

Aging Happens: Good to know — A guide to 'Living with Dying'

By Ellen Waldman

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“Living With Dying: A Complete Guide for Caregivers.” If you saw a book by this title, you might think that this is not anything you either need or want to read about. You’d be wrong on both counts, especially if you’re one of the 80 to 90 percent of people who say they want to die at home, although only about 20 percent do. Perhaps people just need to know what to expect. Katie Ortlip and Jahnna Beecham, the authors of this wonderful book, saw the need and created their book with very helpful and important information. Hear more from Katie as she answers questions about this book:

1. What is your background and your current position?

I started off as a nurse, and after getting my master’s degree in social work, my family and I moved to Ashland. I worked with Asante Hospice, first as a nurse and then as a social worker. I’ve found in my 25 years at hospice that working with the dying and their families is more of a calling than a job. My role is like a midwife, providing people with the tools and support to exit this life in the most peaceful and comfortable way.

2. What does the public need to know about this topic?

I’ve always felt there needed to be a simple, nuts and bolts, basic handbook that caregivers can use when caring for a loved one who’s dying. It would cover everything from the emotional and spiritual to hands-on caregiving. There are many things that we in hospice repeat to our families over and over again about the dying process and the care needed by the patient. For example, there are many misperceptions about morphine, hospice and how the body dies.

3. How do you hope this book will be utilized?

This is a field guide. It is simple and easy to read. Anyone can use it — people in their homes, relatives at a distance, and caregiving organizations. Sometimes, caregivers that families have hired have very little or no training or experience with care at the end of life. This includes basics like how to move a patient in the bed and what to expect when a body dies. Our book would be the perfect manual for caregiving agencies to give to their employees. It addresses symptom relief, care of a bed-bound patient, pain control and the emotional and spiritual journey with the family and patient.

4. In your experience, what constitutes a “good death”? How might this book support that?

A good death is when someone dies on their own terms. Most people express that they want to die at home surrounded by loved ones. They don’t want to end up in the intensive care unit (ICU) attached to monitors and tubes. That’s where our book comes in. We talk about advance directives and appointing a healthcare representative to make sure the patient's wishes are carried out. We help families to understand the natural dying process, and why feeding tubes and hydration can cause more harm than good at the end of life. The body knows how to die itself. We explain that process very clearly to decrease fear and anxiety for the patient and the caregiver.

5. What other important info would you like to share?

Jahnna has written more than 130 books for young adults and juveniles for Scholastic, HarperCollins and other major publishers. She has written for Children's Television Workshop, Hooked on Phonics, and most recently, she edited and was a contributing writer of National Geographic's Science Encyclopedia

Our book is carried by Bloomsbury Books in Ashland, Rebel Heart Books in Jacksonville, and Wellness Pharmacy in Medford. It will also be offered at the Hospice Unique Boutique in Ashland. Amazon carries it in book and Kindle form. If readers want to contact us, Jahnna and I have a website where we post weekly blogs and recommend useful articles from many sources, and where readers can also purchase the book: www.livingwithdying.com.

This may not be everyone's favorite topic, but nothing is truer than our time will surely come. If we mean what we say, that we and our loved ones wish to die at home, then this is exactly the sort of help we are grateful to receive. Thanks to Katie and Jahnna for making it available to us now.