

**Directions: After reading this short true story, decide who you might like to ask these questions of in your life right now. Perhaps, a parent, sibling, close relative, friend, coach, etc. You don't need to ask all, but try at least four of the questions. Take the time to call, email, or sit down for a one-on-one. Use the bottom of this document for notes about your experience and turn in the "exit ticket."**

### **Six Love Talks That Bring You Closer**

*Maya and Jack had ten years together, but they didn't have these soul-baring conversations until the last days of his life. Take a moment to read their story, and then be inspired by them to have these honest talks with the person you love, now.*

**By Maya Fulcher, as told to Amy Spencer**

Maya and Jack didn't have these soul-baring conversations until the last days of his life. Start them now, she says, with someone you love.

At first it sounds like a movie cliché: Jack and I met at a wedding where I caught the bouquet. I'd noticed him the minute he walked in, so when he asked me to dance, I was giddy. After one song, I felt like I'd known him my whole life.

But on our second date, Jack pulled some pills out of a vial on his key chain and said that he had a liver disease. At 15 he had been told he'd live a year, but at 27, after lots of medicine and procedures, he was healthy, playing racquetball, mountain climbing ... and having dinner with me. I thought I could handle it. I was just 19 and didn't grasp how serious his condition was. I did know pretty fast, though, that we were serious. As we dated and got close, I could imagine being with him forever.

Eventually the liver infections came back, and within five years we got news from his doctors: Jack would need a transplant to live — and, said Jack, to get married. He didn't want to propose with a bad liver. He couldn't bear leaving me behind.

Finally, on July 2, 2005, Jack had his transplant. But the surgery didn't have the happy outcome we'd hoped for. The doctors found gallbladder cancer. Still, seven months later, at sunrise on a beach near the hospital, Jack got down on one knee and proposed. He was so bloated from chemo-induced kidney failure that I had to help him get back up. But I had no doubts. However long I could, I wanted to be his wife. A few weeks later, after a session of dialysis (to celebrate, the clinic staff sang the wedding march: "Dah dum dah dum ..."), we eloped.

Our hope for a full future lasted not quite three years. Then things went bad. Every medical complication you could get, Jack got. Finally, together we made the decision to stop chemo and begin hospice care at home in August 2008. One night in his last couple of weeks, I said to

Jack, "What do you want to talk about? What do you want to say to me?" That's when our amazing nightly talks started. We shared it all, things we'd never brought up in our 10 years together. Jack died on September 21, 2008, but I can say I have no regrets. Well, that's not entirely true. I wish we'd talked about all these things sooner. So I beg of you, talk about the tough subjects. In honor of my Jack, when you're with someone you love, ask each other these questions:

### **1. What did you really think when you first met me?**

After we danced at that wedding, we were walking in an alley by the restaurant, and Jack said, "Oh, look — a shooting star!" We stopped and gazed at it silently. All those years later, Jack said, "I never told you what I wished for. What I wished was, 'I wish she were mine'." He'd never told me that. Life's too short — why not say what's in your heart?

### **2. Do you believe in God?**

We'd never really talked about religion. Jack's parents are Jewish and Catholic, but he wasn't raised as either. I'm Catholic but didn't want to push that on him. In our last weeks together, we asked each other: Where am I going? What is my life about? What about my soul? At Jack's request, a priest even came to do a blessing and, eventually, last rites. I think it was a real comfort for him. Just as Jack found faith, I now believe that energy is all around us. While Jack was sick, for instance, we would talk by walkie-talkie when he was in bed and I was in the kitchen. He died at 10:00 A.M. on a Sunday, and from noon on, that walkie-talkie made static noises, like it did when he would talk to me. I still get chills. I know it sounds a little crazy, but I absolutely think Jack was letting me know he was there.

### **3. What little things do you love about each other?**

In his last weeks, Jack kept a journal. He wrote, "When we played Rock Band, I loved how something so simple could make you so happy." I had no idea! My "little thing" was a baby photo I'd seen of Jack in his playpen, laughing. Whenever he'd laugh a really deep belly laugh, he looked just like that. It warmed my heart, and I told him so. Let each other in on the secret moments you cherish.

### **4. What was missing when you were growing up?**

We'd talked about our families before, of course, but in the end, we spoke a lot about what we didn't get growing up, and what we hoped we had provided each other. Jack, for example, wished he'd gotten more spoken "I love yous," so I gave that to him. Through the years, my mother and I faced economic struggles, so Jack did everything he could to make me feel safe financially.

### **5. What would you change about each other?**

Jack knew that I'd always had a type-A personality, so he had to teach me it's OK to relax and enjoy life. Over the years, he got me to try skiing, kayaking, even snorkeling in Hawaii! But in those last two weeks, I think Jack worried that, without him, I wouldn't keep trying new things.

Jack said to me, "I want you to be more adventurous. I want even more for you." As a tribute to him, I've parasailed and am about to go to Tuscany with a girlfriend. And a few months after Jack's death, I went to the Bahamas with another girlfriend — a trip he had actually planned for me, saying, "I think it's something you'll need to do."

## **6. What are your greatest fears?**

I don't mean if you're scared of bugs or heights; I mean the real things. Jack, for instance, wasn't afraid of dying. He was more scared of what would happen to me afterward — that I'd fall into a bad relationship or drink too much or maybe even want to end my life. Most of all, though, he said, "I'm afraid of leaving you."

I then shared my biggest fear, which was having to move forward and have a life after him. I was very candid with Jack about this, about not wanting to marry again. My mom said, "You're too honest. You have to stop upsetting him." But I had to tell him the truth. And Jack gave me the greatest gift. He said, "I want you to meet someone and have the family we couldn't." And as painful as it was for me to hear those things, I'm now so glad he told me that. I know that when I'm ready, I'll just say, "Jack, send me someone to love."

On the first anniversary of Jack's death, I visited the cemetery rose garden where I'd scattered some of his ashes. I brought some flowers, sat down and talked to him for a while. The hardest part, still, is when I want to tell him something and he's not there. So please, for me — for Jack — if you feel it, say it. Don't ever waste that chance.

**“Exit Ticket”:** Below briefly share who (relationship... no need for names) you decided to ask some or all of these questions. How did the experience turn out? Do you feel better that you asked these questions? What did you discover?