

“Why fear death? It is the most beautiful adventure that life gives us.”
–Charles Frohman, as he prepared to die on the Lusitania

Death: A Selective Bibliography

compiled by Jim Van Buskirk (August 2015)

Alexander, Eban. *Proof of Heaven: A Neurosurgeon's Journey into the Afterlife* (2013)

“Brings a unique perspective to the sacred world combining a glorious, personal vision of spiritual consciousness with patient, insightful scientific inquiry.”

Alexander, Elizabeth. *The Light in the World* (2015)

The African American poet's memoir of her marriage and the sudden death of her husband is by turns sorrowful and joyful, earthy and elegiac, deeply personal and achingly universal.

Ariès, Philippe. *The Hour of Our Death: The Classic History of Western Attitudes Toward Death over the Last One Thousand Years* (1981)

The result of almost two decades of study, this classic traces the changes in Western attitudes toward death and dying from the earliest Christian times to the present day.

Atwater, P.M.H. *We Live Forever: The Real Truth about Death* (2004)

Delves into the truths and myths about death that may shed new light on the real truth about life and living.

Becker, Ernest. *Denial of Death* (1973)

This classic book builds on the psychological and philosophical works of [Søren Kierkegaard](#), [Sigmund Freud](#), and [Otto Rank](#).

Benjamin, Kathy. *Funerals to Die For: The Craziest, Creepiest, and Most Bizarre Funeral Traditions and Practices Ever* (2013)

The rich--and often, dark--history of funeral rites, customs, and trivia from around the globe.

[Berman, Rochel U.](#) *Dignity beyond death : the Jewish preparation for burial* (2005)

Examines the rituals of preparation of the dead in the Jewish tradition from the perspective of the volunteers, members of a community organization known as the Chevra Kadisha, or Sacred Society. Dignity Beyond Death.

Bowker, John. *The Meanings of Death* (1991)

Examining eastern and western religious and secular interpretations of death can reinforce and support the human response.

Brener, Anne. *Mourning and Mitzvah: a guided journal for walking the mourner's path through grief to healing* (1993)

Buchwald, Art. *Too Soon to Say Goodbye* (2006)

After the longtime humorist checked into a Washington, D.C. hospice in early 2006, he confounded medical prediction and rallied enough to write one more book of short, comic, sometimes slightly morbid vignettes.

Butler, Katy. *Knocking on Heaven's Door: The Path to a Better Way of Death* (2013)

This eloquent exegesis on taking control of the end of one's life defines a "good death" as one that is free from unnecessary medical intervention and faced with acceptance and dignity.

Byock, Ira. *Dying Well: Peace and Possibilities at the End of Life* (1998)

Beginning with his own father's terminal illness, president elect of the American Academy of Hospice and Palliative Care details without scientific cant the process of decline that awaits most of us.

Callanan, Marjorie. *Final Gifts: Understanding the Special Awareness, Needs, and Communications of the Dying* (1992)

Offers families, friends, and caregivers of terminally ill patients suggestions for facilitating a peaceful death with advice on listening to understand their dying needs.

Chast, Roz. *Can't We Talk About Something More Pleasant?* (2014)

Through four-color cartoons, family photos, and documents, the New Yorker cartoonist's memoir of her aging and dying parents is both comfort and comic relief.

Chodron, Pema. *When Things Fall Apart: Heart Advice for Difficult Times*. 2000.

This collection of talks by the Buddhist author between 1987 and 1994 is a treasury of wisdom for going on living when we are overcome by pain and difficulties.

Crawford, April. *Parting Notes: A Connection With the Afterlife* (2002)

An incredible collection of channeled letters from people who have passed over to the other side.

Crenshaw, James. *Telephone Between Worlds* (1952)

Profiles Richard Zenor, a medium who channeled the master teacher Agasha and founded the Agasha Temple of Wisdom.

Cullen, Melanie with Shae Irving. *Get it Together: Organize Your Records so Your Family Won't Have to* (2014)

This Nolo press title helps one's family dealing with finances, legal documents, online accounts, and medical care.

Davis, Greg. *Grieving for Dummies* (2007)

[Diamant, Anita](#). *Saying Kaddish : how to comfort the dying, bury the dead, and mourn as a Jew* (1998)

Didion, Joan. *The Year of Magic Thinking* (2005)

This taut, clear-eyed memoir of grief chronicles the year following the death of her husband, fellow writer John Gregory Dunne, from a massive heart attack.

Dougherty, Ned. *Fast Lane to Heaven: Celestial Encounters that Changed My Life* (2001)

The author's near death experience opened the door to encounters with various aspects of the divine spirit, including the "Lady of Light," later identified as the Virgin Mary.

Doughty, Caitlin. *Smoke Gets in Your Eyes and Other Lessons from the Crematory* (2014)

The mortician, death theorist, blogger of the popular Web series "Ask a Mortician" and founder of Order of the Good Death demystifies her experiences working at a crematory.

Eadie, Betty J. *Embraced by the Light* (1992)

An inspirational map of the afterlife framed in the moment of Eadie's death, heavily filtered through her Christian worldview.

Eumia, Molly. *Safe Passage: Words to Help the Grieving* (1992) “Of all the literature about grief and grieving I was given, this marvelous and simple book hit home the most.”

Fiore, Edith. *The Unquiet Dead: A Psychologist Treats Spirit Possession - Detecting and Removing Earthbound Spirits* (1987)

A noted psychologist uses case histories to explain how to detect spirit possession, how to protect oneself from entities, how to release one’s home from displaced spirits, and how to perform a deossession.

Gawande, Atul. *Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End* (2014)

A practicing surgeon addresses his profession's ultimate limitation, arguing that quality of life is the desired goal for patients and families.

[Goodman, Arnold M.](#) *A plain pine box : a return to simple Jewish funerals and eternal traditions* (1981)

Grof, Stanislav. *The Ultimate Journey: Consciousness and the Mystery of Death* (2006)

The renowned psychiatrist distills teachings from ancient wisdom and modern science that suggest how to face the process of death and dying.

Hallifax, Joan. *Being with Dying: Cultivating Compassion and Fearlessness in the Presence of Death* (2008)

Inspired by traditional Buddhist teachings, this work is a source of wisdom for those wishing to explore and contemplate the transformative power of the dying process.

Halpern, Susan. *The Etiquette of Illness: What to Say When You Can't Find the Words* (2004)

The psychotherapist, social worker and founder of the New York Cancer Help Program, shares her expertise on how to comfort anyone with a serious physical or mental illness.

Harvey, Greg. *Grieving for Dummies* (2007)

This compassionate resource, by a hospice care volunteer. provides the plainspoken wisdom needed to move through the phases, stages, and tasks of grieving.

[Heilman, Samuel C.](#) *When a Jew dies : the ethnography of a bereaved son* (2001)

by [S. Mark Taper Foundation imprint in Jewish studies.](#)

Humphry, Derek. *Final Exit: The Practicalities of Self-Deliverance and Assisted Suicide for the Dying* (1991)

This controversial book by the founder of the [Hemlock Society](#) in [California](#) and past president of the [World Federation of Right to Die Societies](#).

Jokinen, Tom. *Curtains: Adventures of an Undertaker-in-Training* (2010)

A Canadian journalist in Winnipeg taking "a month's leave to dabble in deathcare" reveals the changing face of the funeral industry.

Jones, Karen. *Death for Beginners: Your No-Nonsense, Money-Saving Guide to Planning for the Inevitable* (2010)

A humorous, concise source of the wide range of options for burial, cremations, organ donation, wills, including practical worksheets.

Kagan, Shelly. [Death \(The Open Yale Courses Series\)](#) (2012)

A philosophy professor challenges many widely held views about the meaning of mortality.

Karnes, Barbara. *Gone from My Sight: The Dying Experience* (1986)

Referred to as the “Hospice Blue Book,” this 15-page pamphlet explains in a simple, gentle yet direct manner the process of dying from disease.

[Kelman, Stuart](#). *Chesed shel emet: The truest act of kindness* (2000)

Kick, Russ, ed. *Death Poems: classic, contemporary, witty, serious, tear-jerking, wise, profound, angry, funny, spiritual, atheistic, uncertain, personal, political, mythic, earthy, and only occasionally morbid*. (2013)
Over 320 poems collected across time, countries, languages, and schools of poetry.

Kiernan, Stephen P. *Last Rights: Rescuing the End of life from the Medical System* (2006)

With candor, clarity, and an advocate's sense of urgency, investigates why our acute-care system has been so resistant to change and how we can infuse greater humanity to life's final chapter.

Koudounaris, Paul. *Memento Mori: The Dead Among Us* (2015)

These photos taken at over 250 sites in thirty countries over a decade are as much a reminder of life, *memento vitae*, as of death, *memento mori*.

Kübler-Ross, Elisabeth. *On Death and Dying* (1969)

The classic introduction to the five stages of grief, a series of emotional stages experienced by survivors: denial, anger, bargaining, [depression](#) and acceptance.

Levine, Stephen. *Who Dies?: An Investigation of Conscious Living and Conscious Dying* (1986)

A classic on spiritual awakening and how the awareness of death process is an essential aspect of becoming fully human and enlightened.

Lewis, C.S. *A Grief Observed* (1961)

Written after his wife's death, this short book is an honest reflection on the fundamental issues of life, death, and faith in the midst of loss.

Lifton, Robert Jay. *The Broken Connection: On Death and the Continuity of Life* (1996)

The psychiatrist explores the inescapable connections between death and life, the psychiatric disorders that arise from these connections, and the advent of the nuclear age which has jeopardized attempts to ensure the perpetuation of the self beyond death.

Lynch, Thomas. *The Undertaking: Life Studies from the Dismal Trade* (1997)

Eloquent, meditative observations on the place of death in small-town life, from the only poet/funeral director in Milford, Michigan.

Martin, Joel and Patricia Romanowski. *We Don't Die: George Anderson's Conversations with the Other Side* (1989)

Gifted with the ability to communicate with spirits "on the other side," Anderson offers documented evidence of his powers through readings and scientific tests.

McKenzie, Kenneth and Todd Harra. *Mortuary Confidential: Undertakers Spill the Dirt* (2010)

This collection of accounts from mortuary professionals is both poignant and funny.

McKenzie, Kenneth and Todd Harra. *Over Our Dead Bodies: Undertakers Lift the Lid* (2014)

More stories from mortuary professionals.

Mitford, Jessica. *The American Way of Death* (1963)

The classic exposé of abuses in the American [funeral home](#) industry.

Moller, David Wendell. *Confronting Death: Values, Institutions, and Human Mortality* (1996)
Critiques how modern technology and bureaucracy, along with professionalization, have come to dehumanize the experience of death for both the dying and their survivors.

Monroe, Robert. *Far Journeys* (1992)
The sequel to Monroe's *Journey Out Of The Body* reflects a decade of research into the psychic realm beyond the known dimensions of physical reality.

Moore, Virginia. *Ho for Heaven: Man's Changing Attitude toward Death* (1946)
Explores international rites and beliefs and symbols which convey the responses of peoples as they changed through the ages.

Neal, Mary C. *To Heaven and Back: A Doctor's Extraordinary Account of Her Death, Heaven, Angels, and Life Again: A True Story* (2012)
An account of the orthopedic surgeon's spiritual journey, after drowning in a kayak accident, as she moved from life to death to eternal life, and back again.

Nogrady, Bianca. *The End: The Human Experience of Death* (2014)
Explores the experience of death from spiritual, historical, physical, and metaphysical perspectives, from the perspective of witnesses, those facing death, and those who have somehow stepped back from it.

Nouwen, Henri. *Our Greatest Gift: A Meditation on Dying and Caring* (1994)
A gentle, almost meditative book on death as a gift, an opportunity to impart hope to those around us, whether through our own dying or in our caretaking of someone else.

Noys, Benjamin. *The Culture of Death* (2005)
A thought-provoking book on the cultural change of death in contemporary western culture.

Nuland, Sherwin B. *How We Die: Reflections of Life's Final Chapter* (1994)
The physician draws on his own experience to explain to patient, family and caregivers the clinical, biological and emotional details of dying.

O'Rourke, Michelle. *Befriending Death: Henri Nouwen and a Spirituality of Dying* (2009)
The words of [Dutch-born Catholic priest](#), professor and writer Henri Nouwen, offer an inspiring and life-transforming guide to the ultimate mystery of human existence.

Panofsky, Erwin. *Tomb sculpture: four lectures on its changing aspects from ancient Egypt to Bernini* (1992)
Examples of the art form that has existed since the dawn of civilization, its imagery expressing humankind's hopes and fears in the face of death, and the striving for immortality.

Ram Dass. *Still Here: Embracing Aging, Changing, and Dying* (2000)
Revised and edited after the author's debilitating stroke, this philosophy for aging teaches how to diminish our suffering despite the aches, pains, and limitations of age.

Richelieu, Peter. *A Soul's Journey* (2011)
The story of a young Englishman in India given the opportunity by an ascended master to travel out of his body and meet wondrous beings on the astral plane.

Ring, Kenneth. *Lessons From the Light: [What we can learn from the near-death experience](#)* (1998)

A balance of sound research and human insight to reveal the practical wisdom held within this collection of accounts of near death experiences.

Roach, Mary. *Stiff: The Curious Lives of Human Cadavers* (2003)

Informative and respectful, irreverent and witty, the Salon columnist explains what really happens to a body that is donated to the scientific community.

Salazar, Gloria and Louis. *Grave Reflections* (2011)

Outlines the many funeral options facing families when a death has occurred, and explores the factors that motivate our decisions.

Schwartzman, Arnold. [*Graven images: graphic motifs of the Jewish grave stone*](#) (1993)

Over two hundred color photographs of Jewish tombstones in 38 European cemeteries with explanatory captions decoding graphic symbols and motifs that illuminate Jewish history and lore.

Smith, Fran and Sheila Himmel. *Changing the Way We Die: Compassionate End-of-Life Care and the Hospice Movement* (2013)

An fascinating exploration of the hospice movement as a philosophy and program that maximizes the quality of remaining life by delivering compassionate care with a holistic approach.

Sogyal, Rinpoche. *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* (1992)

A presentation of the teachings of [Tibetan Buddhism](#) based on the [Tibetan Book of the Dead](#) or *Bardo Thodol*.

Storm, Howard. *My Descent Into Death: a second chance at life* (2005)

A first-person report of a near death experience from the perspective of an atheist who eventual becomes a pastor in the United Church of Christ.

Tolstoy, Leo. *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* (1886)

The novella, ostensibly about the death of a high-court judge in 19th-century Russia, is also about the consequences of living without meaning.

Tucker, Jim B. *Life Before Life: A Scientific Investigation of Children's Memories of Previous Lives* (2005)

A collection of 2,500 cases at the University of Virginia examining research into children's reports of past-life memories.

Van Scoy, Lauren. *Last Wish: Stories to Inspire a Peaceful Passing* (2012)

A physician offers a thoughtful resources to plan for end-of-life medical treatment including defining each individual's quality of life and urging communication.

[Wasserman, Emily](#). [*Gravestone designs: rubbings and photographs from early New York & New Jersey*](#) (1972)

Black and white images document the special craft of gravestone cutting, which flourished in the American Colonies from 1650 to 1700.

[Waugh](#), Evelyn. *The Loved One: An Anglo-American Tragedy* (1948)

A short satirical novel about the funeral business in Los Angeles, the British expatriate community in Hollywood, and the film industry.

Webster, Robert. *Does This Mean You'll See Me Naked? Field Notes from a Funeral Director* (2007)

A funeral director offers entertaining and quirky stories gleaned from a life lived around death.

Welch, H. Gilbert. *Less Medicine, More Health: 7 Assumptions that Drive too Much Medical Care* (2015)

Fascinating and amusing stories backed by reliable data challenges patients and the health-care establishment to potentially save money and improve health outcomes for all.

Whitton, Joel & Joe Fisher. *Life Between Life: Scientific Explorations into the Void Separating one Incarnation from the Next* (1986)

Documents the often elusive periods between incarnations, based on 13 years of research and more than 30 medical case histories, and drawing upon the revolutionary technique of hypnotic regression.

Documentaries:

Barens, Edgar. *Prison Terminal: The Last Days of Private Jack Hall* (40 min. 2014)

This powerful HBO documentary chronicles the final months in the life of a terminally ill maximum security prisoner and the hospice volunteers, they themselves prisoners, who care for him.

[Bernhagen](#), Mike and [Terry Kaldhusdal](#),

Consider the Conversation: A Documentary on a Taboo Subject (60 min. 2011)

Consider the Conversation 2: Stories about Cure, Relief, and Comfort (86 min. 2014)

Explores some of the unintended consequences of American medicine's success and sheds light on the important role of the patient/doctor relationship and communication.

Bruno, Ellen. *Sky Burial* (12 min. 2005)

Follows the ritual of “jha-tor”, the giving of alms to birds in a northern Tibetan monastery – where bodies of the dead are offered to the vultures as a final act of kindness to living beings.

Dillingham, Gay. *Dying to Know: Ram Dass & Timothy Leary* (95 min. 2015)

An intimate portrait celebrating two complex controversial cultural icons in an epic friendship that shaped a generation, instigated by Leary's impending death.

Jennings, Thomas. *Being Mortal* (50 min. 2015)

Based on Atul Gawande's book, this Frontline documentary showing how many doctors and patients struggle to talk honestly and openly about end of life issues.

Lopez, Trina. *A Second Final Rest: The History of San Francisco's Lost Cemeteries* (46 min. 2005)

The hidden history of how acres of burial grounds in the center of the city were unceremoniously closed, the bodies (mostly) exhumed and relocated to Colma.

Moyers, Bill. *On Our Own Terms* (348 min. 2011)

The renowned journalist interviews dozens of terminally ill patients in this four-part program to explain the complex concepts and choices that surround "a good death."

Navasky, Miri and Karen O'Connor. *The Undertaking* (60 min. 2007)

Thomas Lynch is a writer, poet, and funeral director in a small central Michigan town where he and his family have cared for the dead and the living -- for three generations.

Richardson, Peter. *How to Die in Oregon* (107 min. 2010)

The powerful and poignant film follows several terminally ill patients as they exercise the state's historic and controversial Death with Dignity Act, which legalizes physician aid-in-dying.

Shen, Patrick. *Flight from Death* (85 min. 2004)

Explores human beings' innate and subconscious fear of death and portrays the impacts of that fear on our behavior, specifically in regard to violence.

Westrate, Elizabeth. *A Family Undertaking* (60 min. 2004)

This POV episode explores the growing trend of the home funeral movement.

Wilson, Tim. *Griefwalker* (70 min. 2008)

Stephen Jenkinson, once the leader of a palliative care counselling team has made it his life's mission to turn the act of dying from denial and resistance into an essential part of life.

Browne, Amy, and Tony Hale, Jeremy Kaplan, Brian Wilson. *A Will For the Woods* (93 min. 2014)

Determined that his last act will be a gift to the planet, musician and psychiatrist Clark Wang prepares for his own green burial.

Websites:

<http://www.agingwithdignity.org/>

“*Five Wishes* helps you express how you want to be treated if you are seriously ill and unable to speak for yourself. It deals with all of a person's needs: medical, personal, emotional and spiritual.”

<https://www.compassionandchoices.org/>

This nonprofit organization is committed to helping have the best death possible... offering free consultation, planning resources, referrals and guidance, and...working to protect and expand options at the end of life.

<http://theconversationproject.org/>

“The Conversation Project is dedicated to helping people talk about their wishes for end-of-life care.”

<https://www.ramdass.org/the-edge-of-awakening/>

The Dying Project begun by Ram Dass serves and trains people to create spiritual environments for dying.

<http://www.engagewithgrace.org/>

“To help ensure that all of us – and the people we care for – can end our lives in the same purposeful way we lived them.”

<http://www.geripal.org/>

GeriPal (from **G**eriatrics and **P**alliative care) a blog forum for discourse, recent news and research, and freethinking commentary.

<http://getyourshittogether.org/>

After her husband died unexpectedly, Chanel Roberts had to deal with finding passwords, accounts, and myriad details of her husband's affairs. She offers a straightforward guide to help avoid the stress.

gowish.org

Go Wish provides an easy, entertaining way to talk about what is most important. The cards help find words to talk about what is important if one were to be living a life that may be shortened by serious illness.

<http://livingdying.org/>

Promotes healing of body, mind, and spirit inspired and motivated by the preciousness of human life and by the fact that we will all die, we do not know when.

<http://www.orderofthegooddeath.com/>

“The Order is about making death a part of your life....Accepting that death itself is natural, but the death anxiety of modern culture is not.”

<http://www.pallimed.org/>

[Founded in 2005 by Drew Rosielle, MD](#) to track palliative care articles from various journals, the blog also reviews media coverage of hospice and palliative care issues.

<http://www.prepareforyourcare.org>

Designed to help people and their loved ones prepare for medical decision making.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/changing-the-way-we-die>

Fran Smith and Sheila Himmel blog about compassionate end-of-life care and the hospice movement.

<http://www.sevenponds.com/>

Seven Ponds is a “contemporary resource for those who wish to celebrate memory and personalize the end-of-life.”