

60 REASONS TO SUPPORT NEW YORK'S MEDICAL AID IN DYING ACT

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Her partner, Chrissy, was unable to die in accordance with her values

Watervliet, New York



Reason #20

So that no one has to give that last dose of morphine and carry the burden of believing you've just ended your loved one's life.

I want to share a story that I don't often share: the story of my partner Chrissy.

On December 30, 2010, I was with a group of friends at a local bar when my eyes were drawn to a tall, beautiful girl. The energy that followed her through the room was electric and I knew instantly that she was someone who I wanted to get to know.

Chrissy and I just clicked. Every moment I spent with her was a blessing.

On December 30, 2011, a year to the date we met, Chrissy was diagnosed with stage 4 cancer. Chrissy's cancer had affected her liver, pancreas, and the bile ducts in between. The doctors said that there was no "good" option for treatment. Aggressive chemotherapy was the only thing they could offer, so that's what we did.

Chrissy was a fighter and not just a fighter of cancer, a true fighter. She would have done anything to beat the cancer that cruelly invaded her body. A girl who touched every life that she ever came in contact with — an almost 6 foot tall, motorcycle riding, NYS Correctional Officer who you never saw without a smile — was now in the fight for her own life. Her soon-to-be godson Kadyr was due to be born in five months and she wanted nothing more than to be able to hold him.

Much to doctors' surprise, the chemotherapy that left Chrissy crippled for the majority of her days was working, despite the endless torture of nausea, pain, and nerve damage, among other symptoms. Because of this, she kept fighting.

After more than 30 rounds of various chemotherapy cycles, Chrissy's life with cancer was coming to a close. Cancer began to invade her bones and brain. She underwent brain surgery and was willing to try brain radiation, but there was really nothing left.

In the three years that Chrissy battled, we experienced so many great things.

Kadyr, her godson, was born and we were able to share special moments with him. Motorcycle rides in the sunshine; trips to Florida with her parents; a few Broadway plays; hikes; you name it, we did it.

Despite her illness, Chrissy did her best to live through her disease. Even her closest friends and family never saw her without a full face of make-up and a smile. If you asked Chrissy, she was "always okay." If you'd asked me or Chrissy's parents, we would have told you that she deserved the death she wanted.

In the midst of coming to terms with Chrissy's mortality, we learned of Brittany Maynard and discussed moving to Vermont to utilize their medical aid-in-dying law.

Chrissy didn't want to leave her family, friends, and the life that we had spent four years building together. She wanted to be in New York when she passed and she should have had that right. New York provided so many great opportunities for our lives, but the state failed us, New York failed Chrissy, at the end of her life.

As her parents watched their only child suffer in agony and her family shuffled in and out to say their goodbyes, I was horrified by the way Chrissy's death was happening.

Throughout her life, Chrissy was an independent person. She never wanted to die at home, unable to communicate with loved ones standing around her. Chrissy wanted to die on her own terms, in peace, and she deserved that.

Unfortunately, her death was anything but peaceful.

Hospice was there for us, but they could not relieve the suffering that Chrissy experienced in her final days. In the end, administering the ever-increasing doses of morphine to relieve her pain fell to me and Chrissy's parents. I was the one who administered the final doses, and the pain of knowing that the morphine I had to give her may have caused her last breath will never fade.

It should have been Chrissy who was able to control the last medication she was to take; that's what she wanted, and I would have been there holding her when she did it.

February 15, 2015, Chrissy struggled to take her final breath and was finally at peace.

I have since learned that my story, Chrissy's story, is not unique. This is why I work every day urging lawmakers to pass the New York Medical Aid in Dying Act.

No one should be forced to decide whether to move to another state or suffer at the end of life. We know that better options exist; we have decades of combined data from states where the practice is legal that disprove unfounded claims of misuse or coercion.

The time is now for New York to pass this law because currently, we are forcing people to either leave our great state or suffer. I know New York is better than that.

To join our mission, email Amanda Cavanaugh at acavanaugh@compassionandchoices.org.

