

# If Truth Be Told

Some real-world protagonists are more compelling [By Caroline McCullagh](#)



THERE ARE ONLY two ways to avoid dealing with the death of a loved one: Either never love anyone or die first. If neither of those approaches appeals to you, maybe you should read *Hospice: A Memoir of Life among the Dying* by Deborah Lee.

It's hard to imagine a book about hospice being a joy to read, but this definitely is. Part of the joy in this book is Lee's fine writing, and part is the story she tells. She worked for 30 years as a hospice social worker. In those years, she's met an amazing variety of people, some loving, gentle, caring, and courageous and some absolutely horrible as they faced their own deaths or the deaths of loved ones. She never knew what might happen when she knocked on someone's front door or entered their hospital room. The patient might be a child; a hoarder; a former Nazi soldier; or a seriously ill, but not terminal, patient who wanted to be allowed to die. But no matter what, Lee was there to help them and their loved ones with the transition.

I cannot recommend this book highly enough. It's not at all maudlin. It's like a series of interesting short stories around a common theme. Intertwined with the stories are the life lessons Lee has learned from her career. She writes, "I wish I had a nickel for every person who has said to me, over the years, 'I don't know *how* you do this' [...] I can say with some authority [...] the motivations for — and gratifications from — the work we do are varied and might surprise you." She's right!