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Changing the face of death and dying in our community

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Disease to death is often shrouded in fear. Fear of death is like a plague that devours the life force and steals living from lives. Death anxiety exists in various degrees and cultivates suffering in our culture. Some people are afraid of all things associated with death. Others may fear their own mortality, and some may be afraid of it all. We have become a death fearing society that spends vital energy seeking out ways to stay young to avoid death. As we know death is a part of life. As a death doula I am part of a death positive movement. A movement that is required to change the culture of fear and silence around death. Death needs to stand amongst us; visible and heard amongst the living. Death is happening in every moment; death is as natural as our next exhale.

Open and honest advocacy around death can make a difference. A difference that is essential. It was made aware to me in my young years working as a nurse. People were not dying the way that I knew they should be. They were abandoned, left dying alone, in institutions, lying in cold bathroom, the doors closed on death so no one would bear witness to it. I knew this is NOT the way this should be! I was made so clearly aware that changes were essential. Changes such as bringing death to the living, in this death positive approach we can provide a different death experience. One that can be supported in the comfort of people's place of

celebration, love and life, at home, with families and loved ones nearby. An experience that is lived all the way to and through death and beyond is supported by a death doula who encourages the dying person and their loved ones to come face to face with death, to move beyond the death denial and to engage in an open and authentic exploration of dying.

In the experiences as a death doula in a death positive movement it is found that death can be all that it is part of life with all of its curiosity, emotionality and fears alive and safely supported in a matter of fact way. A death positive movement and the role of a death doula is a panacea for death phobia and a potent catalyst of change to bring death back to the living in a holistic and fully honoring way.

Speaker Biography

Christiane Zeithammel worked as a nurse in Germany for many years. After marriage she moved to Canada where she dedicated her energy and nurturing nature to raising a family of four boys. As her children have now reached adulthood, it has made for a long-anticipated return to her work. A work that focuses on caring for the dying and supporting their families. With her skills as a nurse, a mother, a certified yoga teacher and a graduate of the Contemplative End of Life Care Program at the Institute for Traditional Medicine in Toronto she passionately supports those in her community as a death doula.

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