

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

Cara Brittieri



Reason #37

So that no one is in the other room begging a doctor to increase pain medication when a loved one who asked for help to die takes her final breath.

One week before my younger sister Lisa finally died, she awoke suddenly and yelled for her husband, David. Our other sister, Lisa's twin, and David went to her side. Lisa said, "I want this over now. I don't want to be in any more pain." David told her, "We want that for you too, but we would go to jail if we did any more for you." So, we waited and waited.

Lisa Brittieri died from pancreatic cancer on Easter Sunday 2018 at 53. Her last 10 days were by far the worst days of my life. I watched my beautiful sister lay in what can only be described as a torture chamber. We listened to Lisa cry out for help over and over again, unable to help her.

When my sister first entered a highly recommended hospice facility, they told us they would get her pain under control. We were told she would die within days. We kept vigil every day. Every night at least one of us would stay with her. Every night we hoped she would die in her sleep. Every morning she woke up in pain.

Her world-renowned oncologist told us at the end to expect a "peaceful passing." Her liver would begin failing and she would eventually pass away in her sleep. That is not at all what happened. She did not pass peacefully in her sleep. Her young body was so strong that her heart and all her other organs fought her death.

Watching her suffer at the end of life after she fought so hard to beat her cancer, (chemotherapy, stents, ports, surgery, more chemo, radiation, and so much more) is something I will never get over.

Make no mistake. If my sister knew what she would be experiencing the last week of her life, she would have made a plan to have a good, compassionate, loving, and dignified death.

My sister was a planner. A few weeks before she died, she planned her wake and funeral. She chose her casket, the flowers on her casket, the photo for her obituary and prayer card, the church for her funeral mass, even the Prosecco for the toast at the luncheon afterward.

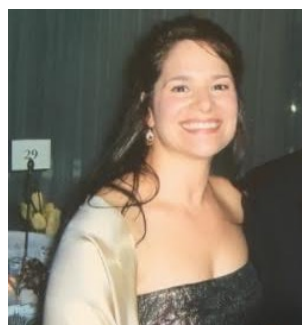
Lisa would have chosen medical aid in dying to avoid suffering at the end. She would have chosen to have loved ones around her, and her husband David holding her hand as she gently fell asleep.

Instead, she lay trapped in her failing body, on the hospice bed drenched in urine, unable to eat, unable to speak, eyes open, and in agony. Every movement was excruciating.

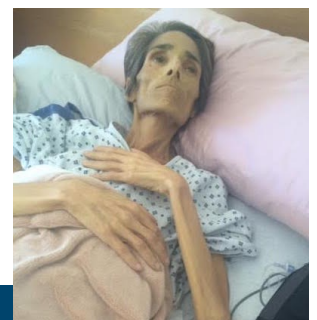
What we regret most is that those closest to her – her husband, sisters and beloved mother – were not with her when she died. How could this be? After weeks of family by her bedside, holding and comforting her, the toll of watching her struggle in pain was overwhelming. For a brief moment, my sister and I took our mother into another room to comfort her. David was on the phone with her doctor pleading to increase her pain medication. When she took her last breath, none of us were there with her.

As a Christian, I believe that God created humans with brains that can do miraculous things, including easing human suffering, not just during life, but at the end of life as well.

Lisa's last words to me were, "Help me." I urge lawmakers to agree that this is just wrong and needs to change. Heed my sister's cry for help and stop deathbeds from being turned into torture chambers throughout New York. Pass the Medical Aid in Dying Act.



Lisa as she was before illness, age 45



Lisa the day before she passed away, age 53

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

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