

Dying—Then vs. Now

For thousands of years, predeath visions were accepted as part of the dying process. Before death became the domain of the hospital, these visions were common and expected.

French historian Philippe Aries has documented that before 1000 A.D. people had entirely different death experiences than the ones we have today. When the dying person felt his time was near he usually reviewed his life, his achievements and failures, and wept for the sorrow he felt in knowing he wouldn't see family or friends again. The dying person then asked forgiveness of friends and family for any trespasses he might have committed in the life he was about to leave. Usually, says Aries, the dying would tell of visions of God and of seeing those who had died before them.

How different dying is today Patients who have predeath visions are treated for "anxiety" with narcotics and Valium, both of which erase short-term memory and prevent patients from remembering any visions or near-death experiences they may have had.