

*Sandol  
Stoddard  
And the  
Special  
Setting  
Of  
Hospice  
Care for  
Dying  
Patients*

*By Hollie I. West*

Five years ago, when Sandol Stoddard was among a group of people nursing a friend through a terminal illness, she had never heard of the hospice concept—the idea of caring for the dying in a home-like setting.

Nevertheless, that emotion-wrenching ordeal of several weeks, which drew together people from different walks of life in a San Francisco suburb, was really a hospice-like situation.

Today, Stoddard is the author of "The Hospice Movement," so far the only extensive treatment of a centuries-old idea, popular in medieval Europe, that is just being reintroduced into Western society.

"I didn't start out to write a book," she recalls. "We were just a group of friends of this man. When we realized he was going to die, we drew together. This dying man drew people around him like a family. We became a study group and had sensitivity training sessions, encounter group sessions.

"We went into a study of death and dying when he became ill. We gave him the friendly part of hospice care, not the medical care. And it was just a group of neighborhood friends.

"About a year later Bill Lamers (Dr. William J. Lamers Jr., director of the Hospice of Marin) asked me, his friend, the writer, to write a short piece about hospices. But I couldn't find anything right away—not even a bibliography. So I started doing research, and he gave me a copy of an old book about hospices in the Middle Ages. So the project just grew and grew."

Stoddard, 40ish and the mother of four boys, ended up going to St. Christopher's Hospice in London to observe the setting where physicians, clergy, family and staff work together to ease the pain of the last days of a patient.

"I felt such joy when I walked into St. Christopher's," she says. "People ask me if it was depressing. But I tell them it was completely upbeat. Patients were given love and care.

"Most people consider death failure. But at St. Christopher's they tried to



*Sandol Stoddard, by Harry Nalchayan—The Washington Post*

make the experience as easy as possible."

In her book she writes of Lillian Preston, 29, the only child of aging and impoverished parents, married at 22, abandoned by her husband at 23, left with a baby daughter and no job, she returned home and found work after two years of searching. But the

child drowned in a boating accident. Six months later Preston found out she had terminal cancer.

But she was able, says Stoddard, to face her impending death.

"She was treated as a person at the hospice," notes Stoddard, locking her hands together. "She didn't think of the pain—and she had plenty of that.

But she appreciated that she was treated as a person at the hospice, not a dying statistic.

"She had tried to kill herself in a hospital. But after she was admitted to the hospice, a chaplain talked to her and helped her through the crisis. They took her off the drugs she'd been getting at the hospital. It was so bad she couldn't feel anything."

Stoddard disagrees with those who say it would be easy to incorporate the hospice idea into existing hospitals.

"The hospice wing would become the death ward of a hospital," she insists. "Hospitals exist for a different purpose—to make people well to live. Hospices prepare people to die. Hospices must be a minicommunity. But they could be in separate buildings on hospital grounds."

At St. Christopher's, Stoddard said she scrubbed "a lot of bath tubs and carried a lot of trays." While she learned firsthand about a hospice center, Stoddard also combed the libraries for material and talked with scholars and physicians.

The result is that she's become a tireless speaker for the hospice movement. She seems hardly able to contain her fervor. Ask her a question and she'll give you a 10-minute, non-stop minilecture.

"I see it as a quiet revolutionary force in our society," she says. "I've been invited to speak in 17 states. I grab a microphone wherever I can. My husband [of four years] is an old fashioned doctor. He gets involved, too. We [she, her husband and teenage son] have three telephone lines in our [Marin County] house and two different answering services."

Stoddard says she could write five more books about the experiences she's had since writing the book. She has been asked to write a book about a hospice nurse. Whatever she writes next she says she is committed to the hospice movement.

Clutching the cross she wears around her neck, she says, "I guess I've felt like a pilgrim. I've been on a search."