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The Divine Art of Dying provides a unique, creative, and often poetic reflection on that graced moment when a person turns toward death. The coauthors explore the myriad ways of embracing one's mortality that offer insight to persons facing end-of-life challenges. Coauthor Karen Speerstra's personal journey of facing with spirit, truth, and love the challenges of her own ovarian cancer diagnosis forms the centerpiece of this novel work. Karen's core challenge is expressed best in her words “live fully until I die.” Each chapter begins with a reflection from Karen's hospice journal and ends with relevant suggestions from The Caregiver's Guidebook that further elucidate relevant and well-researched palliative care principles. The book is divided into four parts: Part 1, Taking the Turn Toward Death, explores the moment of “blessed recognition” where one makes the choice to live fully until they die including how to responsibly forgo some forms of medical treatment. Part 2, Orienting Toward Death, explores the many challenges on the journey such as how to more fully embrace the ambiguity, fears, and relational challenges this life passage demands. Part 3, Living until We Die, explores the richness of daily choosing life and of embracing each moment to the full amidst profound limitations and loss; and Part 4: Dying into Life, explores the sacred art of letting go as death draws near and ways to honor that critical life passage through grieving, ritual, and surrender to mystery.

Noteworthy is the fresh look this book offers in choosing to live life fully amidst the looming reality of death. The Divine Art of Dying takes a much wider approach than just a medical one. Coauthors Karen Speerstra and Herbert Anderson offer a well-integrated mix of experiential insights with soulful wisdom on embracing the dying process. This book is much more about choosing life fully rather than passively waiting for death and is filled with a rich tapestry of insights from philosophy, major religious traditions, psychology, and popular culture. The authors enhanced my understanding of the issue by seeing the many sacred gifts one chooses to experience and live out even as the limits of mortality threaten. It's about the power of choice and that living fully while dying is as much a sacred journey of heart, mind, and soul as it is of body.

If there is a limitation, it may be that The Divine Art of Dying rests heavily on one courageous person's experience of facing the challenge of living well while dying, that of coauthor Karen Speerstra, and may miss exploring the many varied and complex human responses to facing death. Yet, to their credit, the coauthors are quick to point out that each person's approach to end-of-life transitions differ and they provide stories and insights that speak to that diversity. Despite this minor limitation, Karen's own intimate, courageous, and transparent approach to her own dying process is a special gift that easily expands to a much wider audience, offering healing and inspiration. Indeed, Karen's heartfelt reflections offer a soul-bearing depth of insight that is truly hope-filled and potentially
transformative to the reader. This book should be mandatory reading for every person involved personally or professionally in palliative care giving and receiving.

Coauthor Herbert Anderson provides a wealth of experiential and scholarly insight drawing both from his own prostate cancer diagnosis and years of teaching, research, and writing on issues of loss and grief, death, dying, and bereavement. Together, coauthors Herbert Anderson and Karen Speerstra have masterfully achieved their aims of offering immense help to persons and their loved ones who face the many complex emotional, psychological, and spiritual challenges of irreversible illness. This book offers wisdom, inspiration, and hope, supporting people who take the turn toward death to live fully until they die or to live gracefully in the face of helplessness. In sum, I would highly recommend The Divine Art of Dying, a rich blend of deeply personal insights coupled with sound psychological, spiritual, pastoral, and ethical principles in more fully embracing end-of-life challenges. This is a book that one could read and reread whole or in bits and pieces, savoring its messages of hope, meaning, and fullness of life.