

End of Life Conversations Bring Unexpected Intimacy



Episode 70: End of Life Conversations Bring Unexpected Intimacy with Jane Duncan Rogers

Gregory Anne: Welcome back everybody to another episode of rebellious wellness over 50. My guest today is Jane Duncan Rogers, and she has a message for us. We're all gonna die. And so we better start planning for that inevitability while we're young and healthy so that we can be less of a burden to those we leave behind and feel good about how we are approaching those last few minutes.

Welcome Jane. Thanks for being with us.

Jane Duncan Rogers: Wonderful. Good to be here. Thank you.

Gregory Anne: You're welcome. It's not an unusual career path, planning for the future, but yours is a little bit, I love the name of it "Before I go Solutions", name of your business. Tell the listeners how you ended up here.

Jane Duncan Rogers: Okay. So my background has been 25, 30 years in the counseling coaching training world as a as a solo professional. And my husband was diagnosed with stomach cancer in 2010 and a year later he had died. When this happens, you know, when your life is threatened or somebody close to you whose life is threatened, your life changes in that moment. We ended up having a really great last year despite everything, but, so that was a change, but then he died and then of course that was another big change.

And I always knew that I would have to write about this. I'd already been writing a blog. Both of us had written a blog during that last year. And the audience I was working with at that time were small business owners and holistic coaches, that sort of thing. And I, so I knew I would've to write a book.

I trusted that I would wake up one morning and it would just come and actually that is what happened.

Gregory Anne: Wow.

Jane Duncan Rogers: And literally, it was just like in the novels. I woke up and I thought, oh my goodness, I have to write this now. And I laid out a plan and then I got ill, so I couldn't do anymore. And then I carried on and it all poured out in a period of about six weeks.

And that was my first book "Gifted By Grief." And I say that because this book was meant to be, I thought the result of it would be, well, maybe I'll get a few counseling clients who are dealing with bereavement. That did happen. But also what happened was that readers responded to a chapter in that book.

And in the week when maybe 10 people had said to me the same thing, I need to answer these questions too. I paid attention. Now, the questions they were talking about are the questions that I, and my husband answered. It turned out about, it was about a few months before he died. We knew that it was happening.

We knew it was going to be a matter of months. And a friend had sent us an email saying, you need to get him to answer these questions. Things like. What are your

passwords? What kind of coffin do you want? How do you want your body dressed? So really practical, but pretty hard-hitting questions.

Gregory Anne: Yeah.

Jane Duncan Rogers: Especially when you know, you're gonna be dying, you know, so we put it off and we had to get three emails. She sent us three emails, the same one each time. And eventually I said, okay, we really have to do this. Cuz we have to get her off our back. But you know what Gregory? We had such a surprise because it was actually an enjoyable process.

I still, when I say that I'm like shocked, really? Because you don't expect that. The topic was his end of life, but it was like us doing a project together and we've been good at doing projects. So that's what I wrote about, and that's what people responded to. And when you know, I got all these nudges in one, the space of one week I'm like, okay, life's knocking at the door here, Jane, you better pay attention.

So I put on a workshop, a local workshop, and this is before the pandemic. So it was easy to do. And you know, we had 12 people roll up or another 12 on the waiting list. And that was like, I live in a very small place. So this was unusual. And that's really how Before I Go Solutions began, it took another year for me to actually incorporate it as a proper social enterprise, which is a not for profit, but yeah, that's how we began.

And that was five years ago. About five years ago. Yeah.

Gregory Anne: so gifted by grief in truth, really? I mean, aside from all the other gifts you got, I know you talked about that in your book, but this shift in the direction you were going in is not only satisfying for you, but the hundreds of people that you work with.

Jane Duncan Rogers: Well, you know what, in the early days, especially in the early years, the wonderful thing was that I got to talk about Philip a lot and it was completely legitimate. It was really nice and, and I hadn't imagined that would happen, but of course I had to talk about it, cuz I, I was telling my story and it was really lovely.

He had been a psychotherapist and his mission in life was to help other people and to make a difference. And it felt like he was still making a difference through me. And that was really, really good.

Gregory Anne: Yeah. I'll Bet. I'm wondering if that was that hard to speak about him or was it a joyous, like a healing thing for you to speak about him?

Jane Duncan Rogers: It was all of those actually on different occasions. I'm not one, I don't mind if tears come to my eyes or even if they're flooding down my cheeks, I can speak through it. And I just think it's really important that people understand the impact that grief has. And of course from Before I Go Solutions, how we can help people who are grieving, cuz that's what happens when you're taking care of somebody who's died, you're in grief.

There's a lot of stuff to be done. And if people can be helped to do that beforehand to pave the way, if you like, for something that is inevitable, then I, I feel strongly about making that easy for them.

Gregory Anne: Mm-hmm you had a deadline of sorts, not a hard stop, but you knew that this was coming in a matter of

weeks, months. Most of us will not have that.

Jane Duncan Rogers: No

Gregory Anne: many of us, I should say. Speak to the incentive for us to have these kinds of conversations now while we're capable and not grieving and helping.

Jane Duncan Rogers: Well, to be honest, most of the people that we work with who actually do do their end of life plans who want to come and do the courses or take the products, whatever it is, are people who have been brushed by death in one way or another.

So they've had, they've seen the effect either of somebody who has died and left behind a very well organized estate which I have to say is few and far between, but it does happen. And then you realize, oh my goodness. Especially if you're the executor of that person, then you realize how important it is.

Much more common though. Are people who have witnessed the devastation that occurs when somebody dies maybe unexpectedly or without any plan in place. Even if it is expected and that is still common. And the amount of sheer solid administrative work that has to happen. The amount of saying to the various different organizations he's died or she's died over and over and over again.

It's really hard when, you know, you only have to mention their name and you feel like crying. So. When that can be made easier. It's a real gift, but I tell you, it is a

selfless gift because you know, you're gonna be dead. You're not gonna be around to receive their appreciation. although I must say there is a great deal of relief and reassurance that comes in a family when everybody knows that, you know, this element has been taken care of.

Gregory Anne: Mm-hmm I would imagine too, as people get older, I'm thinking of my aunt who's 90. Doesn't live nearby, in another country. And she she's sharp, she wants to stay independent. She has the place picked out that she wants to go to, but her conversations are not as,

let's just say they've changed. Now she's thinking, well, maybe I'll put things in storage when I go to that place and we're kind of going, what? Right. I guess, We should have had things in writing, from her, but all right, we want you to write up this thing and we're gonna sign it.

It just feels intrusive in a way.

Jane Duncan Rogers: It is. Yeah, it's hard. And I think that's why it's so important that we are able to talk easily about death. Right. I would say right from when the children are small, so that it's a normal part of everyday conversation. Well, you probably not talking about it every day, but you know, regularly, it's just like anything else. I mean, if we look outside into nature, we see life and death happening all the time with plants and animals and everything. Especially if you live amongst other animals, that's just something that happens. But but most of us don't do that. Of course. So we don't see that.

And it's easy to forget that, it's a normal part of life. You can't have life without death, that they are interwoven, you know, So I'm on a mission to help people be able to talk about it in a more easy way. Well before the time, well before it's really needed. So you don't have to get over that hurdle as well.

Gregory Anne: mm-hmm . And so you have workshops and different kinds of end of life planning cards. You have ways that people can learn about this, but I'm thinking let's talk a little bit more about what's unexpected that might come up for a person. Let's just say, I, for instance, the woman, as you said, mostly is the women who are ready to start planning when we get, you know, a nudge.

Jane Duncan Rogers: Yeah.

Gregory Anne: What am I to expect that I wouldn't think of when I start answering these questions or, or trying to have a conversation with my spouse

about what kind of coffin,? Well, he wants to be cremated, all those little details. Help us prepare.

Jane Duncan Rogers: Okay.

I've often heard it that the woman in a partnership is the one who really wants to do this sort of thing. And the man doesn't wanna do it. So what do you do? This is not unusual. So first of all I think one of the most creative ways that I heard of somebody coming up with this. Somebody in one of our courses, this was her exact situation and it was really important

they talk because they were a blended family, but her husband just wouldn't talk about it. So she came back one day and she said I told him that I'd been given an exercise to do, this was true, and would he please listen to me just for 10 minutes? And that would mean that I could tick off my box from my homework, so he was willing to do that.

What he didn't realize, was what he got into, because it ended up with them having an hour and a half conversation, which was incredibly useful.

One of the things that's important there, I talk about the three CS for a good end of life conversation. And one of them is you have to have courage because when you're dealing with somebody who doesn't wanna do it, it is a courageous thing.

And when you're wanting to talk to someone you maybe haven't mentioned it to at all, you certainly have to have some courage, but you really need a context. So I described the context there as I was listening, I was on this course, but actually any of your listeners could be saying to somebody, I heard this really unusual podcast the other day.

And do you know what she was talking about? She was talking. Blah, blah, blah, blah, whatever it is that has struck you, and that leads you in cuz there's the context and it could be something as simple as, it made me start thinking about what I wanted for my funeral or what I want to have happened to my body when I die.

And it's amazing, how many people discover, especially in partnerships, that one of them wants to be buried. One of them wants to be cremated, maybe something else. And the other thing that I always emphasize is keeping it, I wouldn't say lighthearted, cuz you know, it's difficult to be lighthearted about this particular subject, but you can be light about it.

You have to be, you have to watch a bit with humor, because not everybody's sense of black humor is the same but, but you can be light about it. So that's one thing that I would suggest in that kind of situation.

There's another unexpected thing that people never think about, if you've got secrets in your life, whatever they may be, if you think that they might come out after you've died, please take care of them beforehand.

It can either be something horrible that is gonna affect that person and you're not gonna be around to answer any questions or explain anything.

But also, you know, maybe you've left somebody something wonderful in your will, but you haven't told them. That's a nice kind of secret you would think, but you deprive that person from expressing their gratitude. So it's really something to come at very consciously.

And you might not think of these things as secrets. It might just be things that only you know, that might be helpful for, for somebody else. So I hope that's useful.

Gregory Anne: Yeah, absolutely. Do you talk about health proxies as well as a will and all those level initiative details?

Jane Duncan Rogers: Yeah. Yeah. There's six different areas of a good end of life plan. In the legals, there's the will or their trust. Depending on what you want and also the proxies or, what we would call 'em here in the UK is powers of attorney for both healthcare and finances.

So now those are going to be different, slightly different in each state or each country, but what we do and our facilitators do because I'm training people now to be end of life plan facilitators, they will help people in that area,

and that jurisdiction if you like, to go through the forms that are needed to get the right information in place. So you don't have to go to a lawyer to do it, which you know, can cost quite a bit of money. In many places, you don't have to do that. If you wanna do it yourself, you can, it's easier with somebody else helping you.

Of course. And some people aren't phased at all by legal language. And so they can do it and that's fine, but, but many of us are and get nervous. You know, they're gonna do something wrong with a legal document. So. There's a few choices there, but yeah, we do cover that. It's really important as well, because if you can't speak for yourself or you can't look after your finances in the future, you need to have somebody that you trust who will do that.

And if you haven't got that in place already, then everything has to go through the courts. And that takes a lot longer and costs a lot more money. And it's a lot more hassle for those people who are looking after you.

Gregory Anne: Mm-hmm . My husband had a knee replacement last year. The hospital in our state hospital system required us to have a medical proxy or they were gonna provide us with one.

So that's an impetus to go get one.

Jane Duncan Rogers: Yes.

Gregory Anne: Cause theirs was boiler plate, you know, and it didn't go into specifics. It was just basically like we'll take care of you until the end, no matter what do everything for you. But of course, many people don't want that. Yeah. And just like the questions you said that when you and your husband got to them, you had an hour and a half conversation.

When he and I had to answer all the questions about how long do you wanna be fed? Should we take you off this? It was, it was more. Bringing us closer than I thought. I didn't think it wouldn't bring us closer, but I did not expect the level of intimacy that those kinds of questions bring.

Jane Duncan Rogers: Isn't it amazing.

Gregory Anne: Yeah. It really is

Jane Duncan Rogers: quite amazing. I've heard that from so many couples now. It's like, you really don't expect it, but there's something about embracing the fragility of life while acknowledging that here we are, you know, strong and full bodied or whatever, I don't know what it is, but it's wonderful.

It's really wonderful. So I encourage people to try this

Gregory Anne: yeah. And you, you hit upon something before, while you are able, because the questions, it wasn't as if Mark and I went through the questions and were bam, bam, bam answered them. I was asking him for him first but questions. Like, do you want a feeding tube?

How long do you want, what kind of interventions do you want? That takes thought if you've never thought about it before, because I think in our mind, none

of us wanna die in a hospital. We wanna die at home. Nice, nice. But the reality is some of us will be in the hospital.

Jane Duncan Rogers: I know.

Gregory Anne: And if we don't want every modern medicine's genius thing happening to us, then we have to be willing to say, no, I don't want the feeding tube.

That's us talking about our own mortality in a very real way. However, it, like you said, it's better to do it ahead of time cuz in the moment. If they don't have any directions they're gonna do what they're best at doing, which is save lives.

Jane Duncan Rogers: Exactly.

Gregory Anne: And that can, can be very intrusive for you, the patient and the family as well.

Jane Duncan Rogers: Exactly. Exactly. I'll give you a little tip about this because nobody wants to project into the future and imagine themselves in this kind of situation, cuz it's horrible to think about. But if you imagine, if you think to yourself, if this had happened to me yesterday, what would I want?

That makes it easier to venture into that arena. Especially if you're completely healthy now and have no reason to believe that anything's gonna happen to you soon, but it's easier to imagine. It's easier to answer those questions if you like, if you imagine it, oh, it's already happened. So what would I want given who I am right now?

Gregory Anne: I think that's important too. Given who I am right now. We don't know who we'll be,

Jane Duncan Rogers: no.

Gregory Anne: At the end. We may lose cognition. We may be happier, sadder, more in touch with the people we love, less in touch. Who knows? You know, as a coach, you know, this, the moment is now, right.

Everything is in the now. So if we decide in the now how we wanna feel, if in five or 10 years, we feel like something's shifting, maybe we wanna change those documents.

Jane Duncan Rogers: Exactly.

Gregory Anne: To have something in place now is much more important than having nothing.

Jane Duncan Rogers: Yeah, absolutely. Which is why we encourage people to review their, all their end of life stuff.

I say once a year in your birthday week, not on your birthday, you probably don't wanna do it on your birthday, but in your birthday week is an easy way to remember it. And do people do it, they probably don't. But you know, if we say every year, then maybe they'll do it every two or three years.

Cause you never know.

Gregory Anne: I interviewed a financial planner, not too long. He works specifically with women over 50. And he said, the interesting thing to me is that the first thing we do is we assess where we are. What do you have in the bank? What do you owe? He said

it's astonishing to him that most people don't know what they spend. They kind of know what they have. They may know what their mortgage is. Right. But it's the same thing. And then he says, once we have all of that data, we can make a plan. And he, in the same way, encourages them to look at their plan. At least once a year.

We're going through a crazy economic turmoil right now. Every country on the globe I think is suffering through it. So we don't know what's going to happen, but those things also affect our planning for the future, with our finances. Maybe it will even affect our planning for our, our physical wellbeing.

Yeah. Do we wanna go into a care home? Do we not against all odds? Do you include those kinds of things in?

Jane Duncan Rogers: Yeah. Yeah, we do. And that's why, you know, sometimes for some people it's easier to think things through with somebody else like one of our facilitators rather than a family member, cuz sometimes with a family member, it can feel just a little bit raw and close to the bone.

So if you can get your own thoughts relatively clear and then have a conversation because you know, you can't really make a really good end of life plan for yourself without involving somebody else, at least one other person. And it might, even if

you don't have a family, it might be a friend, you know, because there has to be somebody involved which also highlights another aspect.

There are more and more people who are living on their own and who don't have family. So if that's the case, who do you appoint as an executor of your will? Who do you point as a power of attorney? It is a big question and there's another one as well, which is, who's gonna look after you when you're older and maybe you can't look after yourself, again is a horrible thing to think about, but it's happening more and more.

And if you are of an age where you're in that situation and you're projecting forward, there's lots of things that you can do about it right now to help manage that situation should you be in that. I write about it in my second book is, "Before I go, The Essential Guide to Creating a Good End of Life Plan".

And there's a chapter in there that prompts you with things to think about well ahead of time, that will help further on down the line in, I don't know, 10, 20, 30 years, whatever it is. Yeah.

Gregory Anne: That's the thing. We don't know how long we have.

Jane Duncan Rogers: No,

Gregory Anne: Everybody's living longer.

Jane Duncan Rogers: Yeah,

Gregory Anne: things will be different in probably 10 or 20 years in care homes, over 50 communities.

All those things will be better, I hope than what I've heard. And I think when you said that many people are living alone, that seems to me like the most precarious place to be, and yet the least drawn towards planning for what's going to happen because it probably feels pretty hopeless.

Jane Duncan Rogers: Yeah,

Gregory Anne: what do I do? I can't afford the best care. Where do I go? You know?

Jane Duncan Rogers: But you can get together. What you can do is you can get together with other like minded people in a similar situation and you can support

each other. That's one of the things. So that's not uncommon for me to hear this, that people would

buddy up, with somebody else and be each other's power of attorney or executor or proxy or whatever it is and to support each other in going through this process. And, you know, we've talked about the intimate, the level of intimacy that occurred when you have a conversation like this, it happens with friends too.

You know, it's like, we really are dealing with the nuts and bolts here of being alive in a body. And you know, when you're dead, there's a body that's gonna be left over. It's got to be dealt with by somebody. I'm sorry to be so blunt.

Gregory Anne: No, that's all...

Jane Duncan Rogers: I think we really need to do that. We need to be blunt.

Gregory Anne: You put it perfectly. That's fine. Blunt. We like blunt here. There was an interview today with, I don't know whether you're familiar with Ms. Magazine.

Jane Duncan Rogers: No,

Gregory Anne: it was a big thing over here. It started maybe 50 years ago and they interviewed the original founders if they were still around or people that had written for them.

And it was all about women's liberation, feminism. What did that mean? But the takeaway pertinent to this conversation is one of the women said, young women that she speaks to now say, how did you do it all? How did you have kids? And still work and manage a relationship. And she said, we always made sure we had buddies, just as you said, but not one,. She said, we figured it took seven to 10 people to have our backs who needs childcare, who needs a ride to the doctor.

And then I was thinking, it's just like, what happens with elderly people? Who's gonna take them for their shots or their medication pick up or so, but I thought it translates all across generations, any age of life could use a tribe, a village as Hillary is known to say.

Jane Duncan Rogers: Absolutely. Absolutely.

And you know, if you're getting older, if you feel like you're coming towards the later stages of your life, which is by the way, anything over about 55 , if you don't

have friends, if you're in this situation, you don't have friends who are younger, then it's a good idea to cultivate younger friends.

I know that sounds like a pretty practical, pragmatic reason to do it, but you know, you'll get loads of other benefits and so will they of course. Yeah. But sensible. It's just really sensible.

Gregory Anne: Mm-hmm my aunt where she lives has a neighborhood that has, it's an expat community. She lives in Mexico.

So lots of English speaking people near her. And her best friends are in their seventies. One woman is in her eighties, but they all have levels of contribution. Who's gonna go to the store for somebody, who's driving everybody to get their COVID boosters. And it seems like it's just natural, that's the way they all are.

You don't even have to think about finding a 30 something, although that would be wonderful. You can just find people that are...

Jane Duncan Rogers: yeah, it only needs to be exactly a decade younger.

It makes a huge difference. It really does. Well, that's another thing about aging mind you, I've noticed, now I'm 64 now. And I don't feel any different from when I was like 34, except, you know, there's a few things that don't work quite so well in the body, but I behave like this with, you know, I have one or two younger friends, you know, and.

Of course, they're probably 45 now, but I think of them as 30 it's like, it doesn't matter. It really doesn't matter. I don't know if it was like this for my mom's generation, but it's certainly like it now.

Gregory Anne: Yeah. I wonder about that. My mom died when she was 49. I was 20, but did my aunt feel 40 when she was 60?

She does say that she felt really good until like 85. She said this 85 to 90 path has been pretty arduous for her physically. Right. But other than that, she mentally doesn't feel different.

So what else should we know before we close this interview? What do you wanna leave us with Jane?

Jane Duncan Rogers: I would like to encourage people to visit Before I go quiz.com. Now the before I go quiz.com is you discovering how prepared you are.

It's just 10 questions. Yes or no. Take you 30 seconds, if that, and it's going to give you a really quick idea of how well prepared you are already with a selection of some of the questions that we have from our workshops and our workbook. It's really important because what I've learned with this work is that you need to plant seeds and then keep them watered.

So if you don't know anything, this is like not knowing your state of your finances. Just do the quiz. You can sign up to get more information if you want, or not. Doesn't matter. But at least you will know where you are and that's an important thing to do. But I would say that if you haven't got a will, that is very, very important to get a will mm-hmm so Yeah.

Definitely a good idea. Reach out to us here at, before I go solutions.com. If you're unsure about anything, cuz we can help you.

Gregory Anne: That's great. Short story, my grandfather was a judge and his specialty was wills and estates. Do you think he died with a will?

Jane Duncan Rogers: No. Oh my,

Gregory Anne: He left quite a lot and took about, I wanna say two years, 18 months, for them, he had a will, but I guess there was some sort of stipulation in it that it would be updated at certain points after his wife died. And he never did. So basically it was held up for a long time.

So and luckily, cuz he was a legal person. He had people that were legal in his corner and an executor who took care of everything. But yeah, don't do that people

Jane Duncan Rogers: no, don't do that.

Gregory Anne: Even if you feel like you don't have a lot, right?

Jane Duncan Rogers: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Gregory Anne: Is that true?

Yes, it's true. Even if you don't feel like you have a lot, because it's so much more difficult for somebody to take care of everything, if that legal documentation is not in place, even if you think that you've got hardly anything.

Jane Duncan Rogers: So I really would encourage that. Yeah. I'm, I'm quite shocked about that story because

Gregory Anne: I was too position I was too,

Jane Duncan Rogers: but it's not unusual. And actually, you know, in our training course, the thing that I insist on is that everybody does their own end of life plan first, which is what I had to do as well.

When I started doing this work still took me quite a long time, but I did get it done. I just thought, how can I tell other people about doing this if I haven't done mine, that doesn't feel right at all.

Gregory Anne: good on you.

You said something earlier in the conversation. That made me think of what, how do you wanna be celebrated or vetted or not vetted?

Yeah. Vetted. Yeah, once you're gone, some people just, they don't really think about that. They don't want anything. When my mom died, we had a party. And we did pictures all over the room of her, in her life and all of her friends came and it was lovely. Yeah. So I think that's important too, cuz that's the celebratory part for us about ourselves.

Right? This kind of music would make me feel good or now we won't be there to enjoy it, but we'll know that we left something in place. So for others, aren't going, what do I do? Would she have wanted this or.

Jane Duncan Rogers: I know, and, and that's the kind of thing that brings incredible solace. It happened for me after my mom and dad died, which was a few years ago now.

And they had completed their workbooks. They really good students of mine, which was wonderful. So I was the executor. I just had to go and have a look and I knew exactly what they wanted. They had chosen the venue and they had earmarked the kind of menu that the one oh. Well, I know, you know, but the ended up being, we had a cremation and we all came back to this hotel and

it ended up being the kind of party that they would've loved. Mm-hmm we could, I could imagine that they were there, they were there on the screen. Mm-hmm not actually in person, of course, but it felt like they were there in spirit and it really was lovely. They would've definitely liked it. And that's very heartwarming at a time when you're, you know, you're missing them.

Absolutely. Absolutely. I think that's a lovely note to end. Okay, so Jane before I go.com, right?

Before I go solutions.com.

Gregory Anne: I noticed that your books are in and your programs are in Sterling, British pound Sterling. Do you, can you people get your book on Amazon by chance?

Yes. The books are on Amazon. And if you want to. If you go to the website to buy anything, the cards you can only get through the website, the workbook, then it just translates into dollars. So you, you don't have to worry about that.

Okay, perfect. I'm sure that there will be lots of people here that are anxious to get started, because as you said, you plant to seed and you have to water it.

We planted seeds today for people.

Yeah. Yeah. Thank you.

You're welcome. People we will be back next week with another great episode of rebellious wellness over 50. Be well till next time.