft surgery (CABG).

Albert stood by and shook his head in dismay. “Can’t they see it’s his time to come Home?”

By now the calculator tape was in loops up to his knees.

He continued, “I.C.U. bed at \$3,592 per day (\$8,120 non-resident—and in US for first day, \$10,794) for two days while awaiting surgery, that’s \$7,184 (\$16,240 non-resident)...”

“There’s a 30% chance your husband will survive,” commented the physician when she interviewed the family regarding the surgery. “And, he will have to stay in Intensive Care for a while.”

“Just do it,” replied the second son. “We can’t let him die. We have to give him a chance.”

“Hope. Fear,” Darion typed.

Albert shook his head again. “Will they ever understand dying is natural? Why aren’t they thinking of consequences? Why aren’t they thinking about Rob’s future and what he will have to endure - the pain, the humiliation, loss of dignity...?”

“If only he could hear you,” said Darion.

Albert tried again, “Rob? It’s Albert. I’m here to take you Home. Can you hear me?”

Silence. Then gradually Rob’s eyes began to open. He was vaguely aware of the room around him but the administered drugs made it impossible for any form of clear thought or communication.

“I’ll have to try again later,” said Albert. “We’d better get back to Florence and give her an update.” With that Albert and Darion vanished and reappeared at the Transition Station holding trails of tape.

“Florence,” Albert said sadly, “we’ve got a long one here. He’s going for quadruple by-pass.”

“You’ll need another roll of tape,” she replied matter-of-factly. Then within a blink of light Albert and Darion were standing in the operating room where a special surgical team had been pulled together for a marathon session.

Scene 4 - Surgery

Albert began: “General cost to the hospital for an uncomplicated routine by-pass surgery, about \$20,000 to \$35,000 (in the US, \$31,000 to \$42,000 with mechanical ventilation); Bridine; more rubber gloves; laundered uniforms; trays and sterilized tools; surgeon, \$ 1,331.92 plus three additional arteries at \$253.10 each, and a pacemaker at \$507.46 - that’s a total of \$2,526.68; two assistants, \$764.63; one anaesthetist, level nine for five hours, \$823.20; scrub nurse; circulating nurse; by-pass technician; electricity;

lights; I.V.; blood; cotton balls; heart-lung machine..."

The first surgeon made an incision down the centre of Rob's chest and exposed his heart. Simultaneously several incisions were made in his leg and a length of vein was removed. His heart was stopped and his circulation was maintained with a heart-lung machine. The surgeons diligently sewed sections of the vein to each aorta and to a point below the blockage. The heart-lung machine was then disconnected allowing blood to flow back into Rob's coronary arteries.

At this point Rob was beginning to see a tunnel of light and a faint image of Albert and Darion glowing in the corner. He was leaving his body and felt wonderful warmth and peace like he had never felt before.

A surgeon yelled, "We're losing him," and quickly began massaging the heart to get Rob's functions back.

"That's another \$382.41, plus \$44.36 for the anaesthetist, level 11 for 15 minutes," continued Albert.

Rob was sucked back into his body and fell into oblivion.

"Almost free. Felt the warmth and love. Stopped from heading Home. Unconscious," typed Darion.

The breastbone was wired together, and the pericardium and chest were sewn up. After the last staple Rob was cleaned up to go to recovery where two nurses stood waiting for him.

"Wash the sheets and uniforms; clean the floors; garbage pick-up..." kept on Albert as he followed them down the halls to recovery and ICU.

Meanwhile Darion wrote, "Wants to go Home."

Scene 5 - ICU

Albert and Darion knew that on some level of consciousness Rob was resisting recovery, but the surgeons and hospital staff were doing their best to follow the family's wishes of keeping him alive. Rob's body was shutting down. His kidneys were failing.

Rob lay tied to all kinds of machines with dressings over his chest, needles in his arms and a towel to cover his genitals. He was intubated to a ventilator, NG suction, three IV lines, one central line into the jugular vein, two chest monitors, a catheter in his penis attached to a bladder bag, an arterial line to monitor oxygen content of the blood, and a whopping tube in the groin catheterizing his femoral artery for kidney dialysis. The room was filled with sucking, beeping and busy-ness as Rob lay oblivious.

"That will be \$3,592 a day for the bed," continued Albert. "Let's see – nursing staff on 24-hour observation; cleaning staff; machines; IV; tests; Comprehensive Care Team \$307.19 for the first day; initial dialysis, \$341.4;

medications...”

“Still unconscious,” added Darion on his iPad.

It had been weeks and still there was no change. Family visited frequently, cried and cried, and pleaded for Rob to get better. “Come on Dad,” they said. “You can pull out of this. Think of the grandchildren. There are so many more things we can do together, and golf games to be played. We need you Dad.”

“Grief. Disbelief. Uncertainty. Unable to comprehend. Despair. Major stress. Fear,” continued Darion.

“I’d better go back and get some help,” said Albert sadly and with a flash of light he was back at the Transition Station, while Darion stayed beside Rob, quietly watching and glowing.

“Oh dear,” sighed Florence. “This calls for extreme measures. We’ll have to get some of his family to go back down to Earth and stand round him. Maybe he’ll hear one of them calling his name, or maybe he’ll see them in his mind. I know, we’ll call on Bing Crosby. He was well known for golfing. Maybe he could croon in Rob’s ear a little. In fact, I’d better come myself.”

With yet another roll of calculator tape Albert, Florence and the new support team arrived in ICU and joined Darion. As the team stood around together, glowing with all their light, Florence sensed a slight opening in communication with Rob.

“Go on Bing,” she whispered. “Go and sing him a song.”

Bing walked over beside Rob’s bed, leaned casually against the nearby wall and began, “Red sails in the sunset, way out on the sea. Oh carry my loved one, Home safely to me.” *

There was a flash of recollection, a coming to. Rob was finally becoming aware. He was still unable to open his eyes but he could see from inside himself.

“Where am I?” he asked in his thoughts.

“You’re in hospital, in ICU,” replied Florence. “You’ve had heart surgery and you’ve been in recovery for several weeks now.”

“Where is everybody?” asked Rob. “I can’t see anyone.”

“You’re not alone,” continued Florence. “There’s myself, and Albert (he’s under that pile of calculator paper there), and Novice Darion, and Bing, and...”

“Bing? You mean Bing Crosby? My favourite singer and golfer?”

“Yes,” replied Florence. “And with Bing come your mother and father, and many others in your family who want to see you well and happy, and make that journey Home, like you are meant to.”

“Home?”

“Yes, Home. It’s your time to come Home.”

“I’m beginning to feel my body,” Rob interjected sharply. “It really hurts. My chest - it hurts. My whole body hurts. What are all these machines?”

“Major pain,” typed Darion.

“At this time they are keeping you alive,” replied Florence.

“Is that how I am living then?” replied Rob.

“Yes,” added Florence. “That is, here on Earth.”

“How long will I be like this?” he asked.

“For a while, and then some. You see, your kidneys have failed and you require continuous dialysis, and your respiration is not running on its own yet. And....”

“Please. I feel like I’m a machine.”

“Well, you could come Home with us,” replied his mother and father as they moved forward into view. “We’ve been waiting patiently for you to see us.”

“I can’t leave my family,” said Rob in alarm. “Who will take care of them?”

“Worry. Stress. Uncertainty,” continued Darion.

“You have done your best,” his mother replied. “They are well prepared to meet what life will bring. It’s up to them now. And we’ll be there to comfort and guide them along.”

Rob was beginning to feel a sense of freedom and love inside him.

“Relief. Relaxing. Love. Peace,” typed Darion.

Meanwhile, a gentle clicking and mumbling could still be heard coming from under an enormous mountain of paper tape; “So that’s 15 days in ICU, \$53,880 (\$99,678 non-resident); kidney dialysis, \$1,680; Comprehensive Care Team for 15 days, \$2,287.53; consultant visits, \$692; tests, \$3,825.90...”

“Go on Darion,” Nurse Angel Florence urged encouragingly. “It’s your turn.”

Nervously Darion stepped forward to whisper in Rob’s ear. This was a big moment for him, his first assignment. “Rob,” he said softly, “you can play your golf game without your body. You can leave the pain behind. You’d be surprised at how incredible the golf courses are at Home - like you’ve never seen on Earth.”

Rob emitted an inner smile of joy at the thought.

Florence came closer, as did Rob’s mother and father. They held out their glowing hands towards him. “Come on Home son,” his father said gently. “All you have to do is want to be there, and you will.”

It was easy, almost effortless, as Rob moved away from his body. The monitors in the room beeped loudly and alarms rang. Within seconds the cardiac unit arrived.

“Extra grease; more rubber gloves; suction cups need cleaning...” continued Albert while his fingers clicked away.

“We’re losing him,” cried a nurse. “Try again.”

“Come on Robert,” whispered his mother with great love. “A little further now and you’ll be free. See the light? Feel the love and the warmth? You’re coming Home now son.”

Flatline.

“He’s gone,” said the cardiac team. “We’ll have to inform the family and prepare the body for their visit.”

Rob and his parents had already started on the road Home. There was music, lots of music. There was warmth, lots of warmth, and love. There was light - and a most beautiful golf green ahead.

“Peace. Freedom. Joy. Love. Release. Relief,” added Darion on his iPad.

Albert still had a few more calculations: “Clean up; prepare room for the next patient. Approximate grand total, \$132,154, give or take a few thousand dollars. For non-residents multiply that by 185 percent, that’s \$244,485.21! Oh my. Just think of how it would have been if he’d accepted going Home the first time. There’s a cost to cheating death.”

Angel Albert turned off his calculator and gathered up the miles of tape while Darion held tightly onto his iPad as they both disappeared, glowing and smiling. Assignment complete.

* *Red Sails In the Sunset*, words by Jimmy Kennedy, music by Hugh Williams, 1935 charted #1 by Bing Crosby

Responses to The Cost of Cheating Death –

as first published in the Vancouver Sun in 2003.

‘Death and Dying’ is a very touchy subject, one that can really hit sensitive nerves and ruffle feathers. It is, after all, not a simple subject and covers everything from the physical and emotional being through to spiritual beliefs and understandings. I received a number of e-mails and there were several Letters to the Editor of the Vancouver Sun in support of the article, and two against. Those in agreement had experiences either in hospitals or with family and friends. One writer reacted very negatively to the idea of equating life and death with dollar figures – in his own grief over recently losing his father he may not have recognized or understood the metaphor. Some wrote about their spiritual and near-death experiences. Others wrote looking for more information. The following are some of the responses. Names have been purposely withheld.

What suffering – for everyone!

You know, I could really relate to the story because my brother-in-law’s passing was very similar to the character – heart attack while sitting in his car, a passer-by giving him CPR. (He was) rushed into emergency surgery. He regained consciousness after a week, but there was clearly brain damage. They kept him alive for about a month in hospital and then he died. But what suffering – for everyone.

Name withheld

Keeping seniors alive

I was so happy to read your article about cheating death. Nobody talks about this stuff and it is all I think about. I work at a hospital as an RN in extended care and I am constantly asking, “Why do we treat these people so aggressively?”

We never used to. We used to let them die peacefully. Not now; they are treated as if they are going to get better. They get all kinds of expensive drugs—blood thinners, blood pressure pills, vitamins, calcium, anti-depressants, bone builders, plus excess antibiotics when they get sick.

Even if you dismiss the cost, it is the moral and ethical issue of keeping these people alive past any quality of life (that is important). All we do is prolong misery and drag out the end of life. They get IV fluids which keep them going another few weeks until finally they let go. How many times have I put up tube feeds on people who push my hand away? They know what it is and they don’t want to be kept alive artificially, and who does?

But family and doctor make the decision. I have seen so many useless surgeries done on people and a month later they are dead. What waste. Nobody would choose to suffer this way if given a choice. I blame the doctors because they are the gatekeepers. They make the decisions, not the nurses. I don't know why this is. We never used to over-treat people this way.

The last time I worked on a discharge planning unit, a lady was doing really poorly with chronic lung disease, and the doctor saw her and ordered all the lab work, chest x-ray and ECG. By the time they came to take the blood she was obviously dying, and they couldn't get the blood because her body was shutting down already. So, I sent the lab people away and cancelled all the tests. The doctor was so mad and wanted to report me. But I was right. She died a few hours later.

Who wants people poking you and doing x-rays on your deathbed? I just don't get it. And I keep asking where are we going? But nobody has any answers. I don't get any info from my union or professional organization. It's a crazy world. Now we put everybody on nutritional drinks so they just go on and on, and suffer through it.

Please understand, I think that if you want all these treatments and you live at home, so you should. No problem there. But the people I work with cannot voice their opinion, and many families want them to live forever.

Registered Nurse, Extended Care Unit

Get 'Do not resuscitate' tattooed on your chest

I just wanted to let you know how much I enjoyed your article on "The Cost of Cheating Death". I am a nurse who has seen this same scenario happen many times and can say you hit the nail on the head. Many nurses have suggested that they will get "DO NOT RESUSCITATE" tattooed on their chest so to hopefully avoid the same fate. Unfortunately, family members can override a person's wishes and it has been my experience that the ones who do are usually the ones with unresolved issues with that person and can't let them go.

Nurse

Article really hit home

I just wanted to compliment you on your great article in this morning's Vancouver Sun. Being a volunteer for a Hospice Society, and having a mother very near death, it really hit home with me and I agree completely. I will be taking your article to our next meeting and sharing it. Keep up the good work.

Sincerely, Barb

Where to turn when you are dying

Thanks for listening this morning. Attached is a quick review of what I'm trying to do re "The Front End of Dying." From the moment of diagnosis there has to be something in place for us to turn to. We all have to try and understand that it is okay to talk openly about death. It is stories like yours that will help us get there...

Gary Fish

One writer saw on TV...

...Tonight, while making supper, I had the TV on and it was some interview show about crime, and the interviewer was asking a woman about when her husband was viciously beaten by some teens. He was in terrible shape in the hospital. They did operate but the surgeon explained there wasn't a lot of hope and she should consider turning off the life support. She was a nurse, and understood very well. She said 'okay' but she needed some time to think.

Shift change at the hospital happened, another surgeon on duty tells her he thinks there 'may' be something he could do. He operates and the husband survives.

'Thank goodness for that second surgeon!' said the interviewer.

'Oh, I don't know,' said the woman. 'I live every day thinking I made the wrong decision in agreeing to the second surgery. My husband is still in a rehab hospital, unable to toilet himself, can no longer read or write (he was a GP before), has had a major personality change, and is a shadow of his former self, with no hope for improvement... and I sometimes feel I've done this to him.'

So sad. Anyway, the article was awesome.

Laura

Interested in experiences of the hereafter

I read your full-page story in the Sun about a man cheating death and our welfare state. I found it an intriguing perspective! I am very interested in your experiences with the hereafter. You say that you have been a hospice volunteer. So I presume you have knowledge first hand? I have had some interesting experiences too. I would love to hear some of yours – or if you could direct me to where you might have written more about such experiences. I would appreciate it greatly, as I am still trying to make up my mind about death and what it means to the evolution of the soul, if anything.

Thanks so much

Lorraine

Definitely touched a nerve - maybe missed the point?

What in the name of God is wrong with you? To equate, compare, or value in any way money over human life is evil, stupid and deeply offensive. Your article "The Cost of Cheating Death," treats human life so callously, so illogically, and so trivially that it staggers the imagination. This article is disgusting and vile. I don't care that you have volunteered in a hospice. Obviously, you learned nothing about the value of human life.

Name withheld (this person had just lost his father and was possibly in grief)

Resources

*Local general practitioners and surgeons provided information on the procedures for an ambulance call, cardiac arrest requiring resuscitation diagnosis, cardiac surgery and recovery. Medical books provided further information on the procedures for surgery, recovery and kidney failure. **Dollar costs are estimates only**, provided by the Canadian Patient Cost Database, and are purely approximate in a subsidized healthcare system—and include figures from 2003 and 2016. Emotional and spiritual costs come from my own experiences with death and dying, spiritual background, belief in an afterlife, acceptance that what we call death is but a beginning, and knowing there is more to life than meets the eye.*

For information on billing and costs visit:

<http://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health/practitioner-pro/medical-services-plan/msc-payment-schedule-june-2016.pdf> and www.cihi.ca/pce for the Canadian Patient Cost Database. You really have to be in the profession to understand any of this.

Further reading:

Can Health Care Costs Be Reduced by Limiting Intensive Care at the End of Life? - By John M. Luce and Gordon D. Rubenfeld.

The State of Seniors Health Care in Canada, September 2016 report by the Canadian Medical Association

The Whales' Secret – by Rosemary Phillips, illustrated by Julie Draper (www.thewhalessecret.com for a free download)

Recommended viewing:

Defending Your Life, (1991) with Albert Brooks and Meryl Streep, and read the Rolling Stone interview with Albert Brooks on the 25th anniversary of what has now become a cult film;

Resurrection (1980) with Ellen Burstyn.

Post Script

This story was inspired by the news of a family in the United States losing their third-generation operating ranch when Papa had a heart attack, was revived and eventually died. The ranch was sold to cover the medical bills. In addition, a local physician here in Canada, when interviewed about death and dying commented on the difficulty he faces when being told by a patient's family to 'do everything you can to keep them alive.'

While originally published in 2003, the information in this article is still relevant today. However, since 2003 there have been improvements and changes, such as the acceptance by our government of assisted dying (see dyingwithdignity.ca), and a September 2016 report by the Canadian Medical Association titled 'The State of Seniors Health Care in Canada.' In British Columbia there is the new M.O.S.T. to assist individuals in determining their end of life care (it's complicating – very legal-ease).

In 2009, 60 Minutes in the U.S. did a program on 'The Cost of Dying' as patients are kept alive on machines and with drugs, at a cost that, with an ageing population, could spiral the U.S. economy into bankruptcy.

Even this morning, November 24, 2016, I listened to a report on CBC radio about the application of physiotherapy etc., instead of the use of drugs for depression in seniors in care.

What has become clear is the continued fear in our Western culture of death and dying; a fear of the natural cycle of life. There is also a lack of understanding by the general public of the true costs of subsidized healthcare to taxpayers – such as an MRI which could cost approximately \$1,200.

I realize - no one can determine or interfere in another's life path or soul's journey. We can but help another along the way - with love and caring.

My intent - for this document is to give comfort and hopefully remove fear.

I am most grateful - for all those who have contributed to this document, either with technical information, encouragement, or in their written responses to the original article. I also give thanks for the characters (angels) who whispered in my ear and for the wonderful words they offered.

About the author:

Rosemary Phillips is a writer and singer/songwriter and has worn many hats while journeying through this life. She presently lives in BC, Canada.

Visit her web site: www.quillquotesandnotes.com. There you will find many articles plus information on, and examples of, her books and recordings.

Notes:

... A fantasy based on real events, facts and figures ...

What some have said...

“I just wanted to compliment you on your great article in this morning’s Vancouver Sun. Being a volunteer for a Hospice Society, and having a mother very near death, it really hit home with me and I agree completely. I will be taking your article to our next meeting and sharing it.”

— *Hospice Volunteer*

“I just wanted to let you know how much I enjoyed your article on ‘The Cost of Cheating Death.’ I am a nurse who has seen this same scenario happen many times and can say you hit the nail on the head.”

– *Registered Nurse*

“I was so happy to read your article about cheating death. Nobody talks about this stuff and it is all I think about.”

– *Registered Nurse, Extended Care*