BOOK REVIEW

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Final Passage: Sharing the Journey as This Life Ends, by Barbara Harris Whitfield. Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications, 1998, 202 pp., $10.95.

Book titles are often misleading, but not in this case. Final Passage: Sharing the Journey as this Life Ends depicts exactly what the book is about—ten people who shared their final transitions with the author. Who is Barbara Harris Whitfield and why does she qualify as the litterateur? She is a thanatologist, respiratory therapist, and near-death experience researcher. Her literary accomplishments include numerous articles and two books, Full Circle: The Near-Death Experience and Beyond (Harris and Bascom, 1990) and Spiritual Awakenings: Insights of the Near-Death Experience and other Doorways to Our Soul (Whitfield, 1995). Beyond her professional achievements, she is a compassionate and caring individual who experienced a close call with death herself.

In the introduction, Whitfield stated her purpose for writing Final Passage: “I offer these stories and the way I experienced them in the hope that you may gain compassion and mastery over the process that we call death” (p. xviii). She furthermore set a sensitive tone that flows throughout the publication: “I wrote Final Passage from the perspective of how important universal energy is on many levels: in helping spiritual growth, in reducing pain and in creating a healing atmosphere” (p. xvii). Within the first ten pages, her thesis was well in place: By mastering death we learn how to live more fully.

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In Chapter One, "Healing: Barbara's Story," the author narrated her near-death experience along with pertinent data. For example, 80 percent of near-death experiencers (NDErs) do not experience life reviews. Whitfield, one of the 20 percent who did, chronicled how she continues to apply and benefit from her autobiographical replay. The only NDE presented in Final Passage was the author's.

The remaining eight chapters held touching accounts about people who made their transitions into the Great Beyond. Within each story, Whitfield reinforced her theme: We all hold a profound and common bond to a universal or divine energy. Although she described how she worked with the energy, I hungered to read more. Whitfield began and concluded Final Passage with a poem she wrote shortly after her NDE, wherein she invited readers to awaken and live more fully and authentically:

The only real pain
When we die
Is if we do it
Without living first. (pp. xi and 182)

Written from the heart, Final Passage is interesting, easy to read, and includes a bibliography and two-page index. I recommend it to anyone interested in the topics of death, dying, and the art of living. I furthermore consider it essential reading for anyone thinking about joining a hospice program as staff or volunteer.

References