



# Knocking on Heaven's Door: The Path to a Better Way of Death

*Katy Butler*

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## **Knocking on Heaven's Door: The Path to a Better Way of Death** Katy Butler

In this visionary memoir, based on a groundbreaking *New York Times Magazine* story, award-winning journalist Katy Butler ponders her parents' desires for "Good Deaths" and the forces within medicine that stood in the way.

Katy Butler was living thousands of miles from her vigorous and self-reliant parents when the call came: a crippling stroke had left her proud seventy-nine-year-old father unable to fasten a belt or complete a sentence. Tragedy at first drew the family closer: her mother devoted herself to caregiving, and Butler joined the twenty-four million Americans helping shepherd parents through their final declines.

Then doctors outfitted her father with a pacemaker, keeping his heart going but doing nothing to prevent his six-year slide into dementia, near-blindness, and misery. When he told his exhausted wife, "I'm living too long," mother and daughter were forced to confront a series of wrenching moral questions. When does death stop being a curse and become a blessing? Where is the line between saving a life and prolonging a dying? When do you say to a doctor, "Let my loved one go?"

When doctors refused to disable the pacemaker, condemning her father to a prolonged and agonizing death, Butler set out to understand why. Her quest had barely begun when her mother took another path. Faced with her own grave illness, she rebelled against her doctors, refused open-heart surgery, and met death head-on.

With a reporter's skill and a daughter's love, Butler explores what happens when our terror of death collides with the technological imperatives of medicine. Her provocative thesis is that modern medicine, in its pursuit of maximum longevity, often creates more suffering than it prevents.

This revolutionary blend of memoir and investigative reporting lays bare the tangled web of technology, medicine, and commerce that dying has become. And it chronicles the rise of Slow Medicine, a new movement trying to reclaim the "Good Deaths" our ancestors prized.

*Knocking on Heaven's Door* is a map through the labyrinth of a broken medical system. It will inspire the difficult conversations we need to have with loved ones as it illuminates the path to a better way of death.

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