THE ROOM YOU LEAVE IN

Before You Need It

A starter guide to the part of dying nobody plans for.

Someone will be with you at the end. This is how they'll know what you wanted.

Six minutes to read. Answer the questions whenever you're ready, on paper or wherever feels private. If someone sent this to you, they were thinking of you.

The Gap

A will says who gets what. An advance directive tells a doctor what to do. Both matter. Neither says a word about the last room you'll ever be in.

That room is what people remember: who sat with you, how the light fell, the song that was playing, what finally got said out loud.

If none of it is written down, someone else decides. They'll do their best. Then they'll have to live with it.

You picture this far off. It can arrive without warning: a stroke, an accident, a diagnosis that moves fast. What you want only counts if you said it while you still could.

Planning ahead changes that.

86%

of people who planned ahead had their wishes known and followed at the end.

For everyone else, it was 30%.

Seven in ten didn't have their wishes known or followed.

Randomized trial of older hospital patients · BMJ, 2010 ↗

3×

the risk of major depression for caregivers when the end involves ventilators and resuscitation.

People who talk through their wishes ahead of time are far less likely to end up there.

Cohort study · JAMA, 2008 ↗

You can't take away their grief. You can take away the doubt.

5 Things No One Tells You

Most people meet these for the first time at the bedside. Decide now, and the people with you won't be caught off guard.

1 You may still hear them

Other senses tend to fade first. Even when you can't open your eyes or answer, you may still hear voices, music, and the talk in the hallway.

> What do you want said to you at the end, and who should say it?

EEG study of hospice patients · Scientific Reports, 2020 ↗

2 Your breathing may rattle

In the final days, breathing often turns wet and rattling as the body loses the ability to swallow. It sounds like drowning. It isn't, and there's no evidence it causes distress. The people listening are the ones who struggle.

> Should the people with you be warned about this ahead of time? Who tells them?

Systematic review of 39 studies · Journal of Pain and Symptom Management, 2014 ↗

3 You may have a clear hour

After days of decline, you may sit up, speak clearly, and seem like yourself for an hour or an afternoon. It often means time is short. If the people with you weren't warned, it feels like hope. If they know, it's one more clear conversation.

> If it comes, who gets the first call?

4 You'll want less food

Appetite falls away near the end, and pushing food or fluids can add discomfort. A damp swab and lip balm for a dry mouth often help more.

> Comfort first, or keep offering food? Your favorite lip balm?

Systematic review in cancer patients · Annals of Oncology, 2011 ↗

5 What's under you matters

Bedsores hurt, and lying still is how they start. A medical-grade sheepskin under the sheet helps: across three trials, bedsores fell from 12.2% to 5.4%. It's warm, too, and these rooms run cold.

> What do you want against your skin? A sheepskin, or a throw from home?

Pooled trials of hospital and nursing home patients · Medical Journal of Australia, 2010 ↗

Who Decides for You

Sometimes the person who loves you most is the one who can't say stop.

Most people name a healthcare proxy without asking if that person can carry it. The obvious choice isn't always right.

> If a doctor asked them tomorrow whether to continue or stop, could they answer without being destroyed by it? And if not, who could?

Whoever you choose, tell them what you'd want, out loud and in detail. If there's no spouse, no children, no obvious person, your decisions can still speak for you once they're in writing.

> Who decides for you, and have you told them?
>
> NAME
>
> TOLD THEM: YES / NOT YET

Your First Page

Pick any line. One answer counts, and none of it has to be finished at once.

SOMEWHERE TO START

Who I want with me, and anyone I'd rather not have there

Who I'd trust with the most personal care

The room: bright or dim, music or quiet, what I want to see last

A prayer or a ritual, or nothing at all

Something I haven't said yet, and to whom

Where this page is kept, and who knows

If You Want Help With It

Some people finish this page on their own. Others want someone across the table asking the next question. That's my work. Six sessions, in person or by video, and everything goes into a bound book: a printed copy for you and one for whoever will speak for you. Nothing lives online. If a diagnosis has arrived, the same work fits into weeks.

Say it while it's still yours.
I'll put it on paper, so at the end, you're still the one being heard.

BOOK A FREE 15-MINUTE CALL

Or write to me at maria@theroomyouleavein.com. I answer every message myself, and I won't chase you if you go quiet.

You plan everything except this.

Maria Long
FOUNDER & END-OF-LIFE ADVISOR
The Room You Leave In
Based in Austin, Texas · Serving clients globally
maria@theroomyouleavein.com
theroomyouleavein.com
Instagram: @theroomyouleavein

© 2026 The Room You Leave In LLC. All rights reserved.
Freely shareable in full; please do not excerpt or reproduce in part.