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I happen to live with a nurse, and I suspect that every health care **worker** — or anyone who works with the sick or the dying — has a book in them. Longtime **hospice** social **worker** Patricia Acker has written her book, “The Dying Teach Us How To Live.”

It’s not as if the 62-yearold Xenia mother and grandmother, who raised five children as a single mother, didn’t have plenty to do. She finally heeded her former patients and their families who insisted, “You should write a book.”

During her 16 years as a **hospice** social **worker**, she explained, “I heard so many stories of near-death experiences and angels, stories of courage and faith and hope. It helped patients to make decisions in their lives and gave them an avenue to express their feelings. They feel comforted they are going to something instead of away from something.”

Acker could have used that kind of comfort in 1980, when she lost her 54-year-old father, Clark Acker, in a motorcycle accident. Ten days later, her 32-year-old brother-in-law died in an explosion on an oil rig in the Philippines.

“I didn’t know where to go or what to read to help with my grief,” Acker recalled. “I couldn’t believe that life went on without those family members.”

She had nowhere to turn. The **hospice** movement was in its infancy in Dayton.

“That was the beginning of my interest in **hospice** care and grief counseling,” she recalled.

While raising five children as a single mother, Acker managed to earn her master’s degree in social work. In the midst of so much life, busy raising her active family, Acker began learning invaluable lessons about death from her patients and their families. She began telling the stories to her patients, and began writing them in her head — brief vignettes, most no more than 400 words, yet packed with wisdom. Her book is subtitled, “True stories intended to comfort and support individuals dealing with death.”

Family members often don’t know how to talk to someone who is dying, Acker said, and her stories often served as a springboard for difficult but necessary conversations. “They don’t want to appear to want to hasten their deaths,” she said. “So they’re reluctant to ask if they have made a living will, or if they have done things to protect their families.”

“The Dying Teach Us How to Live,” self-published by Greyden Press, is illustrated with Acker’s pastel drawings, many of them gifts to the families of patients, as well as oil paintings by Jennifer Martin.

Karla Hollencamp works with grieving families as community relations director for Calvary Cemetery in Dayton. “I found Pat’s book to be very comforting because it helped me realize that many families go through similar experiences when a loved one is dying,” she said.

“I was estranged from my father for many years and was able to call him and have a productive, loving conversation before he died because the lesson that forgiveness is better than regret is taught in her stories.”

Acker never found her **hospice** work depressing; instead, it brought her inspiration and bolstered her faith.

Many dying patients reported seeing angels, a bright light or meetings with family and friends, even beloved pets. “Sometimes they make petting motions as they stroke their old friends,” Acker wrote.

In a particularly touching anecdote, she writes about a dying fireman who spent his final day giving “a fireman’s hug and greeting as he recognized friends who had been deceased. He had his eyes closed, but would smile and make friendly greetings to the people he was seeing.”

There was only one person, however, that the fireman would kiss on the lips: the wife who had been dead for 11 years. “Suddenly, the fireman sat up in bed and puckered up for a very long greeting kiss,” Acker wrote. “After the prolonged kiss, he settled back onto his pillow and died with a smile on his face.”

“I felt that these stories needed to be told so that we don’t forget their example on how to live and how to die with dignity and faith,” Acker said. “I wanted to offer others a resource to help them cope and be able to move forward with their lives.”

As Hamlet famously soliloquized, death is “the undiscovered Country, from whose bourn no Traveller returns.”

That is why, no doubt, we are so drawn to these stories, and to the wisdom of a woman who has comforted so many dying patients and their families.

Contact this reporter at 937-225-2209 or email Mary.McCarty@coxinc.com.

HOW TO GO

What: Patricia Acker book signing and open house When: 4 to 6 p.m., Thursday, Sept. 19 Where: the chapel at Hillspring Health Care and Rehabilitation, 325 E. Central Ave, Springboro, 45066 For more information: Call Leah Collins at 748-1100. To order the book: www.thedyingteachus.com or call the Greyden Press book store at 299-0185.

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