This list of fiction and nonfiction books, compiled by Sarah Burris of Bay County Public Library, provides a range of perspectives on the issues raised by the POV documentary My Love, Don’t Cross That River.

ADULT NONFICTION

Trillin, Calvin. About Alice. New York, NY: Random House, 2006. Five years after the death of his wife, Calvin Trillin wrote this loving portrait of Alice. He incorporated Alice into his writing, using her as both his muse and his subject. “I wrote this for Alice. Actually, I wrote everything for Alice.” About Alice chronicles their romance throughout the years and the devastating experience of losing her.

Didion, Joan. The Year of Magical Thinking. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005. “Life changes fast. / Life changes in the instant.” So begins The Year of Magical Thinking, the memoir renowned author Joan Didion wrote in the wake of her husband’s sudden death after forty years of marriage. This occurred just days after the couple’s only daughter, Quintana, was admitted to the hospital and had to be put into an induced coma. This landmark memoir on grief spans the year after her husband’s death and provides an intimate portrait of their marriage.

Butler, Katy. Knocking on Heaven’s Door: The Path to a Better Way of Death. New York, NY: Scribner Book Company, 2013. In this extraordinary memoir, award-winning journalist Katy Butler tackles the question of what it means to have a “good death.” Butler recounts the aging and deaths of her parents. Her father suffered a debilitating stroke, but his life was prolonged by a pace maker, leaving her mother to serve as his caretaker for six years. Butler shows that by increasing lifespan without good quality of life, modern medicine created additional suffering for both of her parents.

Mockett, Marie Mutsuki. Where the Dead Pause, and the Japanese Say Goodbye: a Journey. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2015. Marie Mutsuki Mockett’s family owns a Buddhist temple in Japan near the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant. The earthquake and tsunami of March 2011 caused damage to several nuclear reactors. The resulting increase in radiation prohibited the burial of her Japanese grandfather’s bones. Mockett visits Japanese citizens and Zen priests who are mourning the loss of thousands due to the natural disaster and discusses their methods of grieving. She had also been struggling with the sudden death of her American father several years earlier. In these conversations with Japanese mourners, Mockett finds solace.

Miller, Lisa. Heaven: Our Enduring Fascination with the Afterlife. New York, NY: HarperTorch, 2010. What is heaven? Eighty percent of Americans say they believe in heaven, yet very few of them can articulate anything specific about their belief. Numerous questions surrounding the concept of heaven have existed for ages, and Americans continue to grapple with these ideas. In Heaven: Our Enduring Fascination with the Afterlife, Newsweek Religion editor Lisa Miller provides a groundbreaking history of the afterlife and offers a new understanding of this cherished spiritual ideal.

Chast, Roz. Can’t We Talk about Something More Pleasant? A Memoir. New York, NY: Bloomsbury USA, 2014. New Yorker cartoonist Roz Chast documents the decline of her aging parents in this graphic novel memoir. Both parents are well into their nineties when they can no longer care for themselves in their family home. The portrait provided of Elizabeth and George Chast is endearing and comforting to those experiencing the loss of elderly parents.

Gilbert, Sandra M. Death’s Door: Modern Dying and the Ways We Grieve. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006. Acclaimed author and poet Sandra M. Gilbert explores social customs around death and mourning. References to literature, poetry, photography, and paintings run throughout as significant moments in the history of death. What about death has changed within contemporary mourning and what remains the same? Gilbert also looks at larger events, such as war and the death of the famous, which can prompt widespread grieving in any society.

Knisley, Lucy. Displacement: A Travelogue. New York, NY: Fantagraphics Books, 2015. Displacement is Lucy Knisley’s graphic memoir of her experiences traveling with her aging grandparents on a cruise. Knisley discusses her frustrations, fears and compassion both in caring for her grandparents during this trip and in coming to terms with their mortality. The memoir uses her grandfather’s World War II memoir as a guide for exploring her family’s history.

ADULT FICTION

memories of the relationship: Philip the mathematician and Nina the artist. The novel is both a story of a marriage and ruminations on chance—how two individual lives meet and intertwine.

Hays, Tommy. The Pleasure Was Mine. New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press, 2005. Prate Marshbanks retires to care for his wife of fifty years who has begun slipping away to Alzheimer’s. Irene was an unlikely pairing with Prate, but their marriage remained strong throughout the years. Marshbanks is also asked to take care of his moody, nine-year-old grandson during the summer after the death of his daughter-in-law. Set in Greenville County, South Carolina, this is a story of romance, grief, and the resilience of family.

NONFICTION FOR YOUNGER READERS

Vincent, Erin. Grief Girl: My True Story. New York, NY: Delacorte Press, 2007. It’s just another October day until Erin’s parents are hit by a speeding tow truck. Mom dies instantly. Dad dies one month later, after doctors assure Erin he’s going to make it. Now Erin and her sister are left to raise their baby brother—and each other. This is Erin Vincent’s gripping true story of how one moment tears a family apart and how love and strength come together to rebuild what was lost. Grief Girl will break your heart and then fill you with hope, time and time again.

Ingpen, Robert and Bryan Mellonie. Lifetimes: A Beautiful Way to Explain Death to Children. Saint Louis, MO: Turtleback Books, 1983. This beautifully illustrated picture book is designed to help a child understand the death of a relative, friend, or pet. It is sensitive in nature and explains the cyclic nature of living, the process of dying, and death.

FICTION FOR YOUNGER READERS

Firestone, Carrie. The Loose Ends List. New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company, 2016. Seventeen-year-old Maddie O’Neill Levine is primed to spend the perfect summer with her best friends and beloved young-at-heart grandmother. But Maddie’s plans change when Gram announces that she is terminally ill and has booked the family on a secret “death with dignity” cruise to leave the world on her own terms—and give the O’Neill clan a trip of dreams come true in the process. Soon, Maddie is on the trip of a lifetime with her own top family where she bonds with other passengers and falls for Enzo, who is processing his own grief. But despite the laughter, glamorous destinations, and headiness of first love, Maddie knows she is on the brink of losing Gram. She struggles to find the strength to say goodbye in a whirlwind summer shaped by loss and love.


Hest, Amy. Remembering Mrs. Rossi. Westminster, MD: Candlewick Press, 2007. Eight-year-old Annie lives in a sunny apartment in Manhattan with her father, Professor Rossi. Life would be pretty good if only Annie didn’t so achingly miss her mother. When Mrs. Rossi died suddenly, she left not only Annie but also a class full of students—who pour out their hearts in a scrapbook Annie will treasure forever. With tenderness and humor, Amy Hest reveals the struggles of a father and daughter as they forge a new life together.

Matson, Morgan. Second Chance Summer. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2012. Sandwiched between two exceptional siblings, Taylor Edwards never felt like she stood out—except for her history of running away when things get too complicated. Then her dad receives unexpected, terrible news, and the family makes the last-minute decision to spend the summer together in the cramped quarters at their old lake house. Taylor hasn’t been to the summer house since she was twelve, and she definitely never planned on going back. Up at the lake she is confronted with people she thought she left behind, like her former best friend, Lucy, and Henry Crosby, her first crush, who’s all grown up...and a lot cuter. Suddenly Taylor is surrounded by memories she’d rather leave in the past—but she can’t run away this time.

Lapointe, Stephanie. Grandfather and the Moon. Toronto, ON: Groundwood Books, 2017. This moving graphic novel tells the story of the affection between a girl and her grandfather. When the grandfather withdraws in grief after his wife dies, the girl is determined to live life fully herself and enters an extraordinary contest -- the result is a sensitive portrayal of pursuing a dream.

Grandfather, a man of few words, is devastated when his beloved wife succumbs to cancer, and he sinks into depression. His granddaughter (“MarMar,” as he calls her) has a different response. She decides to enter the Who Will Go to the Moon Contest, and when she actually wins, she hopes that Grandfather will be proud of her. She embarks on the thrilling journey and at first it is wonderful, but just as she is about to reach the moon, her journey takes an unexpected turn.