

Book Review published on About.com: Breast Cancer by Pam Stephan, Freelance Writer, March 2010, 5 star rating

We must someday face death. But many of us fear the process of dying and its aftermath. In her book, *A Sacred Walk*, Donna Authers covers practical, spiritual, emotional and psychological preparation for death and dying - without becoming morbid or sad. Authers writes from a Christian perspective, but her book may be used by anyone who is facing the end of life or caring for a loved one. Without imposing a religious agenda on us, she shows how facing death with love and acceptance can bring peace and closure. This book demystifies the dying process and helps the reader face the concepts of death and grief without fear and hopefully without regrets.

Pros

- Compassionate, wise advice from personal experience
- Practical tips for patients and caregivers
- Discussion of family dynamics and how to deal with those in crisis
- Opens the door to freedom from fear of death and dying

Cons

- Missing: A checklist of ways to prepare patients and caregivers for death.
- This book may not appeal to non-Christians, but is useful for anyone.

Guide Review - A Sacred Walk - Dispelling the Fear of Death and Caring for the Dying

Donna Authers lost her father, then a baby sister, and soon her grandfather before she got to high school. She spent too much time in funeral homes with grieving family and developed a fear of death early in life. But when her grandmother Angelina died from breast cancer, that fear was transformed into the gift of *good* grief.

This book is for those who may be facing death or helping someone through their last sacred walk. Based on her many experiences with her family, and her work as a Stephen Minister, Authers gives practical advice on navigating the process of dying. Her focus is actually on how to live fully, without regrets, with the best possible relationships, and how to face death as we journey toward it. She illustrates her points with intimate details of her grandmother's passing and her mother's final nine days. Each woman had a lot to teach us about life and death.

Authers has worked with Hospice – both with a care facility and home hospice - and she freely shares how they work with families and those walking down their last road. Respect for each person and compassion for all are paramount, without creating a solemn, funereal atmosphere. Indeed, her chapter, "Hospice Is For the Living" sheds a great light on how Hospice works and how people get through their fears of death. Grandmother Angelina kept up a sense of humor even while helpless and clearly dying, kidding with the nurses about other patients. Authers' mother Anna, who chose home hospice, began dying over Easter Week, and kept managing the traditional Easter preparations, lovingly bossing her children around the kitchen. Readers will feel like part of her family as they read about Anna's last nine days, and will find a sense of peace and even joy as she completes her sacred walk.

Although I had looked for a checklist to appear in this book, Authers wisely lays out the details in such a way that each family can choose what best applies for their own situation. Not all deaths are alike - Angelina died with no loose ends to wrap up, but Anna left behind an elderly husband with dementia who would still need care. However, each woman made her wishes clear, sparing her children frustration with legal and practical arrangements. If you're facing such a situation, you might benefit from conversations with family members while they can still discuss options with you. Authers encourages us to learn from our "Living Libraries" - people who have greater experience and

hopefully, wisdom to pass on. She got encouragement from her spiritual director, Sister Therese, who taught her the Prayer of Abandonment, which she used to create calm within crisis. Clearly Christian in worldview, Authers does not impose a religious agenda on us, but shows how facing death with love and acceptance can bring peace and closure.