

Loving Choices, Peaceful Passing: Why My Family Chose Hospice

By Kathleen Vallee Stein • Book review by FEN Surrogate Consultant Althea Halchuck

Author Stein hooked me in her introduction, as she takes us on an intimate end-of-life journey, beginning with her father's decision to stop the cancer radiation treatments that were killing him, and ending with his peaceful passing in the arms of his loving family 29 days later.

Walk in Kathleen's shoes as she candidly and honestly leads us through her family's emotional and often painful end-of-life journey and the difficult decisions they had to make.

"But first," she writes, "and most difficult, was accepting that he was dying and releasing him from the hospital's culture of cure at all costs." She says acceptance and enrolling him in hospice is what brought them peace.

Kathleen holds nothing back as she talks about her difficult relationship with her stern father while she was growing up, and her siblings, who left all the heart-wrenching and exhausting caretaking to Kathleen and her sister, Anne.

She lays bare her struggles with her dysfunctional family, and in doing so, she shows us that dysfunction is the new normal. While reading her story, it is easy to imagine that every family has disorder to some degree and that, ultimately, someone in the family needs to step up to care for aging parents.

As Kathleen says, "I stepped up and did what had to be done. My dad lived his last days in the

comfort of his own home, cared for by my sister and me. It wasn't easy, but we did it."

This is a must-read for anyone contemplating hospice – learn the family commitment and fortitude it requires in bringing someone home to die with the help of hospice. The journey is

fraught with daily challenges, much heartbreak, and many tears, but they discover the rich experience gained when loved ones say what's on their hearts and relate what matters most at their end of life.

This memoir is not a weepy tale, but richly demonstrates the promise of hospice; it's not about giving up, but making the most of the time you have left. It is mostly a tale about selflessness, forgiveness, of caring for Dad, who faced his final days with courage "and remained a gentleman to the end," writes Kathleen.

A testimonial from a reader said it best: "It's hard to imagine

a more personal memoir about a daughter's relationship with her father on his passage through hospice. (The author) shows her pain, conflict, and strength as he shows her his trust and love. This book is more than how-to; I felt I could use her own fortitude and spirit to help me through hospice."

This book is a rare gift.

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