

Beyond the High Blue Air

Lu Spinney

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In *Beyond the High Blue Air*, Lu Spinney confronts every mother's worst nightmare and boldly searches the meaning of life and death.

Spinney's adult son Miles suffers a snowboard accident that leaves him in a "minimally conscious state." She, and her whole family, become dedicated to his care. But as the years progress, everyone, including Miles, begins to wonder if this is what life should be. Together, they painfully yet hopefully seek a peaceful, humane way to end Miles's life, but since he's not in a "persistent vegetative state," their wishes aren't allowed medically or legally. The result is a highly individual story with implications for the field of medicine and law, and for the whole of humanity.

Spinney's bold, honest narration is raw with nearly every emotion. She generously opens up her family's trauma and tenderness, holding nothing back as she pays tribute to her son and begs for a better way for mothers, lawyers and doctors, and humanity to honor life and accept death.

The book showcases ethical questions like assisted death and quality of life clearly and directly, without pontificating; Spinney lets the story speak for itself. While Spinney and her family sought a way to end Miles's life, their story ultimately upholds human dignity and the full joy of being alive.

In the end, Miles's death was not what they'd hoped for: a respiratory infection robbed the family of the peaceful end they wanted. And Spinney found, all too painfully, that even a longed-for death comes with crushing grief.

Her story is compelling to families facing choices for the quality of life of loved ones, and for medical and legal professionals as they grapple with what it means to save a life and who has the right to end it.

Beyond the High Blue Air explores the limits of medical science and searches for the unlimited potential of human compassion.

MELISSA WUSKE (July/August 2017)

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