

INTERVIEWER: You know, anyone who has had a loved one die, and that's nearly everyone who's listening, remembers the shock when they received that awful call or the sense of helplessness, emptiness, and crushing sadness if you were with your person when they took their last breath. While most of us prepare for the birth of a baby, not many of us plan for the other side of life's coin, death.

Former Twin Cities' television news anchor Pat Miles has had a painful firsthand experience of the emotional and legal issues that can arise after the death of a loved one that can complicate the loss. Her beloved husband, Bucky Zimmermann died in 2019 after a short fight with cancer. Pat has put her journalism skills to work and wrote a book that's designed to help before someone dies. It's called *Before All is Said and Done: Practical Advice on living and Dying Well*. Pat Miles, what a pleasure to have you here.

SUBJECT: Oh, thank you, Cathy. A pleasure to be here. And just so you know, my daughter Kate was like, you're going to be on Cathy Rose's show. She was like, oh, mom, you finally made it.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, Pat, that's sweet. Tell her I said hello. You mentioned in the book that every day, in the last three years since Bucky died, you've asked yourself, how are you doing today? So how are you doing today?

SUBJECT: Well, it's an interesting journey and it's a moveable feast. One of the things I talk about in the book is that you have to, when you lose your spouse, you have to reimagine your life. And that's not something that's pleasant, especially at my age, trying to reimagine a life. And I thought about this a lot actually, Cathy.

I mean, when I was a young woman and I came here, and I was on TV, I was a single lady. And then I got married and I had kids and I was a mom, and then I was a professional woman. And then when I married Bucky, I was his wife and we retired and, or at least I did, and moved to Arizona for half the year. And then when Bucky died, I wasn't Pat Miles anymore and I wasn't Pat Zimmerman anymore and so I am now trying to figure out who I am right now and how I re-imagine a new life for myself without a career or a husband.

INTERVIEWER: And that's good to go-- that's very much a roller coaster I'm assuming.

SUBJECT: It is a roller coaster and you have to come to terms with it. I mean, part of what happens when you lose somebody is that you don't want to accept that this has happened to you. It's like this is not my life. This was my life. This can't be my life. But it is your life and you have to figure out how you want to spend the rest of it and what you want to do with it.

INTERVIEWER: Say, I want to take you back a little bit here for folks who are not familiar with the story. Bucky's death was sadly not too long after diagnosis, was there any hint that he was sick?

SUBJECT: Oh, absolutely not. He was probably one of the healthiest people I knew. He prided himself on his diet. He didn't really drink. He had a 32 inch waist. He had been a professional tennis player. He exercised every day. He was most proud of the fact that he did a four minute plank every morning. I couldn't even do a one minute plank.

And we were on a trip with my two daughters and he seemed tired, which he was never tire. He was always like, what are we doing next? But he seemed tired on that trip but I didn't pay much attention to it. I just thought, oh, he's probably just worked too hard and this is a relaxing vacation and he's taking some downtime. But when we got home, he knew there was something seriously wrong. I didn't and he stopped at the Mayo Clinic emergency room and said, you know, I'm constipated. I don't feel great. And they did an MRI and he had stage four pancreatic cancer, which is not a good diagnosis.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, my goodness. And then soon after, as I mentioned, he passed away. When I read your book, it didn't surprise me to read that neither of you were willing to talk about or acknowledge that he was dying and what that meant to you both. And you wrote that you thought that by talking about death, it meant you were giving up, and a lot of people believe that. How did that reluctance, Pat, to engage with death affect his last days in your time with him?

SUBJECT: Oh, there's so many things, Cathy, I wish I could go and do, redo and that's one of them. One of the things my daughter said to me when she came to visit us, she pulled me aside and she said, you know, mom, I think you need to think about getting a death due and help you that. And I just pushed it aside and said it's a millennial mumbo jumbo stuff. I don't even know what you're talking about.

And then after Bucky died, I asked her, why did you tell me that? And she said because you were fighting a war you were not going to win. And rather than fighting, why not spend that time having someone help you come to terms and acceptance of what was going on? And I sure wish we had done that.

We kept thinking, praying, hoping he was going to get better, or he was going to live longer, or they were going to find a cure or a treatment. And we didn't deal with it. We were in denial, pretty bad denial. And the only time we actually really talked about it was the day he died and he said to me, he grabbed hold of my hand and he said, where am I going? And I'm like, I don't know. I don't know.

INTERVIEWER: Oh my goodness, Pat. Oh, this is so hard, isn't it to relive this? When I read the book, what turned my head was the statistic that you included in the book. That the average age of a widow is 55 and that surprised me. And I could see why you weren't prepared for death. What are the dangers of not thinking about that final transition for anyone of any age?

SUBJECT: Well, there are so many implications to it. I mean, Bucky was an attorney. I was a journalist. I mean, you would think we would have our act together, right? But it's sort of like the plumber who comes home and doesn't want to repair the leak. I think we thought, at least I did, I thought our affairs were in order but they really weren't. And by the time I kind of realized that it was too late.

And one of the things I say in the book is if you wait to deal with bad things during bad times, you've waited too long. You need to deal with these things while you're living good times. They're easier to talk about, they're easier to deal with, and it's going to make like a lot easier for those who you leave behind. And that's really the whole purpose of me writing this book.

I mean, in any regard, Bucky wanted to leave me this basket full of problems. I mean, it's hard enough to grieve somebody's death but then to be faced with all kinds of legal problems, and accounting problems, and bank problems, and family problems.

It's impossible almost to function in any kind of realistic way when you are in the, what I call, the grim fog of grief because you're not thinking straight and you're not making great decisions. And it's just a horrible period of time. So if you can get all of that together before you have to face the inevitability of somebody's death or your own, you're going to leave behind a much better legacy for the people you love. I mean, I say we were set for life but we were not set for death.

INTERVIEWER: And you talked at length about wills, power of attorney, health care power of attorney, those sorts of things that most people just their eyes glaze over.

SUBJECT: Right, and mine certainly did. I mean, I say in the book, I mean, Bucky had to drag me to the attorney's office to do a will and a trust. I was like, you know, which is whatever you want to do is fine. I'll sign whatever but you pay attention. You need to pay attention. We all need to pay attention and we all need to make sure that we have a binder with all the information that the people you leave behind are going to need if you don't come home tonight. If you don't come home tonight, you need to leave behind the code to get into your cell phone.

You need to leave behind the account numbers. You need to leave behind the names of the people you need to call, the banker, the accountant, the attorney. You need to have all of that written down so that there's a place where those you leave behind can go and figure things out. And I didn't have any of that and it took me a year. I mean, I spent half of that year on hold waiting for people to call me back or get back to me. Because they won't talk to you. If you're not on the account, they won't talk to you. You don't have the account number, they won't talk to you.

INTERVIEWER: All the good advice that you wrote in this book. It was hard one obviously. I wish I had more time with you too, Pat. I know you're going to be at the Carlos Creek winery near Alexandria for a book event on October the 12th.

SUBJECT: Yes, I am and I'm looking forward to it. It's going to be kind of a mini-vacation to go up there. So I'm hoping for good weather. And Cathy, I just want to say you're doing great work in this area as well. I mean, I'm so impressed with what you've done with that nonprofit and just the fact that you're talking about these issues. I mean, we need to, in this culture, start talking about death. And I think COVID made that a reality for a lot of us who didn't want to think about it.

INTERVIEWER: It absolutely did.

SUBJECT: We didn't know if we were the one it was going to kill. And so I think for the first time, a lot of people, no matter what their age, 32 or 82, started thinking about the fact that, hey, I am mortal. I could die.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, Pat, thanks for the kind words about the End in Mind project. I will have you back on somewhere along the line here and we'll talk. Thank you so much. Take care of yourself, OK?

SUBJECT: Thank you, Cathy. I appreciate the opportunity to talk.

INTERVIEWER: Absolutely. Pat Miles, again, she'll be at the Carlos Creek Winery near Alexandria for a book event October 12th, 5 to 7 PM. Contact the Cherry Street bookstore in Alexandria for details.