

Mothers Grave Nana_FINAL2

[00:00:00] **Uma:** Hi, Dana. My name is Uma Girish. So my mother passed away in January of 2009, and it was the event that absolutely shattered me, broke me down, and then pieced me back together. All the work I do today in the world is serving people, um, who are grieving and who believe that there's something deeper than loss for them to live, live up to, which is their sole purpose.

[00:00:28] And my job is to work with them and guide them on this journey from the portal of loss to the portal of purpose. Um, I've published three books. I'm just working on my fourth. The first draft is done. And, uh, I love the work you do. I serve as a spiritual mentor, mainly focused on the areas of, um, loss and life purpose, incorporating the beauty and the uniqueness of human design, which is a whole beautiful system that I am guiding people on.

[00:01:06] So lots to share. And if you feel called to connect, I would love to thank you and have a beautiful day.

[00:01:31] **Dana:** Welcome to I Swear on My Mother's Grave and the final episode of season three. I did it. I did it. I didn't wasn't sure I was going to make it to the end. And we did it. We did this collectively three seasons, baby. Thank you for supporting me on this ride. Uh, I don't want to bury the lead. I don't want to be manipulative.

[00:01:54] So I also want to welcome you to the end of my podcast journey with all of you. Yep. This is it, friends. I am turning off the mic after this episode, but I might release a special compilation of conversations you haven't even heard yet at some point because there are so many amazing people you still haven't heard.

[00:02:13] I have catalogs of audio from like 2021. Um, I might put out some bonus episodes too, so don't unsubscribe forever. It is hard for me to say goodbye to you all and to the show because I've put so much time, energy, brainpower, money into building it. And, um, I've made so many amazing friends on and off the mic.

[00:02:32] It has been unreal, the community I now have forever and thank you. And it's helped me heal, but sometimes things end naturally. And that's how this feels. It feels like the right time and the right moment in my grief journey to step away. So since goodbyes are hard and I don't want to ghost you, it just felt

fitting to end this journey, talking about preparing to say goodbye to those we love.

[00:02:58] And to share with you all what I learned about sitting with the dying as I approached my Nana's death this past summer. The truth is that if I'd never started this podcast, I am, I'm not sure I could have made it through her decline and her looming death all year with such acceptance and tools and the grace to say goodbye.

[00:03:19] If you've been listening to the show for the last three years, you know that my Nana, Donna, is my mom's mom and my best friend. She's like the sister I never had. And she's like a second mother to me. I also got to live really close to her for most of my life, with the exception of college. So she was always about an hour away.

[00:03:37] In this episode, we're going to do two things. You're going to get to hear an excerpt of a conversation I had with Uma Girish, a spiritual mentor and author who reached out to me via my website. She's the beautiful voice you heard at the top of this episode. Uma and I first connected in 2022. And then I asked her if we could get back on the mic together this past May.

[00:03:58] When I knew that my Nana was struggling after having COVID and pneumonia earlier in the year I had been preparing for months to say goodbye to her and because Uma has experience sitting with the dying and has a wise calming way about her I knew that she could provide some wisdom for me. Uma is gonna remind me and all of you that the dying can sense our energy that my Nana just wants my presence and that maybe right now it is time for silence.

[00:04:30] It's okay to just be, to just sit with her. What a lesson for life, right? And for preparing for death. My Nana passed away three weeks after this conversation. And I'm going to tell you a little bit about those four days sitting bedside with my Nana and how Uma's advice kept rumbling through my mind about my memories of both my mother's death and my Nana's life.

[00:04:56] And how maybe this entire podcast journey was leading me to this moment. This is Uma Girish, my Nana's death and me.

[00:05:19] I wanted to know if you had any thoughts for me about how I could show up and, and not overwhelm her. With death talk, right?

[00:05:33] **Uma:** Yeah. So I'm drawing on my experiences as a bedside companion to the dying in hospice to answer, to respond to your question,

because I was sitting with strangers whose lives I didn't know very much about at all.

[00:05:49] I would say lead with, lead with what she wants. So it's very easy to walk into the space with your agenda in place. And usually when we walk in with our agenda, it's about, I'm going to feel so connected to her at the end of this conversation or at the end of this time together. And that's really not the place we want to be in.

[00:06:14] We want to be in the space of what would serve her best? What would help her feel connected to me? What would help her feel safe? What would help her feel seen? And so, I would just ask your grandma. Like what she wants to do. Does she want to watch Jeopardy? Does she want to watch a movie? Does she want to play a board game?

[00:06:37] You know, does she want to talk about stories from the past? Does she want to open up a photo album? Like, let her lead the dance.

[00:06:46] **Dana:** And she usually wants me to talk, right? She wants to hear about my life. She wants to listen. She doesn't because it's hard for her to talk, literally. So it's easier for her to say, well, you just talk to me about what's going on with you and I'll listen.

[00:07:00] And yeah, but sometimes I feel like. I should be doing more, you know, I should be guiding quickly get all the questions answered now in case she doesn't wake up, right? Or I don't see her again. And that's potentially putting pressure on something that isn't necessary, right?

[00:07:21] **Uma:** And I so understand that, Dana, because from your end, you want to make this time count.

[00:07:28] Right. You are aware of time slipping away, like, you know, pouring through this hourglass, sand pouring through the hourglass. But for your grandma, she probably doesn't want to be reminded of that. She's still here. She's alive. She's present. And if she says, talk to me, tell me about your day, then you can go any place you want.

[00:07:51] You can even talk about things that you remember from your childhood as a, as a young girl, the things you did with her, the things you did with your mom. You can, you can sort of look back and say, what do I remember from my childhood that I want to talk to her about right now? That would be like a fun memory.

[00:08:10] And maybe if you just even videoed these sessions, video recorded these sessions, you have something to look back on. And, um, it's, it's such a treasure trove. When they're gone, for us to be able to sit with these memories, hear the sound of their voice. you know, watch the look in their eyes. It's, it's such a gift.

[00:08:34] **Dana:** Yeah. And I think it's cause I don't live there too. So I'm like traveling and it feels a quick, quick, uh, get it in, get the visit, get the time, make sure you say this cause it might be the last time, you know? And so. It's almost, and I don't want to feel rushed. I don't want to feel like I'm slotting her in, but I'm traveling six hours to be with her.

[00:08:55] And then, right, I have to go home.

[00:08:58] **Uma:** Can I ask you a question.

[00:09:00] **Dana:** Yeah. Please do. Oh God, please take this interview. You can have it. What do you got? What do you got?

[00:09:07] **Uma:** So, what if you travel six hours to see her, and then you end up sitting with her and it's just... This beautiful, precious silence. Do words have to be said?

[00:09:20] Do words have to be spoken? Is that the only way we make meaning?

[00:09:24] **Dana:** Do you want to take, take this show over, I'm already crying, Uma, you're great. Take it, you can have it, you can have the rest of the season. Um, no, you're right. But like, yeah, silence is hard for me, I guess is what I'm probably crying about.

[00:09:39] It's hard for me to just sit there. I feel like I have to fill it in general. As a person too, I think, and so just sitting there, of course, there are moments we sit there. I let her eat. I'm not always rushing her. I'm not always trying to make her talk when she's got food in her mouth, but I feel like, oh, I've got to be funny and smart and interesting and sitting in silence is hard, but there's power in that, right?

[00:10:11] **Uma:** There's a lot of power in that, but our culture has taught us to fill silences with words. So most people are very awkward when there are no words that enter a space. So people don't know how to sit in silence, there's real

discomfort when there's silence and nobody's saying anything. But if you inhabit that space, it is pure energy, it is the energy of love.

[00:10:41] Sometimes it's hard to know what to say or to find the right words to speak. And just having this moment of silence or having moments of silence between two people can communicate so much. I mean, your grandma feels your energy. You don't have to be witty or charming or funny or any of that. She just wants you sitting there.

[00:11:03] I mean, just you sitting there beside her makes her so happy. Why isn't that enough? Why can't that be enough? Right?

[00:11:11] **Dana:** Right. Did you sit beside people in silence a lot when you were a bedside companion?

[00:11:18] **Uma:** Oh my goodness, yes. Because many of them had already lost consciousness. So I would sometimes just sit there and sing to them.

[00:11:29] And I would sing songs from, you know, Indian hymns and songs they probably don't even know. But I just sat there and sang or sometimes I just hold their hand and just sit there quietly, close my eyes. Um, and I would visualize light moving from my heart through my hand to theirs and easing whatever pain or discomfort they were experiencing in the moment.

[00:11:55] And to me, some of those times have felt like the most precious because I didn't know this person. As a vigil volunteer, which means I often sat with people who didn't have family, who had nobody, so they were dying alone, but we believe in hospice that no one should have to die alone. So I was actually companioning a person who had no family or friends.

[00:12:16] Sometimes these were people who were extremely harsh, bitter, cruel in their lives, so they alienated all the people that knew them. So in this last moment, when, when this person is dying and they're unconscious. I don't know them. I just know that I'm here as a vigil volunteer and I am a human presence, just companioning them on their last breaths.

[00:12:45] So I would just sit there and, and really tune into what feels, what feels most natural for me to be doing right now. So if the person was awake and they had a specific request, then I would be honored to perform that, whether it was rubbing lotion, whether it was holding their hand, some of them would have questions about.

[00:13:09] You know, the afterlife that they never pondered in the days and months and years prior. So then there's a specific agenda. But if you don't know the person and they can't speak to you, then you just have to sit there and be present. And presence for me was such an important part of what I was doing, whatever, how I was showing up for this person at the end stages of their life.

[00:13:38] **Dana:** How do you quiet your own mind? If you're trying to be present, you're trying to throw light and energy towards someone else that you don't know, and you might have your own swirling thoughts about your own, I don't know, maybe immortality. How do you quiet your mind and stay present? How do you, how do you channel light to someone?

[00:13:57] How do you do that? You know, how do you, yeah, quiet the brain and just be still? I mean, I know meditation, I know there's a lot of answers. I just wonder for you how you did that.

[00:14:12] **Uma:** Yeah, for me, meditation was a big part of quieting my mind. So I have been meditating now for about 14, 15 years. I've had a consistent practice, but I was very new to meditation when I was a hospice volunteer.

[00:14:28] I became a hospice volunteer after my mother died, and that's when I really needed to quiet my racing mind. And so I began my meditation practice as a way to quiet my mind, but something beautiful happened every time I entered the space of a dying person. I just felt the presence of spirit. I don't know how to describe it except it was just such a powerful energetic presence in the room.

[00:14:57] And I would, before I stepped into the room, I would always think about an intention. You know, I would say, I don't know what this person needs. So I was talking to the great spirit or the universe or God. I would say, I don't know what this person needs. But just help me to be that presence of love in their space.

[00:15:18] And oftentimes that's all you need. I mean, if you set an intention and you offer. You offer what you're feeling, the not enoughness, the, the, you know, the way your mind says you must have an agenda, you must do something tangible and concrete to help this person, you just take all those feelings and thoughts and pressures and agendas and offer them to the divine and say, I don't know what this person needs, I'm just willing to show up and be a loving presence here, so whatever needs to happen, you guide the way, and often that just worked out very well for me.

[00:16:01] **Dana:** Sometimes my grandma, when I show up, she wants to do logistics, like pay the bill, right. A bill she has, or look at the email. And I remember once I said to her, can we just talk, can we just sit here? I, I feel like when I come, I always have to do the business. I remember being able to articulate, I kind of don't want to do that right now. I don't want to talk about Chase Bank for the next 30 minutes. You know what I mean? I just want to be with you. And that was a big deal for me. And I, I need to remember that I, I also, you know, can advocate for what I, what, what might help me be able to be the most present granddaughter I can be.

[00:16:40] And also I wanted to really just spend time with her and not talk about all the logistics. Um, even though that's easier, like we said, than sometimes right? Talking about her feelings or what. Her end of life and the ticking time bomb.

[00:16:55] **Uma:** And here's the thing that they often feel our energy. They can sense our discomfort.

[00:17:02] They can sense, uh, trying to move away from things that need to be spoken. They can sense...

[00:17:09] **Dana:** Avoiding.

[00:17:10] **Uma:** All of that. So it's, you know, for me, every time I entered a dying person's space, I would cleanse my energy. Literally, like, you know, remove the busyness, remove the agenda, remove. Like what's the right thing to do?

[00:17:27] What's the best thing to do? How can I make this time most productive in terms of how I serve them? I would literally like cleanse all those, those thoughts and feelings from my space so that when I entered that room, I was just a presence of love. That's how I wanted to show up that that would be the most valuable thing for them.

[00:17:52] And it was always about them, it was never about me, right? That's why I was doing the work.

[00:17:56] **Dana:** Right. Right. For them. Yeah, that's helpful. I, I should do that. I'm going to see her in two weeks. I think. Yeah. May 22nd. So I'll see her again. She's excited for me to visit. I'm going to see her two days in a row. So it'll be nice.

[00:18:14] Yeah.

[00:18:15] **Uma:** Awesome. I'd love to know how your visit goes differently the next time. Now that we've had a conversation about all of this. And you, you've had some reflections about how you want to be more present to her and just be available for the experience instead of having a predetermined outcome in mind.

[00:18:39] **Dana:** Yeah, I know. I like to predetermine lots of things. I'm working on it. I'll plan ahead for every moment of every step of my life.

[00:19:06] Uma's mother's name was Lakshmi, by the way, and translates to one of the Hindu goddesses of wealth. Be available for the experience versus having a predetermined experience in your mind. Uma's words have been rumbling through my mind for months. The infamous May 22nd visit we chatted about was the last time I saw my Nana.

[00:19:27] Upright, alert, and present and came at the tail end of a trip to Chicago that I took to see friends and attend an event downtown. I remember feeling a bit rushed that trip and overscheduled during those four days, trying to cram in seeing people and moving from one friend's extra guest bedroom to the next.

[00:19:45] I also sort of just wished that I could stay in the city and I didn't have to drive an hour west to see my Nana. Those feelings of obligation and at times stress had only intensified in the last year when I moved six hours away from her. After having lived close to my 96 year old nana for most of my life, with the exception of college, even though she was in a nursing home now and she had a part time caregiver, I, I felt guilty for actively moving away.

[00:20:11] And at times my visits started to feel like obligations to check off a list and slot in when they coincided with other reasons to be in Chicago, but, be available for the experience versus having a predetermined experience in your mind was all I could try and remember as I walked into her room in May with some homemade bread that a friend in Chicago had made for her.

[00:20:34] Lucky for me, her caregiver Paula was there that day as well. And because it was a nice day, we decided to take my Nana outside and sit on the front patio, which is something my Nana doesn't do often, but something she enjoys. After suffering from COVID and pneumonia in January, and gradually declining and having trouble swallowing and talking, my Nana was quieter than usual, but comfy and all smiles in her blue house dress, the warm May spring breeze on her face.

[00:21:02] The episode image for this finale episode is of that day on the patio, the last photo I took of my Nana's face. I couldn't say that I was 100 percent present for this visit, if I'm being honest, since I still had one more overnight here in Windermere in the guest residences of the retirement home.

[00:21:20] They're connected to the nursing home and I usually stay here because it's really cheap, about 80 bucks, and I can just stay on the premises. So I was also knee deep at this time in our upcoming mother's grave retreat planning. So I had to work tonight and then drive the six hours home to Michigan tomorrow.

[00:21:35] But I tried to make Nana smile and tried not to talk too much and just be present. But old habits die hard for both me and my Nana as she wanted to ask me about her finances again, because she loves talking money and I love talking. So we weren't just present, but we did get some business done. When I was younger, my nana used to come over and sleep at our house on Christmas Eve, in the guest bedroom next to my room, just one wall away from my bed.

[00:22:04] I loved waking up on the big day with her, knowing that her and her pink robe would be a witness to my gift unwrapping and my joy. The smell of Entenmann's coffee cake and coffee brewing, waiting for my mom, my dad, and Nana to gather in the living room to watch an only child go nuts on her gifts, are some of my favorite memories.

[00:22:23] And the purple scooter she gave me when I was 10? Yeah, I screamed. When I get back to Michigan after this May visit, I am knee deep in retreat planning because it's in two weeks, June 8th through the 11th. I'm also up for a full time job here in Michigan with a nonprofit organization, so I'm trying to prep for that interview as well.

[00:22:45] But the Mother's Grave Retreat is a huge success, and it ended up being one of the most spectacular weekends of my life. We ate amazing home cooked food with incredible people, had massages, we built mandalas on the beach, we wrote to the dead, we object shared, we spent time around a water altar and laughed a lot.

[00:23:02] Two participants even came back to this retreat after attending our inaugural one in October. How cool is that? I love my team, I love all the participants who come, and it's truly a special time. I even used some of my inherited platters and tablecloths that were my mom's and nana's at these retreats because I want them to be present too.

[00:23:21] And after the retreat was over, I was back in Michigan. And I was sitting, waiting for my iced oat milk latte, decompressing from an incredible retreat. I was basking in all we accomplished and feeling buoyed by the success. I felt proud. I remember outwardly smiling, I do, in this public coffee shop and just taking a big deep breath.

[00:23:43] Like no joke, I was feeling good and proud and ready to focus on the job interview and my next steps in life and to get ready for summer. I got in my car, I looked at my phone, and there was a text from Paula, my Nana's caregiver, telling me that my Nana was not doing well. She was very lethargic, her lungs were crackly, she can't speak much, and she was choking when she eats.

[00:24:04] Paula said it's hard to watch her like this, and that it's also hard to say how much longer she has, but she doesn't look well, and I might want to think about driving down. Back to Chicago, I think? I just got back from the retreat that was in Illinois. I have a job interview in two days. I haven't even done my laundry.

[00:24:20] Drive back? In the midst of fear and weird resentment, and feeling like this is all unfair timing, small pangs of guilt also start to creep in because this last trip back to Illinois for the retreat, I made the choice to not see my Nana. I had just seen her two weeks before, so I had to stay focused on work to protect my energy, and so that meant no visits to Wheaton.

[00:24:45] I told myself I would see her next time. And right now it was looking like I had to hurry up because next time was now. When I was in my twenties, my mid twenties to be exact, I was dating a bipolar poet and drinking every night while losing my wallet and cabs. And my parents got divorced after 37 years of marriage.

[00:25:08] It was one of the most devastating phone calls of my life, even if I wasn't completely surprised. About a few months after that call, while I was working at a 1950s themed restaurant in Chicago, where we danced on the counters and yelled at tourists, my name was Betty Bacon Fat, by the way, I was suspended from my job.

[00:25:27] It's a long story, but I made a mistake and I brought a kid a drink without carding him. And two days later, after I was suspended, I was informed that I'd been let go while I was at the airport with my Nana. My Nana and I were flying to visit and support my deeply depressed mother in Arizona, who

was struggling after a complicated back surgery and mourning the fact that my father had just moved out.

[00:25:48] My mother was barely leaving her bedroom or sleeping, a pattern that would continue for the next 10 years. On the airplane, I remember looking out the window and finding the courage to tell my Nana that I had just lost my serving job, that I had been fired. Without missing a beat, she looked right at me and said, "Good.

[00:26:07] What's next?" As I stood outside my Nana's nursing home door, with my husband by my side, three days after getting that text from Paula, and four days before my first wedding anniversary, I remembered Uma's words. Be available for the experience versus having a predetermined experience in your mind. I also quickly cleansed my energy and set an intention.

[00:26:30] My intention was to be calming and to allow calm, to allow stillness. My Nana was still awake when we walked in and she was able to nod and blink. And she squeezed my hand and mouthed, "love you." The moment I got to her bedside. Paula, her caregiver, was also there, which put me at ease. Channeling calm, but still leaning into humor as a defense mechanism, which I love doing, and to try and keep the mood light, I said, We decided we wanted to celebrate our wedding anniversary back here at the nursing home where we got married last year.

[00:27:03] It sounded romantic. She smiled at me, but it was a sad smile. It was a knowing smile because she knew that wasn't true. That isn't why we came. She knew why we were here, but she couldn't speak it, and neither could we. Over the last year a few people have suggested that I ask my Nana if she imagines herself coming back as an energy or an animal after her death.

[00:27:24] To ask her what she imagines the afterlife to look like and what her ideal death would be. But I never ask her those questions because I honestly can't imagine her thinking she would ever come back as a butterfly or the breeze on my face. I promise you my Nana would rather talk about her chase bank statements and why she isn't getting them in the mail anymore and watch Jeopardy, then talk about the afterlife and coming back as a butterfly.

[00:27:50] When we come back to visit my Nana the next day. One of her favorite aides, Maria, stops me in the hall. She has tears in her eyes, and she says, "Oh, Dana, your grandmother is ready to go, but she was waiting for you." I wanted to ask her, did my nana ever say anything about coming back as a

butterfly? But instead, I thanked her and hugged her, and then she said, "Oh, and happy anniversary weekend. That was such a fun time."

[00:28:17] I keep forgetting that a lot of the staff here saw me in my wedding dress, out back on the patio last year, and watched me kiss my husband. While they served people in the dining room, it was such a surreal day, but I know it meant so much to my Nana that we included her. Over the next four days, every day we come back into her room, my Nana's condition was worse.

[00:28:37] Which is to be expected when you're no longer eating or drinking. Hospice is called to help with meds and pain management. And the nursing staff can really only keep you comfortable and change you when needed. A bunch of different cleaning ladies, nurses, aides, and staff from Winscape keep stopping by to see her and to talk about her daily skincare products, her beautiful clothes, her immaculate room, her high standards for routine, and to say hi to Jonathan and I, to wish my husband and I a happy wedding anniversary.

[00:29:07] If the dying can sense our energy, then I had to keep leaning on calm, and the only thing that I knew would calm me and her was classical music and reading. My Nana and I both loved reading, and so I pulled out the romantic novel that I bought specifically for this moment at the Target in town for 10 percent off.

[00:29:26] A mindless rom com about two New York 30 somethings that will allow me to escape and be still as I sit vigil with my Nana. With Mozart playing through the TV in between chapters, I would hold her hand or brush her hair. I would stare at her, wondering if she could feel me there. Did she know I was reading?

[00:29:47] Did she wonder why I left at night? Was she scared? Was she thinking of her two daughters, Joe and Barbara, whom she buried during her lifetime, and how she might see them again? Was she thinking of her husband? Was she thinking of her Chico's pants? For years, my Nana and I would chat on the phone or email.

[00:30:07] My Nana kept her iPad until the day she died. But right now, she could do neither of those things. And now, there is immense power and grace in the silence. And as you know, silence can be hard for me. And yet, she was asking for it. It's time to go, Nana. All words have been said. I thanked her and silence for holding me close and protecting me for so many years.

[00:30:31] It's time to go. I tell her she doesn't have to be strong anymore, and her skin is flawless. It's time to go. A friend texted me and asked me how I was doing. I told her that all I could do is read and try to do box breaths to calm myself, that this was the most intense ride of my life, and I worry I might pass out if I don't breathe.

[00:30:54] My friend texted back and said, "yes to all of this. It's intense. Your brain and body will only let you process what you're able to right now, but she knows you're there. And physically, emotionally, psychically, this death process is on the exact opposite end of the spectrum from your mom's." My mother's death.

[00:31:16] Oh, right. My mother. My mother, I miss my mother. Why aren't you here? Why are you not beside me? Why am I doing this without you? And then I remember I looked at the corner of the room where there is the exact same picture of my mother and I that I have had out next to me in my house for every single interview I have ever done for this podcast.

[00:31:41] It's the exact same photo in my grandma's room taken from my senior year of college. There she is. She is in the room with us, and we are ushering out my mother and my grandmother together. I wasn't in the room when my mother died. My mother died alone. But this room is filled with people. And in her last breaths, 45 minutes after Jeopardy ends on Monday, June 19th, the day after our wedding anniversary, Paula, Jonathan, and I lay our hands on my Nana, and she gasps a final breath.

[00:32:13] It's time to go, Nana. During one of the last Christmas holidays of my mom's life, I arrived from Chicago to her townhome in the suburbs, and she wasn't there. I was about 34 years old, and my mom had left me a message that she called herself an ambulance earlier in the day, and she was now in the ER. She wasn't feeling great, and she thought that she was having a heart attack.

[00:32:36] And so Christmas was essentially over. I remember feeling like my mom did this to avoid gathering with us, that she was pushing us away by admitting herself to the hospital. I debated about sleeping alone in her townhouse, but ultimately decided to sleep with my Nana instead, in her retirement condo.

[00:32:55] Another sleepover with Nana. And this time, I slept in the bed with her. The intimacy of this was not lost on me, and I remember thinking what a gift it was to get this chance, maybe my last chance, to sleep with her. My only living Nana. My best friend and sister. Back outside the nursing home, June

2023, as the van carrying my Nana's body left the parking lot for good, the sunset was just beginning, and cocktail hour was upon us.

[00:33:23] I'm not sure who suggested it, but my husband offered to go grab some gin and tonic at the grocery store. He also came back with a mini shrimp cocktail appetizer and nuts. We didn't have my Nana's fancy crystal glasses. But the essence of this ritual was clear. Cocktail hour and shrimp was a staple of my life with my family, and especially with Nana.

[00:33:42] Every birthday visit, Thanksgiving and Christmas, when my mother was living and my parents were married, this was a part of our lives. And so the three of us, Paula, Jonathan, and I sat at the patio tables under the awning outside of Wynscape Nursing Home, off of Manchester Road in Wheaton, Illinois, the town I was raised in, and raised a glass to Donna, my Nana.

[00:34:04] We looked at my Nana's window there on the first floor, the window I visited every Sunday for over a year during the global pandemic, just so I could see her face and talk to her on her cell phone. The same window that allowed my Nana a glimpse into the outside world during one of the most isolating times of our lifetime.

[00:34:23] The window that now held an empty room filled with all her last remaining objects that eventually Paula and I would need to sort through, organize and donate. But for now, we sip. We sit. We reminisce. We cry. We snack. We laugh. On the same patio I sat with my Nana during my last visit in May. I still can't believe she waited to die one day after our wedding anniversary.

[00:34:50] But also I can, because she wanted us to have our own special day. And let's be honest, she also wanted her own day. She didn't want to share it. I still can't believe I got to bear witness to the end of her life. I was in the room and was totally available for the experience versus having a predetermined experience in my mind.

[00:35:11] After that May 22nd visit, my Nana sent me an email. She wrote, "Sweetie, yesterday I was in the back getting some sun on the patio. And of course it brought a tear recalling last June and your beautiful wedding. And I wondered to Paula where you stayed last night, and she said you slept next door at Wyndermere.

[00:35:31] And here you were so close, and I could have given you a goodnight kiss. I'm so sorry. I love you." A lifetime of sleepovers, and sleeping close. That

was our life together. Goodnight Nana. I love you too. I am already mourning this podcast, and I am wondering what will fill my brain in time when it ends. Like how will it affect my friendships, my identity, my marriage?

[00:35:57] Who am I without it? And what is my relationship to my mother and my Nana now that I won't be talking about them all the time? I told a dear friend that I think I'm sad because it feels like I'm saying goodbye to them all over again. Which is profound, even if it isn't true. But if one of the goals of this podcast was to celebrate the living through death, then I do think it's time I stepped away from the mic.

[00:36:21] And into my own life fully and open my arms to my next phase of life, whatever that may be. I swear on my mother's grave, this podcast has changed my life and I hope it has helped some of you heal, reflect, laugh, and feel less alone. It sure has for me. Thank you all for being a part of it. On and off the mic, you are my family for life. Now Nana, please.

[00:36:51] **Nana:** Hi Dana. I just wanted to tell you how much I enjoyed yesterday. It was so wonderful seeing all your pictures and hearing your tribute to your father and his life. And honey, I want you to tell Isabel that her flowers are more beautiful today than they even were yesterday. And they were so beautiful yesterday.

[00:37:20] And honey... You're the most beautiful girl I know. I love you. I love you. Bye bye, darling.

[00:37:31] Hi, Dana. How are you? I hope you're fine. Um, today's your mother's birthday. Did you know that? I think you did. Anyway... I was wondering if, if Megan had ever called you. She is my CPA, and she says it has to come from you.

[00:37:58] So, (inaudible), I hope she's called you. This is your grandmother, in case you didn't know. Uh, bye bye, darling.

[00:38:25] **Dana:** The third season, which is crazy to say, of I Swear on My Mother's Grave podcast would never be possible without our editor. Amanda Mayo from Cassiopeia Studio. I also want to thank our music composer Adam Ollendorff, our graphic designer and illustrator Meredith Montgomery, our copywriter Rachel Claff, and Tony Howell and Jonathan Freeland for all of their work on our beautiful website.

[00:38:47] And as always, thank you to Heather Bode for her emotional, spiritual, social, physical, for, well, for all of the help over all of the years. Thank you. And all of you, thank you for listening, for subscribing, for reaching out, for telling all of your friends. I know that this club, this complicated messy club, isn't fun to be in, but I'm so glad that you're here.

[00:39:11] I couldn't do this without you. So thank you for being a part of this community and if you haven't signed up for our newsletter, please do so at our website, which is danablack.org. Not just because I want to sell you stuff, but because I want to keep talking to you and you talking to me. So go check that out.

[00:39:27] There's personal stories. I'll tell you about the season and you'll learn about some live retreats that we're curating one retreat at a time. Yeah. Thanks for being here. I hope you'll come back. Will you come back? Don't leave me like my dead mom. You know what I mean? Come back. Please. I'll talk to you soon.