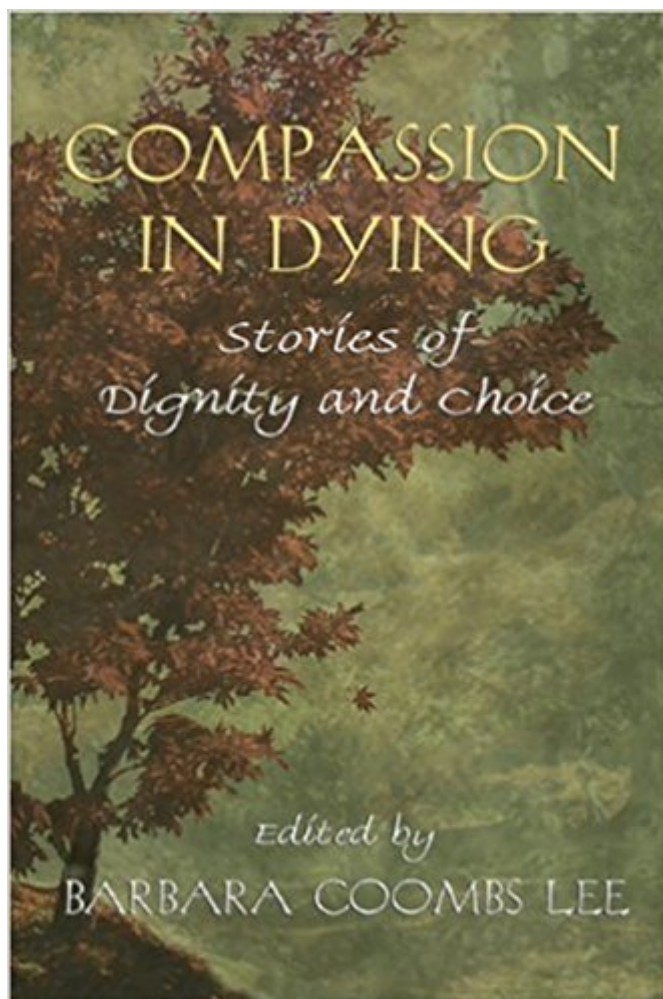


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# Compassion In Dying: Stories Of Dignity And Choice



## Synopsis

Since 1993 the nonprofit organization Compassion in Dying Federation has been advocating for a social revolution that seeks more humane and caring options for dying individuals---including end-of-life choice. From its inception, this group has worked to support and counsel individuals on how to achieve a peaceful and humane death. Many amazing stories have unfolded from individuals who have turned to Compassion in Dying, and specifically, those seeking end-of-life choice with Oregon's Death with Dignity Act. These stories are from individuals who sought to use the Death with Dignity Act. Most individuals have felt empowered by choice and control in how they die; whether or not they opt to use the prescribed meds to end their lives; and often experience renewed hope. Publication of this book is in conjunction with Compassion in Dying Federation's 10th anniversary. NewSage Press also published former Oregon Governor Barbara Roberts' book, *Death Without Denial, Grief Without Apology*, which includes some information on Oregon's unique Death with Dignity law.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Barbara Coombs Lee, editor *Compassion in Dying: Stories of Dignity and Choice* (Troutdale, OR: NewSage Press, 2003) 137 pages (ISBN: 0-939165-49-X; paperback) (Library of Congress call number: not given in book) Barbara Coombs Lee (when she put this book together) was President of the Compassion in Dying Federation. Later this organization was merged with End-of-Life Choices to form Compassion & Choices, which she now serves as President. This book consists mostly of several stories of patients in Oregon who chose to shorten the process of their dying using the

Oregon Death with Dignity Act. Usually a picture of the person or whole family begins each story. And often family members give their own accounts of the complex processes that ultimately led to a decision for voluntary death. All of the statements written by others support the decision for death. Oregon was the first state that allows physicians to prescribe drugs for patients to take to bring their lives to a peaceful and painless end. This book is probably the only book so far to tell their stories. (In 2009, Washington state also authorized the use of life-ending drugs.) When many of these deaths took place, Oregon was in the national news because of its controversial right-to-die law. Thus, some of the patients were given considerable news coverage for their decisions to shorten the process of their dying--to choose a timely death. But all of these deaths seem to have been wisely decided, based on the information provided in this book. The patients were all in the process of dying from well-known diseases. And their doctors agreed to write prescriptions for life-ending drugs so that they would not have to suffer longer than necessary. Some of the people profiled in this book had the lethal drugs on hand in case they were needed but decided to let nature take its course. They died from natural causes without taking the drugs prescribed for voluntary death. This book also contains interesting contributions provided by Compassion-in-Dying volunteers and staff members. And there is a time-line describing the many steps in the complicated process of winning the right-to-die in Oregon. Since this book's publication in 2003, many more Oregonians have taken advantage of Oregon's Death with Dignity Act. And there are more steps to add to the chronicle of securing the right-to-die. Thus we can hope for a new and expanded version of this book in the future. We want more stories of people who rationally chose voluntary death. Since we must all die our own deaths, we can learn from others who have already faced death and made wise life-ending decisions. If you would like to discover other books in favor of chosen death, search the Internet for the following bibliography: "Best Books on Voluntary Death". James Leonard Park, advocate of the right-to-die with careful safeguards.

Nurse-clinician and attorney, author Barbara Coombs Lee presents case histories of terminally ill patients, in an unblinking, sympathetic and uplifting way. She also tells the story of Oregon's remarkable law, first in the U.S. to permit physician aid-in-dying. The book provides a breath of air in a society stifled with violent media overload and morbid curiosity about death, but little support in handling the actuality. It should reassure Americans that taking control of life's ending is not only possible and practical, but life-enhancing for the individual concerned, the family, and the community. John Ashcroft doesn't get it, but this approach actually prevents impulsive, desperation suicide and prolongs meaningful life for many, because they have compassionate medical support.

This is a marvelous book, beautifully written, thoughtful and sensitive. The various stories by and about people helped by Compassion are wonderfully told and very moving. The introductory chapter, "A Death of One's Own" is one of the best statements I've ever read on this subject. The book is a very valuable contribution to the literature and to the public debate on end of life choices.

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