



Will the Circle Be Unbroken?: Reflections on Death, Rebirth, and Hunger for a Faith (Ballantine Reader's Circle)

By Studs Terkel

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“IT’S THE UNGUARDED VOICES HE PRESENTS THAT STAY WITH YOU. . . . Terkel’s interviews may not allay fears about death. But reading them certainly encourages life while we have it.”

–The New York Times

Whether it’s *Working* or *The Great War*, the legendary oral histories of Studs Terkel have offered indispensable insights into all areas of American life. Now, at eighty-eight, the Pulitzer Prize winner creates his most important work on a subject few can comfortably discuss: death.

Here, in the voices of people both esteemed and unknown, are wise words, meaningful memories, and compassionate predictions about the experience of life’s end—and what may come after. A grad student explains how her two-year coma convinced her of the existence of reincarnation . . . A Hiroshima survivor reconciles her painful memories with the stoicism of her Japanese culture . . . Actress Uta Hagan expresses how her art is her religion and will be her legacy . . . Oscar-winning cinematographer Haskell Wexler relives his World War II ordeal, after a torpedo left him in a lifeboat among injured and dying comrades . . . An AIDS counselor reveals why healthy gay men may require the most crucial psychological help . . . and a retired firefighter admits he “never felt so alive” as when he was doing his dangerous job.

From the sheer physical facts to the emotional realities to spiritual speculations, all aspects of death are openly expressed in this wonderful work, the stirring culmination of Studs Terkel’s brilliant career.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Mustering more spunk and battery juice than his overworked tape recorder, 88-year-old Studs Terkel cranks out another eclectic treasury of oral histories in *Will the Circle Be Unbroken?* This time, the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *The Good War* takes on death, a universal experience that solicits plenty of speculation, caution, and emotion from his 60-plus interviewees. Regular folks--ranging from the deeply religious to the deeply atheistic--share their life stories and their hopes or suspicions about the afterlife. Some are well-known, such as author Kurt Vonnegut, radio journalist Ira Glass, and folksinger Doc Watson (who, incidentally, appears in the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band's classic bluegrass album *Will the Circle Be Unbroken*). Others, including parents, artists, medics, and clergymen, share equally compelling stories about losing family members, patients, and friends; personal encounters with heavenly voices; and apparitions. Terkel lies low throughout the book; his voice is only heard in the short intros to each speaker's story and in the chuckle-inducing introduction, which tells the story of an asthmatic boy--Studs, of course--who ironically outlives his family and dear wife Ida. The result is a vibrant tapestry of life's full process, sure to stir compassion and inspiration in adults at any point on the curve. --Liane Thomas

From Publishers Weekly

In the past, Terkel (*The Good War*) has gotten people to talk about their concrete experiences, like family, war and the Depression, rather than an event that no one can talk about after having experienced it. Now Terkel, a gifted interviewer, encourages the subjects of this book to talk openly about their feelings regarding life's final frontier. The raconteurs who share their moving stories in this collection range from emergency room doctors and paramedics to public figures such as Kurt Vonnegut, NPR commentator Ira Glass and country music guitarist Doc Watson. Each of Terkel's subjects brings his or her unique insights to the mystery of death. For example, emergency room doctor Ed Reardon says we fear death because we don't understand it, and that it's hope that keeps us going while we're alive. Country woman Peggy Terry observes that death would not be so frightening if "we've fulfilled ourselves as human beings, not as collectors of stuff, money, and bank accounts." Tico Valle, a young Latino gay male, reflects on the death of his partner and the significance of reincarnation for understanding the meaning of life. Finally, Emmett Till's mother, Mamie Mobley, poignantly recalls her son's sacrifice: "Emmett had died that men might have freedom here on Earth. That we might have a right to life.... If Jesus Christ died for our sins, Emmett Till bore our prejudices." Terkel's refusal to overwhelm readers with his own philosophical reflections and his willingness to allow ordinary men and women to speak for themselves make this a stirring and enlightening collection that will lead readers to think more deeply about their own hopes and fears. (Oct.)Forecast: This is bound to be another bestseller for Terkel, who will tour five cities to promote it. First serial was sold to the Atlantic Monthly.

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From Library Journal

Terkel, the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of a dozen books on American life (most recently *The Spectator*), writes in the introduction about his own encounters with death narrowly avoided first as an asthmatic child seeking help in falling asleep and then as an adult undergoing quintuple bypass surgery. He also describes the deaths of his father and, more recently, his 87-year-old wife. Like his previous books, this current volume collects interviews with a variety of people on a particular theme. Here he speaks with "sixty heroes . . .

offering me their bone-deep, honest testimonies [which] have been a palliative beyond prescription." Terkel rightly claims that the book deals with "death, of course, but understood only by living to the full its long prelude, life." His heroes include medical personnel, strangers, parents, clergy, journalists, performers, and others, some well known, such as NPR's Ira Glass, author Kurt Vonnegut, and country singer Doc Watson, and some less familiar. Together they offer a wide spectrum of reflections on death and life. Highly recommended for public and seminary libraries. [See p. 210 for an interview with Terkel. Ed.] Carolyn M. Craft, Longwood Coll., Farmville, V.

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

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