

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

Barbara Thomas

Her husband, Bob, was unable to die in
accordance with his values

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Reason #41

So that no one has to hear their husband ask her to shoot him to end unbearable suffering.

My late husband Bob and I both had a parent who laid in a hospital or nursing home bed, unable to move, for over a year as they waited to die. And we also knew a woman who was sent to prison for shooting her husband in order to put him out of his misery.

In about 2001 we both had our lawyer put a clause in our health care proxy and living will documents that read: "If physician assisted death and dying should become legal in New York State, I direct my agents to choose this option if, in either agent's opinion I would have done so if I had been competent."

Unfortunately, Bob was stricken with glioblastoma multiforme towards the end of 2010 when it was illegal for physicians to provide medical assistance to hasten death in the terminally ill, and the law still hasn't been changed.

My husband Bob died of his brain cancer in January 2012. We'd been together for 55 years; he was my best friend, my lover, the person I spent more time with than anyone else in my life.

We raised four sons together, spending lots of time outdoors camping, canoeing, hiking, cross country skiing. He loved reading, hunting, fishing and walking in the woods.

The first we knew that he had a problem was about a week before Thanksgiving in 2010. It was already dark and he hadn't returned from walking in the woods with his dog. I found him chilled and on the ground with his dog nearby, but I couldn't get him up. It took the volunteer fire department and the EMTs to get him through the woods to the ambulance.

Then, 2 days before Thanksgiving, he had an MRI that we thought was going to rule out any brain tumor. Wrong. Instead, I drove him to the neurosurgery unit at Albany Medical Center and right after Thanksgiving they removed as much of the tumor as could be removed.

By May 2011, Bob was ready to die. He said that he was glad that he'd had time to put his affairs in order, but he could no longer do any of the things he liked to do and he wanted out.

To be clear, Bob was not suicidal. He wanted to live, but his cancer chose to end his life. All he was asking for was assistance in ending his suffering when he couldn't take it anymore. He asked me to get his pistol so he could shoot himself. As a responsible gun owner with a pistol permit his guns were in a locked gun cabinet, up a flight of stairs he could no longer climb.

I didn't, couldn't, do it. I loved him. I couldn't watch him do that. I told him that everyone would know that I had helped him. That I didn't want to go to jail for helping him. He didn't want me to go to jail either. I still feel guilty that I didn't help him escape his misery.

By August he was in a wheelchair, by the beginning of November he only got out of bed when I used a lift to move him to the commode. Then it became impossible to do even that and he was forced to wear diapers and be fed. We would lay in his bed and cry together.

He died January 18, 2012, and I vowed to myself I didn't want anyone else I love to suffer like that. And I don't want to suffer that way either.

This is an urgent issue. New York should be the next state to authorize medical aid in dying. This is not a politically risky issue. The vast majority of voters in every jurisdiction want to make sure that those who are dying in New York have this option. Few people will use it, but everybody deserves to have the choice to avoid needless suffering at the end of their lives.

No one should have to die as Bob did. No one should have to go to prison for helping the person they love. No one should have to face telling the one they love that there's nothing they can do to help.

To join our mission, email Amanda Cavanaugh
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