



Taking Control of One's Destiny

Lives lived after death

There was a scene in a movie I saw 25 to 30 years ago that has remained part of my memory ever since. I don't even remember the name of the movie, but that scene was powerful. As I recall, the movie was about some native island in some far away land. The people were happy, and they lived in a commune atmosphere where everyone pitched in and did their part. But here's what was different; when a person felt he could no longer contribute or felt he had become a burden to his people, he would just disappear.

The scene I can't forget was an elderly man climbing into a small rowboat and rowing out to sea, far beyond where anyone could see him. The next morning that rowboat returned to the island empty. What was amazing to me is how all the people accepted this as normal.

This obviously was a different culture than we know or believe in. Yet, there is something about this that holds a message.

I had a profound experience when my sister was diagnosed with cancer. I have often said that I learned more about living during the two years she was dying than at any time in my life.

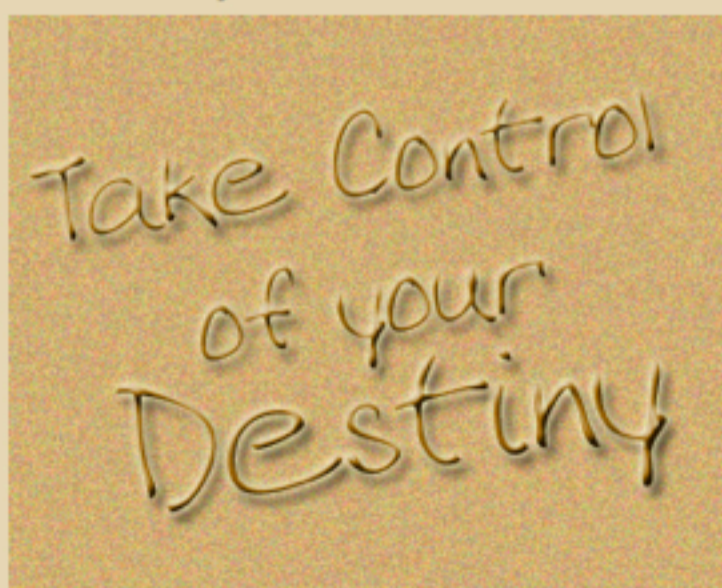
After some reflection, I need to correct this statement. Since I was the older brother, I felt I needed to take control when my sister was first diagnosed with cancer. I felt I needed to find a cure even though the doctors said her condition was terminal. The first year into her illness was a whirlwind of emotions - up and down. Travel, expenses, hope, and disappointment were the menu that first year. Then one day my sister came to me and said, "I'm going to unpack my suitcase". I knew exactly what she meant. My sister lived another year in which she was in control of her destiny - not me. She gave me one of the most enjoyable and memorable experiences of my life. That was twenty years ago, and I still live and reflect with the year my sister took control of her destiny. My sister may have died twenty years ago, but she still lives on in me to this day.

This message has come home to me recently. My 93 year old aunt has asked me to take care of her affairs when she no longer can. But let there be no mistake - she is in control to the end with instructions for no chemo, no radiation, no operations, no machines to keep her going, etc. She is at peace, and I am greatly relieved.

My sister straightened me out and changed my way of thinking. And through this experience, I learned that just because a death occurs, this does not mean a life is ended. Had she not taken control of her destiny, I'm certain her life would not be as meaningful to me today as it is. Thanks, sis!

We have the choice of taking control of our destiny or leave this burden on someone else's shoulders. This is just another way of Paying-It-Forward.

Doug



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