

Book Review

Brigitte S. Cypress, EdD, RN, CCRN

■ A SACRED WALK: DISPELLING THE FEAR OF DEATH AND CARING FOR THE DYING

Donna Authers, ISBN 13: 9780615245850, \$15.95; Gulf Breeze, Florida: Fire Starter Publishing; 2009.

Donna Auther's *A Sacred Walk: Dispelling the Fear of Death and Caring for the Dying* is a sensitive, heartfelt, honest, scripture-based, poignant resource that offers a unique approach to death and dying. Death is a stage that most face with apprehension and fear. The fear arises from an inability to control death and the uncertainty that it brings. This book is an invaluable guide to many who face the fear and process of dying. It draws uniquely on the experience of the dying as well as the caregiver to show how best to meet the practical, emotional, and spiritual needs of a loved one who is facing death. Although this is more of a book for consumers, it also provides insights for healthcare providers who care for the dying. It taps into their own fears and anxieties about death and dying.

As a result of a number of tragic losses in her family, the author lived in fear of death from childhood that continued into her adult life. This fear was broken by her grandmother's faith, which marked the start of her calling as a caregiver to others who were approaching death. The author's passion for applying her natural caregiving skills continued as her own mother was on her "sacred walk" to death. Auther walked alongside her mother through all the trepidations of a chronic, terminal illness. Later in life, she herself was faced with the same predicament. Her experience represents the ultimate role reversal where the author as the caregiver becomes the care receiver. She fulfilled this role with grace, love, and devotion. The intimate, loving, and moving mother-and-daughter relationship is like a love story that I did not want to see end. This book touched my soul, as I connected to the writer's honesty, compassion, great faith, and service to others. The book definitely sends an uplifting message to caregivers, seniors, and those with aging parents or loved ones who are chronically, terminally ill.

End-of-life care is an important aspect of today's healthcare with an increasingly aging population. The importance of improving care for dying patients specifically in intensive care units has been acknowledged as vital since 2001. Aside from intensive care units, end-of-life care, like advanced cancer care, has increasingly moved into the ambulatory setting. Most caregiving has fallen to family members, many of whom are unprepared for the role. However, inadequate attention has been paid to the effects of this caregiving on family members. Over time, patients and families experience changes in treatment goals and life goals. This book presented the approach the author utilized for the services of hospice care to take care of her dying mother. She clearly demonstrates how family, friends, hospice, and other resources can come together for her mother's final days.

The end-of-life lessons shared in this book provide insights into how best to care for loved ones when their end of life is near. This book is an invaluable tool readers can use to open a dialogue with family members about this very important topic. It also gently guides readers toward facing the reality of one's own death. The many real-life examples and personal experiences presented by the author will help provoke individuals into thinking about the possibilities for handling end of life when it is close by. The practical ideas and useful insights for caregivers are of value and give encouragement to everyone to make the most of life until the very end. My final thoughts after reading the book were "Death should not be viewed as an end, but as a convergence point from where one's flow of life takes a new shape and direction."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brigitte S. Cypress, EdD, RN, CCRN, is an assistant professor of nursing at Lehman College City University of New York in Bronx. She also serves as a reviewer of manuscripts for Dimensions of Critical Care Nursing.

Submitted by: Brigitte S. Cypress, EdD, RN, CCRN, PO Box 2205, Pocono Summit, PA 18346 (Brigitte.cypress@lehman.cuny.edu).