

Nathalie Bonafé Testimonial by Laurie S.

Finding a doula in a pandemic is no easy task. Being 5 hours from my home was an added challenge to me during the most difficult 4 weeks of my life. My mom called me calmly one day last fall to tell me she was ready to “go home.” *And if it weren't for Nathalie, I would have missed this sign entirely.*

I am a trained and certified birth doula. I have a clear understanding of what a doula does. I hired two doulas, one for each of my births. There is a phrase in the birth doula world: “don't give birth without one,” meaning a birth doula. I would add: “don't die without an end-of-life doula, either.”

When I arrived at my parents' house, my mom was in the hospital with no visitors because of COVID. I emailed person after person, and no one was available. I specifically wanted a local end of life doula because I was navigating hospice and in need of skilled nursing care for my Mom, who was coming home with serious medical needs that were well beyond both my non-medical doula scope. And yet, I found no one.

I am eternally grateful that I met Nathalie 2 years ago doing a choir performance about health care workers. **When I first met her, I thought “how morbid?” And “who would want *that* job? I will stay in the land of the living, full of joy as new babies enter the world and clients become parents.”** Then something divine interceded. Nathalie and I were placed face-to-face to work together by the choreographer, and I fell in love with her. **It was her quiet voice, beginning the piece, that always calmed my nervous body. It was this voice that would do the same for me as my Mom was dying.**

I remember my very first text to her: “is palliative care used for end of life?” She wrote back: “Call me.” And I did.

From that moment on, I felt that Nathalie never left my side. Separated by physical distance, I felt quite close to her. She always called or texted me at exactly the right time. She was prompt and never intrusive. We spoke about signs that my Mom would be nearing death including physical and emotional changes, as well as verbal signals. She told me that my Mom may say she wants to go home. When my Mom said these very words, I was ready to affirm her wish and gently give her permission to do so. Without Nathalie's guidance, I might have contradicted her or told her dismissively that she was already home.

She helped me advocate for myself and my Mom. She was always just a couple of steps ahead of me, preparing me for what was to come as the excellent guide that she is. The list of things she helped with is long, but I will share one thing. When we knew my mom's hours were few, Nathalie suggested dimming the

lights, playing her favorite music, and holding her hand. She instructed me to take as much time as we needed after she passed. The funeral home was quick to come to our call, and I'm so grateful for her suggestion to wait to call them until we were ready. In fact, there was no rush for any specific thing to be done. She advised me to take my time, and I did. She also suggested that if I was comfortable with it, I bathe her. I did that, too. It was one of the most painful and beautiful things I have ever done in my life.

Nathalie worked very hard to see and name my mom without any fear or judgment of her increasingly frail body. As a result, I tearfully bathed her body, thinking about how this body had grown and birthed me. Her arms had held my tiny baby body, her hands wiped tears and snot, put band aids on "boo boos," and her body hugged me so many times over the course of my life. I had no fear around her body. As Nathalie was my calm and reassuring witness to what I was going through, I could be present and do the same for my Mom. Even in death, I admired and thanked this brave and strong body. If it were not for the positive conversations I had with Nathalie in the weeks leading up to her death, I am worried what my response might have been and what regrets I might have today. Instead, I have none.

Nathalie is an end-of-life doula with a natural skill at helping and seeing people. She is an empath and a healer. She is peaceful, loving, and patient. She does this work from the heart and it shows. She is so good at what she does that she can manage from a distance and it feels like she's beside you. Her preparations helped me focus on my mom clearly, feel seen and heard, and be fully present during a difficult time. **Nathalie met my emotional and intellectual needs, answered every question I had, and kept a couple steps ahead of me so there were no surprises. I no longer fear or judge the work of an end-of-life doula.** End of life work is important, needed, and supportive. And I am so glad Nathalie accepted the call to this special work because I could not imagine going through the process without her.