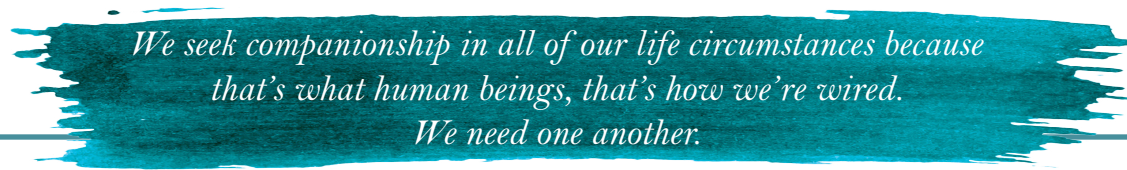


EVERYTHING
HAPPENS
~~FOR A REASON~~
WITH KATE BOWLER

Discussion Questions

Sunita Puri: The Uncertainty Specialist

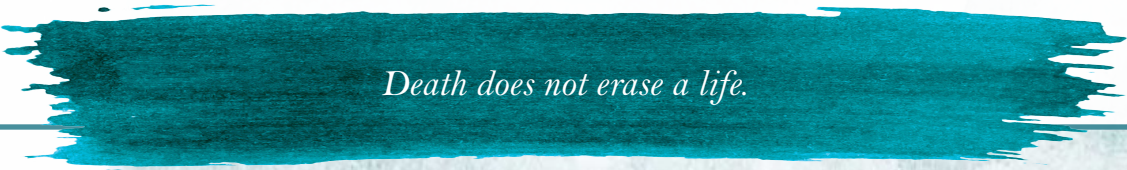
1. In addition to being the author of a memoir called *That Good Night: Life and Medicine in the Eleventh Hour*, Sunita Puri is a palliative care doctor whose job is to attend to and alleviate human suffering. What did you know about this distinct discipline before listening to the podcast?
2. Kate calls Sunita “an uncertainty specialist,” which is a hard specialist to be in a profession like medicine that prefers absolutes. How were you raised or trained to respond to uncertainty? If not uncertainty, what kind of specialist do you consider yourself to be instead? No answer’s too off-the-wall.



*We seek companionship in all of our life circumstances because
that’s what human beings, that’s how we’re wired.
We need one another.*

3. In order to face her patients with more clarity and compassion, Sunita had to unlearn some bad habits of communication, like over-explaining a diagnoses or its treatment. Why do we do this? Why do we think information alleviates pain, and why does it miss the mark?
4. "The gulf between what we can do and what we should do for someone—that's the gulf to pay attention to," reflects Sunita. "That's the gulf in which goals of care conversations exist, where we sit and we talk with patients about the reality of their disease and what they want for themselves." Have you ever sat in this gulf with someone you love? What did you learn about what matters most?
5. Sunita conceives of her palliative care work as "borderlands work." What do you know about this geography between existence and eternity? What is its topography? Its sounds? Its aromas? Its flavors? Its feel? If there is a Sherpa in this land, describe them, too.

6. Developing a new language for life in the borderlands is something both Sunita and Kate agree is super important. One way Sunita does this is by using the phrase "Tell me what that means to you" to help people better name their hope and reality in hard situations. Can you try likewise? By yourself or with a partner, describe what the phrase "I'm a fighter" might mean to you if you were very sick. What do you notice about the importance of nuance?
7. Sunita has a "cheat sheet" for how to talk to patients in difficult situations. But while asking good questions of patients is important, she also teaches students that half of doctoring is an inside job, i.e. the ability to ask themselves good questions like "What does it look like to sit in silence?" or "How do you muster the moral courage to tell people something really difficult?" Think about your own role or work in the world. What questions do you need to sit with before you can show up well and fully for others?
8. Kate reflects that much of what Sunita practices sounds like not just good doctor skills but good friendship skills, too. Sitting in silence. Holding a hand. Telling someone, "I'm just as human as you." Who does this for you in your life? Who can you do this for in their life? How will you begin your training to become a better friend and "uncertainty specialist"?



Death does not erase a life.

9. The tricky part about bodies is that we're each trapped in one which often feels, well, lonely. What makes you reach for another person even when you can't take away their pain or they yours?

10. Resistance to "what is" is one of the most common forms of suffering, Sunita says. But when we embrace that death is part of life but cannot erase our life, we become a little less afraid, a little more brave. What reality awaits your embrace today?

BONUS. After listening to this week's podcast, what part of Kate and Sunita's conversation resonated with you most? What insight will you carry with you?

Discussion Questions written by author, editor, and facilitator Erin S. Lane (ErinSLane.com).
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