

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

Stacey Gibson

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



Garrison, New York



Reason #43

***So that no one has to watch her
once-vibrant husband starve to death.***

My husband and best friend Sid Gibson died in May 2014 at 68 from a rare degenerative motor neuron disease called spinocerebellar ataxia or SCA. To look at Sid, you would have thought he suffered from ALS.

His symptoms started in 2006 when he fell in the middle of a parking lot because his legs just gave out. Over the years, he gradually lost his ability to walk, his balance and equilibrium, his bladder and bowel control, and his arms and legs atrophied.

He developed dysphasia so his food and liquid intake diverted from his esophagus into his lungs and he would gag, but his diaphragm was atrophying so bad he had difficulty coughing up the food and liquid that was diverted.

He went from a cane to a walker to a manual wheelchair to an electric wheelchair. He had to stop driving his car after a bad accident resulted from his inability to stop for a red light because of such weakness in his legs.

One of Sid's greatest joys in life was a great Davidoff cigar. Yet that too was lost as he no longer had the lung capacity to light the cigar nor keep it lit.

My husband Sid was a very smart, successful man who loved life. He loved his daughter, his grandkids, his wife and even his son-in-law! He wanted very much to go on and enjoy his retirement. He had worked very hard his whole life and built a successful corporate career. He had looked forward to our golden years together. We had a strong and honest and happy relationship for 34 years.

Sid did not want to die. He was just so tired from living.

Sid strongly believed in the dignity of one's quality of life, which he believed equally strongly was not necessarily related to one's quantity of life. As Sid's disease progressed, he explored many options to end his life since New York State did not have any death with dignity laws. He explored the option of going to Switzerland to access their system but that was no longer available.

He considered moving to an authorized state the way Brittany Maynard courageously did but did not want to be away from his daughter and grandkids at the end. He explored various methods of suicide, but frankly, by this point, his condition had progressed so far, he was unable to carry out these methods independently without compromising those he loved. He ultimately made the decision to stop eating and drinking, and through the extraordinary assistance of Hospice of Westchester and Putnam, was kept as comfortable as possible until his death on May 5, 2014.

It took twelve days. He developed terminal agitation. It was not peaceful. It was not beautiful. I do not know what choice I personally will make when faced with my own death. What I do know though is that I want a choice. So I advocate for Sid, and for others, who want to end their life in a way that dignifies the way Sid lived his life.

He earned the right to choose a decent and dignified end to his life just as he had led a decent and dignified life.

To join our mission, email Amanda Cavanaugh
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& choices