

[Sample Article #1]

An interview with Claire Schoen
Producer/Director of *Heart-to-Heart: Caring for the Dying*.

What is this series about?

Heart-to-Heart: Caring for the Dying is a series of three hour-long radio documentaries that examine end-of-life care and what we, as a society, can do to help people find a path to a good death. The series shares personal stories and remarkable moments with people facing death and those who are helping them along the journey. It looks at the care given by doctors, hospitals, clergy, family and friends to people at the end of life.

What inspired you about this topic?

I believe that there is a genuine need in our culture to have a meaningful conversation about death and the process of dying. As the population ages, many of us are facing the passing of our parents and loved ones. Interestingly, I found that almost everyone I told about this series wanted to share a personal story with me about their own experiences with death. It seems there is a real need for meaningful conversation on this topic and I wanted to create another venue for dialogue. Also, I believe that if we are informed about the issues, both personal and public, that affect our end of life care, we have a better chance of living well until the very end of our lives. I wanted to give people a chance to learn about these issues and what's at stake.

There have been programs on death and dying before. What is unique about *Heart-to-Heart*?

While many programs have examined the issue of death from a philosophical standpoint, *Heart-to-Heart* uses personal stories to focus on the practical realities of death. The series identifies some of the barriers to good care, such as cultural misunderstanding, fear over the use of morphine, and lack of funding to pay for good programs. In addition, each program provides ideas, examples and

inspiration for those who are searching for a better path on the journey to death.

Also, the stories are very personal and intimate. And they incorporate a wide cross-section of the American population. You will meet a thirteen year old girl suffering from cystic fibrosis and struggling with hard decisions about a potential lung transplant. And you will attend Sunday dinner with the extended family of an African American woman who is dying of breast cancer. The series introduces you to individuals from of differing ages, walks of life and cultural backgrounds, including Zuni, Chinese, Latino, African American and Caucasian.

How did the making of this series affect you, personally?

I think I was most impressed by the strength, understanding and insight I encountered in unexpected places. Brittney, the thirteen year old girl suffering from a potentially terminal lung disease, is wise beyond her years. Geri, who works with dying children every day has the compassion and fortitude to confront the grief of their families. Bev, who's father died in unnecessary pain, fights the system that kept him from getting the medication he needed. Mrs. Sang, who speaks no English, finds a way to communicate her fears in her dying days. This experience taught me that standing at the brink of death, one often finds inner resources to accomplish the seemingly impossible.

I also realized that the time to confront the issues surrounding death is before you are in the middle of the process. Many people shy away from this topic, but there are things we can do now to control what happens at the end of our life and the lives of our loved ones. The good news is that it is possible to live well, even in the face of death - but we need to do our part to make this the case for the majority of people who die in this nation.

Claire Schoen has been creating award-winning documentaries in radio, film and video for over 25 years.