

[Gangaji Radio](#)  
Epiphany Series  
Host Hillary Larson  
Episode 1  
TEACHINGS FROM GRIEF  
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[00:02] MUSIC

[00:10] HILLARY LARSON, HOST: I'm Hillary Larson, and I am the producer and host of *A Conversation With Gangaji*. And we have a new episode coming up for you in about three weeks, it's called 'The Courage to Give Up Hope'. But before then, I wanted to share a new show we would like to launch in the next few weeks, with your help and support. It's called *Epiphany*. And epiphany is one of my very favorite words. Epiphanies, these 'aha moments' that we have, change our lives for sure. But when we hear other people's awakenings, it connects us in unexpected ways, but it also can lead to our own epiphanies. Hence the idea that epiphanies are contagious – and we would like to be part of spreading that. So, we're very excited about this new show, but before I play it here for you in just about a minute, in order to launch *Epiphany*, and keep bringing you *A Conversation With Gangaji*, I'd like to ask you right now for your help. For the first time in our almost four years of Gangaji Radio, we're gonna be doing our first fundraising campaign. So, if these radio shows have been helpful to you, if you've shared them with someone you love, if you listen to them over and over, and if you feel inclined, you don't have to donate, but if you'd like to, if you'd like to support us in this way, all you have to do is go to the Gangaji website – that's [gangaji.org](http://gangaji.org) – and there will be a 'donate' button specifically for Gangaji Radio. And we would be grateful for anything you'd be compelled to give, whether that's five dollars, or twenty dollars, or a hundred dollars, it does not matter to us. This is mostly about joining us in our intention to spread peace: within ourselves as individuals, within our families, and throughout the world. It's been Gangaji's message for over twenty-five years, and it's the mission of Gangaji Radio. So, let's get to this first pilot episode of *Epiphany*, so you can get a taste of exactly what I'm talking about. This is called 'Teachings From Grief'. This is a profound story of love and loss and courage, and what can happen when all of those things come together.

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[02:31] HILLARY: To work in the field of hospice requires a special skill set, along with a certain depth of compassion and courage. Providing comfort to individuals as they face their last days of life is a selfless act in a certain way, but what if someone who helps others on that most sacred journey is suddenly forced to face death themselves? What if the heartbreak of saying goodbye is their own?

[02:58] MUSIC

[03:07] HILLARY: If you spend any time with Carol Downing, you'll notice she has a certain groundedness about her. You get the sense that you can sit down and tell her just about anything, and you'd be met with kindness and compassion. Maybe it was those qualities that led Carol to a career in nursing. Carol loved her work in hospice. She held the journey of so intimately tending to other people's vulnerabilities at the end of life as sacred, and a

privilege. In two thousand four, in the midst of a very full life, the course she was on took an unexpected turn. It happened when Carol met the love of her life.

[3:45] CAROL: I remember walking in to this art gallery, it was like an art walk-up in Alaska where I'm originally from. And I walked in, and I saw him standing across the room, and he had such a, he had a light about him, that was, I don't know if it was, I don't think it was just in his eyes. He just, it's like just his whole being beamed. And I think in essence we were together from that very moment. And I was afraid of it for a while, you know, that he's too good to be true, but we really had a, a beautiful connection right from the very very beginning.

[04:20] HILLARY: Just a few months later, Carol and Michael were married. And in two thousand five, they had a baby boy. They named him Lucas. Michael had a career as an engineer, while Carol put her focus on their son. Carol was also in the midst of planning on opening a private practice. It was a good life, full of plans for the future. But there was one small thing: Michael had been feeling a little bit under the weather, some back pain, not quite feeling like himself. They weren't really worried about it, but his doctor ordered some tests, including a routine colonoscopy, just to check things out.

[04:54] CAROL: That day that I went to pick him up, we just thought everything was fine and he called, and I had planned on just picking him up at the door, you know, so I was in my yoga clothes and had just gotten out of the garden, and picked Lucas up from kindergarten, so I had our, our young son with us, who was five at the time. And he called and said I needed to come up. And I knew right then that something wasn't right.

[05:18] MUSIC

[05:22] HILLARY: On that Fall day, in October two thousand ten, Carol's husband Michael was diagnosed with stage four colon cancer. Right away the test results showed that surgery wasn't a possibility. When they woke up that morning, before he went to his appointment, as they planned other things like logistics for dropping him off, picking him up, what to have for dinner that night, a diagnosis of cancer was the last thing they ever expected to hear.

[05:50] CAROL: I remember just looking at Michael, and, you know, grabbing his hand. And we were both taking in this news. And I, I think the feeling inside of me is, I just, I wanted everything to stop. And I, and they just kept going with, you know? And I know that in their mind it was more information, and here's how you follow up – but I just felt like the impact of that moment was so strong that I, I couldn't take anything else in. You know even with all my background in nursing I couldn't say anything. I, I was speechless.

[06:23] MUSIC

[06:28] HILLARY: The next eighteen months included periods of time where life seemed almost normal, where Michael was still working, still going on his daily run. There were moments when he even hoped for a cure, despite his prognosis. There were the times when the chemotherapy worked, and then the time came, when it didn't.

[06:48] CAROL: I can remember right where I was. Lucas was in an acting class, and I was sitting in a coffee shop waiting for him, I was doing some work. And got the call and I just

heard the catch in his voice the minute I answered the phone, that told us it had spread, not just to his lung but to his liver and, and that that, that was the end of treatment.

[07:09] MUSIC

[07:22] HILLARY: The last month of Michael's life had moments of great physical pain, huge pain. Carol said that even with her medical training, there was nothing she could do. But there were also moments that had nothing to do with medical treatment or training. They were the moments when it was just the two of them, when everything was quiet. When there was only love present, and there was no training needed for that.

[07:47] CAROL: You know I feel like we would kind of surround ourselves in this kind of sacred cocoon, and we would read poetry from, you know, the saints and mystics, and, and just sit in silence together. And then when he was dying, and just sitting next to his bed and aware that it could be a week or a moment, in that he would die. I, I felt like I just wanted to be connected to that place that's, that's, that I know I source from, that I know I am, that he is. I, it felt like a place of deeper connection than even talking, to just somehow resonate in that, the sacredness. And I think in a way, not even in a way, I know I experienced more stillness, and peace, and clarity about the nature of being, simply by sitting next to him as he died.

[09:04] MUSIC

[09:21] HILLARY: When you look at the months since that time, what have you learned about grief? Because there's those beautiful moments when we're so connected, and then there's the moments where you go to the grocery store for the first time and you're not with your partner. And there's those real-life moments.

[09:44] CAROL: Mmm...I mean grief taught me, I think above anything, it taught me to feel in a way that I don't know I ever was willing to feel before. And what I would see is that my feelings, to push them away, everything became so overwhelming, that I would almost not be able to function. Whereas if I let myself feel, if I felt how alone, how angry, how just the void of what was, I got to a different place. Like I didn't stay in the feeling, but if I allowed myself to really feel that first moment at the grocery store, or the moments where I would be in bed, at night, alone, and not being able to feel any connection to him at all, and to just let myself feel that, that on the other side of that was relief. There was a stillness that would come after, I think I would just let myself feel the humanity of it all. And then it wasn't any different, right? You know that there were hundreds, thousands, of people all around the globe losing partners, and children, and it somehow connected me to something much deeper than myself.

[11:09] MUSIC

[11:22] HILLARY: I was thinking that there's this thing that I've heard Gangaji say many times before: that life is the satguru.

[11:31] CAROL: Ahhh.... yeah.

[11:34] HILLARY: And, in that, I, I'm so touched by what Michael taught you in life when he was with you in life, and what he's taught you now that his form isn't here.

[11:52] CAROL: Mmm...

[11:53] HILLARY: Like who could ever plan that?

[11:56] CAROL: Yeah. I, I don't think I ever would've imagined the impact of, kind of, who, not who but *how* I am since his death. I mean, I think there's an awareness of, of loving that's, that I trust, even though the pathway to that was losing the person I loved the most in the world. That, it gave me a place, oddly enough, to trust more than I'd ever trusted before. In peace and, and I, more loving, I think that's the way I describe it, is there's a place of loving beyond all that surrender that I can't deny, or don't, I don't doubt it anymore.

[12:52] MUSIC

[13:07] HILLARY: I'm Hillary Larson. This is *Epiphany* on Gangaji Radio – your stories of realization and inspiration.

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[13:30] HILLARY: If this first taste of *Epiphany* has been meaningful to you, if you feel inspired to help us here at Gangaji Radio, the website is [gangaji.org](http://gangaji.org). There's a 'donate' button that makes it easy to make a contribution. We would love your help in launching *Epiphany*, and in keeping *A Conversation With Gangaji* happening. All in the name of spreading Gangaji's message of peace to the world.