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My dad's assisted death was a parting gift. I wish I'd said so in his obituary

Kelley Korbin

5–6 minutes

[Canada](#) · First Person

Deferring to her mother, Kelley Korbin left out the fact that her father had a medically assisted death in his obituary — a decision she regretted.

In writing about death, we use euphemisms that sometimes obscure how we actually feel



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Kelley Korbin wished she'd included the fact that her father had a medically assisted death in his obituary. (Judi Korbin)

This First Person column is written by Kelley Korbin, who lives in West Vancouver, B.C. For more information about CBC's First Person stories, please see [the FAQ](#).

My father's death was something I'd worried about for decades — probably since I learned that smoking kills. But years of pre-emptive angst didn't prepare me for the crushing heartache that landed like a rock on my chest when he finally died from lung cancer at 82 last year.

I couldn't have known how the deliberate way he chose to die would become part of his legacy. Or that Mom's reticence would prevent me from sharing with the world that he had medical assistance in dying. I had

hoped to honour my father with an obituary that inspired readers to live harder and love bigger. And, I wanted to package his life with all its complexities and idiosyncrasies into an honest tribute that — if you read between 20 column inches — revealed his authentic nature.

For example, I wrote he regaled us with tales that we never tired of hearing, that he was never one for small talk and that he was his most relaxed self when he travelled. I'll decipher: Dad always prefaced his (albeit entertaining) stories with, "Stop me if you've heard this," and then launched right in with nary a nanosecond pause for interjections; he did not suffer fools and, without a margarita in hand on a tropical beach, he could be pretty set in his ways.

The one thing I didn't want to couch was how he died.

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I'm reticent to use a hackneyed term like transformational but it's the only one I have to describe what we experienced. Medical assistance in dying spared Dad many indignities and, for the family he left behind, knowing in advance the exact day and time of his death provided us with a chance to say everything we needed to say and send him off steeped in the love he deserved.

As I watched Dad take his last peaceful breath (not a euphemism, it really was), I was flooded with gratitude for living in a country where my father

had the option to forgo a long, slow death. I wanted to share it with the world.

WATCH | Canada delays expansion to MAID for those suffering solely from mental illnesses:



What another delay means for people waiting for MAID

The federal government wants another pause in allowing medical assistance in dying (MAID) requests from those suffering solely from mental illnesses. CBC's Christine Birak breaks down the division among doctors and what it means for patients who have waited years for a decision.

So, I asked Mom.

"Can I write that Dad had MAID in the obituary?"

"I'd rather you didn't."

I'm not usually one to demur. But this was my mother — just a day after her husband of 60 years had died. Plus, obituaries cost a bundle, and she was paying.

"OK, no problem," I said and went on the hunt for a breadcrumb to drop in the obit. Dad's death was neither "sudden" nor "unexpected" or "tragic," leaving me unsure of what coded language to use for assisted dying.

In the end, I settled for the truth: Dad died surrounded by his family as the sun set.





Korbin's parents, David and Judi, were married for 60 years. (Kelley Korbin)

For the next year, I regretted what felt like a lie of omission. Then, on the first anniversary of his death, Mom said to me, "It's taken me a while, but now I see that your dad traded a few months of his life to give us a beautiful death."

She was right.

- [Liberals introduce legislation to delay expansion of assisted dying eligibility until 2027](#)
- [Family celebrate lives of Sask. couple who used medical assistance in dying at same time](#)
- [Catholic Church files court challenge of Quebec's assisted dying law](#)

Dad had always been generous with material things, but his deliberate death was perhaps his greatest gift. Watching him make his difficult decision with grace and equanimity was the bravest thing I've experienced. We have always been a close family, but I don't think any of us, even Dad, could have predicted the way sharing this rite of passage would bring us closer. Even a year after our patriarch's death, I can feel a

deeper intimacy between those of us he left behind.

Beautiful indeed.

I took my mom's opening to probe further.

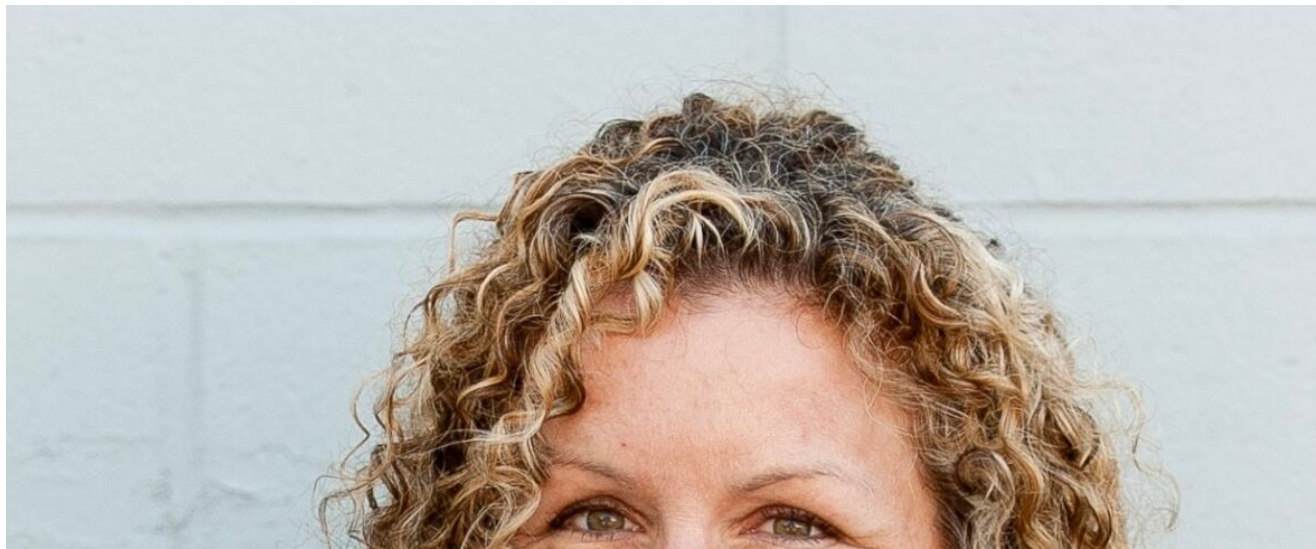
"Why didn't you want me to put MAID in the obituary? Were you worried about the stigma?"

"Me? Stigma? Not at all," she said, "I just didn't think it was relevant."

And then she added, "But I do now. So you go and tell the world about your father's big, beautiful, assisted death."

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR





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