

I Used to Be Happy about My Birthday

Category: Aging

written by Lynn O'Donnell | February 15, 2020

My mother was forty-nine when she died of primary pulmonary hypertension. She was a non-smoker and a non-drinker, but she had a tremendous amount of stress in her life. After being told she could not have a management job because she was a woman, she sued her employer for discrimination. These were the days of the "women's liberation movement."

My mother won her lawsuit, but she died before it was settled. I blame the stress of the lawsuit on her illness and untimely death.

I was in nursing school when my mother died. I went on to a career in pediatrics with special needs children. Then later, and for the past thirty years, as a case manager.

I used to celebrate every birthday, and especially my fiftieth, when I reached an age my mother never saw. I celebrated that year with a beach vacation. And I've celebrated every year since.

But now, as I approach my sixty-second birthday, I think more about illness and what the remaining years may bring for me and my siblings. I've been diagnosed with osteoporosis, and my brother-in-law has cancer. I see patients, some younger than me, with terrible illnesses, and I wake each morning with aches and pains. I wonder: *What will the future hold for me?*

Case management has its own special kind of stress. Patients rarely understand our role and are rarely grateful for the amount of work we put into arranging a safe and successful discharge plan.

I don't want to die from a stress-related illness, and plan to work only PRN soon. I want time to enjoy my family and time to travel.

I hope that I have at least twenty more years, and that these are mostly healthy. But I know I am much closer to the end than the beginning.

For as long as possible, I want to celebrate, not fear, my birthdays.

Lynn O'Donnell

Lewisville, Texas