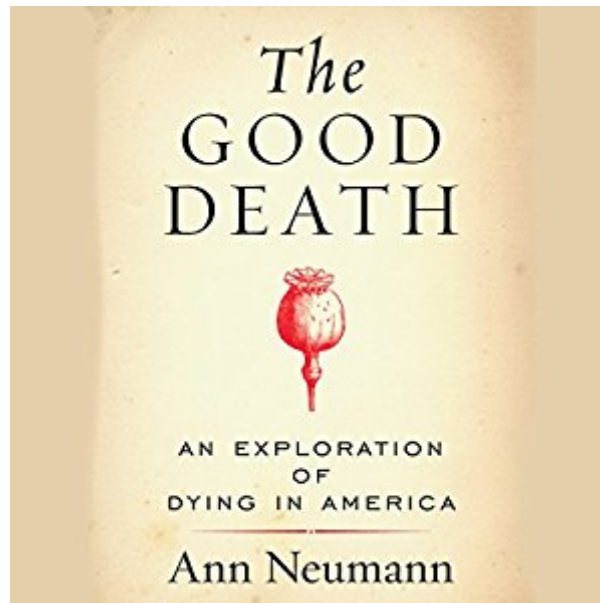




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# **The Good Death: An Exploration Of Dying In America**



## Synopsis

Following the death of her father, journalist and hospice volunteer Ann Neumann sets out to examine what it means to die well in the United States. When Ann Neumann's father was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, she left her job and moved back to her hometown of Lancaster, Pennsylvania. She became his full-time caregiver - cooking, cleaning, and administering medications. When her father died, she was undone by the experience, by grief and the visceral quality of dying. Neumann struggled to put her life back in order and found herself haunted by a question: Was her father's death a good death? The way we talk about dying and the way we actually die are two very different things, she discovered, and many of us are shielded from what death actually looks like. To gain a better understanding, Neumann became a hospice volunteer and set out to discover what a good death is today. She attended conferences, academic lectures, and grief sessions in church basements. She went to Montana to talk with the attorney who successfully argued for the legalization of aid in dying, and to Scranton, Pennsylvania, to listen to "pro-life" groups who believe the removal of feeding tubes from some patients is tantamount to murder. Above all, she listened to the stories of those who were close to death. What Neumann found is that death in contemporary America is much more complicated than we think. Medical technologies and increased life expectancies have changed the very definition of medical death. And although death is our common fate, it is also a divisive issue that we all experience differently. What constitutes a good death is unique to each of us, depending on our age, race, economic status, culture, and beliefs. What's more, differing concepts of choice, autonomy, and consent make death a contested landscape, governed by social, medical, legal, and religious systems. In these words, Neumann brings us intimate portraits of the nurses, patients, bishops, bioethicists, and activists who are shaping the way we die. *The Good Death* presents a fearless examination of how we approach death and how those of us close to dying loved ones live in death's wake.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I've been kind of obsessed with end-of-life issues since I was in my twenties, and so have read many of the books that have come out over the years. Recently, Atul Gawande popularized the idea of The Conversation, that difficult but necessary discussion we should have with anyone we love about what we, and they, want when the end comes. (Spoiler: it will). Katy Butler took that idea and panned out a little to see the institutional landscape in which many of these medical decisions are made, or made for us. But Ann Neumann's new book THE GOOD DEATH: An Exploration of Dying in America brilliantly pushes the debate to the next level. With an intimate and informed voice that is alternately curious, humble and sassy, she embarks on a journey both personal and reported to find out what it means to live and die in America today. With the starting point of experiencing her own father's death -- which planted the question in her mind: was it a "good death?" -- Neumann goes on to become a hospice volunteer, buying strings for a dying man's instrument and weed for a dying woman's peace. She seeks out lawyers fighting for assisted suicide cases, prisoners who are being force-fed, and a man who lambasts Ann for her lack of support of disability rights on his blog, "Bad Cripple" but then they meet in person and the conversation deepens. In an ever-shifting landscape of medical advances that transform traditional notions of medical autonomy and medical ethics, THE GOOD DEATH provides an insightful and necessary addition to a topic that concerns every single one of us. Highly recommended.

A gripping discussion of death in a time when technology can do much to delay and prolong the dying process. Well researched, thoughtful and balanced.

Thought provoking, and easy-to-read. I was only going to read the final chapter, "A Good Death" but once I read the first few pages I had to read it all. She does not include the "death with dignity" law that takes effect in June/July 2016. Too little attempt to cover those people in Oregon who chose death with dignity. But this book is such an easy read and the author is so interested in interviewing

that you feel you are right there during the interviews.

Everyone should read this book! In my own work to prepare for a "good death," I read dozens of books (about 60) about death and our current culture and ways we can "do death" better---and I came away with three or four favorites. This is one of them. Thoughtful, wise, gentle-but-adamant, this book stands out. I thank Ann Neumann for writing it.

A wonderfully written book that helps to answer the question of what is considered a good death & is it really possible to have one. The author shares eye opening stories of her personal experiences & the reader feels really close to her losses.

It seems like the past year has brought us our share of books that deal with death and dying: *Being Mortal* and *When Breath Becomes Air* were two which I've read and thought were very well done. My most recent read on the subject was by author, Ann Neumann shares the death and dying experience of her father and then further examines death in the American Culture. Ann was 37 when she returned home to help care for her 60 year old father who was dying of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. After refusing the last ditch chemo effort, he chose to go home to die. Unfortunately, his death wish to die at home with his daughters and hospice helping out were not to be. His drawn out death required that he be hospitalized for pain management levels that were not possible at home. Ann shares some stories of her time as a hospice volunteer and discusses the history of death in the US. She shares her findings about death experience and how the experience differs based on socioeconomic environment -- the wealthy, those in poverty as well as those incarcerated. The *Good Death* also revisits some prominent right-to-die cases many of us recall to this day. For me the Karen Ann Quinlan and Terry Schiavo cases seemed in some ways like a media circus. It caused some individuals to change their views on living and dying and many others to put their final wishes in writing. It's clear that the author believes that dying should be a "choice" and that individuals should have "choice" when recovery is no longer an option. She believes that there is not one particular scenario that constitutes "a good death", it's a personal situation that individuals, even those who avoid thinking about death, need to start planning for by making your wishes known to loved ones. "A good death is whatever the patient wants. There is no such thing as a perfect date as humans aren't perfect." Overall, I felt this book was well-done although the focus seemed to shift abruptly at times. An important subject, I'm glad I read it.

Quite nicely written. To the point .

I wanted to like this, but it went in strange directions. Like an entire chapter on how prisoners die. Overall, I learned very little and found it rambling and hard to read.

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