Beyond Black History Month

Generations Align Around Dying

Preempting Dementia Decline

Beyond Black History Month

Five Questions for Anna Camp

The beloved actress tackles end-of-life choice in her moving new film *Here Awhile*
Who Will Support the Next Generation of Changemakers?

YOU CAN ... Through Your Legacy Giving

Compassion & Choices Board Chair David Cook and his wife, Ann Thompson Cook, know that creating a world where everyone is empowered to chart their end-of-life journey takes more than a lifetime.

That's why David and Ann created a Legacy Gift — a future contribution through their estate plans. How? They named Compassion & Choices as a beneficiary of their individual retirement accounts (IRAs). At the end of their lives, a percentage of their IRAs will be donated to advance our work.

“We want to continue our support and help the next generation after we’re gone. The beneficiary designations were so easy to do,” said David.

To hear David and Ann talk about their Legacy Gift, visit CompassAndChoices.com/Beneficiary-Designations where you'll find a brief video.

To learn more about beneficiary designations and other legacy giving options, contact our planned giving staff.

Contact 800.247.7421 x2152 or email PlannedGiving@CompassionAndChoices.org. Visit online at CompassAndChoices.GiftPlans.org.

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Death: It’s the one thing we all have in common. At some point in our lives, each of us experiences the loss of a loved one, and eventually, we will all die ourselves.

In this issue, we intentionally and randomly reach out to individuals across a span of age groups, including some less directly involved in the movement, to gauge their perspectives on the end of life. From Baby Boomers through Millennials, we heard a universal openness and awareness around the topic of death. I found this heartening and a promising indicator of our potential to continue creating a future where autonomy through death is accepted as a fundamental human right.

We see a similar awakening about the importance of end-of-life planning taking place across racial and ethnic groups. In that light and in recognition of Black History Month, we also feature our work to empower African Americans to take charge of their end-of-life care.

And finally, we highlight an approach to end-of-life planning for a condition that is gripping all generations and all races — dementia. We introduce you to a storyteller whose fears of suffering a prolonged existence with severe dementia have motivated him to use Compassion & Choices’ new dementia tools — tools that we hope all our supporters, and many others, will use.

While death is the one thing we all have in common, so is life. Over the years, I have come to realize that our work together is not just about dying, it is about living. All too often, we live in fear, unwilling to embrace the inevitability of death and unwittingly robbing ourselves of the ability to fully live the time we have left. And so, with that in mind, I invite you to join me in 2020 in supporting the option to live boldly, with acceptance, courage and compassion.
Americans of all ages are concerned about death. Their own death, the death of their loved ones and the impact of their decisions on the dying experience weigh heavily on most everyone. Preparing for dying is complicated and invokes intense thoughts, fears and emotions.

Perhaps you have seen the data. Over the past several years and among multiple demographics, Americans support the concept of steering one’s own end-of-life experience, including 72% in favor, according to a 2018 Gallup poll. And while there is support among the different age groups, there are also variations and similarities between generations.

According to a 2017 U.S. Census Bureau report, with an aging population, there will be a historic increase in the number and percentage of people who die each year. Recently, as we have witnessed more momentum in passing legislation in support of medical aid in dying, how has this changed America’s comfort level with discussing death, if at all? Are Americans preparing advance directives? Are we making plans for a dementia diagnosis?

We decided to ask a few representatives from each generation to share their perspectives on the end-of-life experience, including medical aid in dying.
**Generation Y, or Millennials (those born between 1980 and 1994)**

A number of research studies, including the Achieve and Case Foundation's Millennial Impact Report, suggest that Millennials are largely driven by social issues, perhaps aligning their beliefs directly with our mission.

Ramona Pyos (Washington, D.C.) works for a government agency in the nation's capital. "I am afraid that my end-of-life experience will not be meaningful. I am afraid that it will not be planned, that it will be sudden and unexpected. It is one of my greatest fears," Pyos said. "I deal with death on a daily basis because of my profession. The thought of not being here with my family at this point of my life is hard to wrap my head around. I have discussed my end-of-life wishes with my immediate family more times than I would like to. As much as I don’t like to talk about it, I have discussed them."

Shanna Anderson (Portland, Oregon) shared that her parents differ on their own end-of-life care. "I'm worried that it will not be planned, that it will be sudden and unexpected. It is one of my greatest fears," Pyos said. "I deal with death on a daily basis because of my profession. The thought of not being here with my family at this point of my life is hard to wrap my head around. I have discussed my end-of-life wishes with my immediate family more times than I would like to. As much as I don’t like to talk about it, I have discussed them."

For Brandon Johnson (College Park, Maryland), his main concerns for himself and his loved ones are unnecessary pain and suffering, time spent in the hospital and financial costs. "My greatest hope is that we will have available to us a way to prevent suffering, to have peace with each other and a meaningful closure at the end of life," he said. "I have not spoken about my end-of-life experience with anyone, but I am more than comfortable with the conversation. Death of a loved one is difficult to talk about in general, but I'm happier knowing the ways they prefer to end their life and make it less painful and stressful on them, whatever that may be."

**Generation X (those born between 1965 and 1979)**

Members of Generation X are often lauded for their entrepreneurial spirit. It was Gen Xers, after all, who founded Google, YouTube and Amazon. But does their embrace of innovation seep into their beliefs about the end-of-life experience?

Jason Gaulden (Denver, Colorado) is vice president of partnerships at America Succeeds and a member of Compassion & Choices’ African American Leadership Council, an advisory group of leaders who represent a host of professional and social interests, and who are dedicated to engaging the African American community with the end-of-life dialogue. "Too often, having candid conversations about death — and proactively planning for it — is still uncomfortable territory for a lot of African American families, mine included," he said. "The topic is treated with reluctance and avoidance. I guess the inevitability of death sometimes triggers feelings of powerlessness. Without clear, properly documented end-of-life plans in place, it leads to family feuds, legal challenges and costly financial consequences. I don’t want that for my family and loved ones."

He added, "It’s also important to normalize the conversation. These conversations help combat the stigma and overcome the taboo around the subject of death. The time to have these conversations and ensure our affairs are in order is now, not at a time of emergency or crisis."

"At age 41, I’m thinking deeply about these issues and taking action. Using an advance planning guide and toolkit (a free resource from Compassion & Choices), I am working my way through the very comprehensive checklist of critical considerations, decisions and documentation."

Jody Hoyos (Alexandria, Virginia) is a senior vice president at Prevent Cancer Foundation. "My greatest hope for myself and my loved ones is to feel safe, comfortable and without suffering as we enter the end of life,” Hoyos said. "I am very comfortable talking about end-of-life wishes. Each of us will face an ending to this life, and if having a plan and talking about individual desires brings comfort, I’m all in. It can be incredibly stressful for people without children or with children who are not likely to play a role in end-of-life care to know who to talk to or lean on."

Hoyos continued, “My husband and I have talked about our end-of-life wishes with each other. We have not talked to other family members about our wishes though. It really would be a good idea to talk together, but it’s the one area of life I have continued to procrastinate. We started to draft our end-of-life wishes with an advance directive, but it’s been sitting in a pile for years, and I’m not even sure where it is right now. And I did not even know a dementia provision existed.”

Michelle Manrie Fowlie (Los Angeles, California), a community organizer and activist, said, "If I would want the end-of-life experience to be as peaceful as possible, with family around. But up to the point of actual death, I would want counseling onsite for the emotional and spiritual pain one will likely be going through as they reflect back on the meaning of their life.” She acknowledged that she had an advance directive with a dementia provision, noting, “The minute my father got dementia, my husband and I did that.”

**Baby Boomers (those born between 1946 and 1964)**

Baby Boomers make up just under 23% of the current U.S. population, and the majority are still in the workforce, according to a 2019 Pew Research Center study. But as they eye retirement, is life’s final chapter on their minds?

Mary McMahon, RN, PSN (Parker, Colorado) is a retired perinatal and informatics nurse specialist. “I do not want any efforts to prolong my life,” she said. “Should I experience a sudden, unexpected life-threatening event, up to three or four days on life support would be acceptable, to allow time for my children to travel to be with me and say goodbye. But once all have arrived, interventions to prolong life are to be discontinued within 24 hours.”

McMahon shared her personal experiences about her husband’s sudden death from ALS. “We all knew he didn’t want any interventions (no feeding tube or...
tracheotomy) and that his choice was to die at home. He experienced a very peaceful and dignified end of life. Knowing that his wishes were respected helped us all accept the loss of our loved one, though we miss him greatly.”

McMahon also acknowledged her fears of a potential dementia diagnosis. “Recently, I have struggled with the concern that I might someday need dementia care, since my 96-year-old mother died six weeks prior to my husband from complications of Alzheimer’s disease, and now my 73-year-old brother is showing signs of dementia.”

Joan Eisenstodt (Washington, D.C.), principal of Eisenstodt Associates, lives with debilitating pain and disability. “Like I hear many people say, I too would like to die easily in my sleep. I don’t know that it is that easy — unless one has the option of choosing to die legally … my fear is that anyone who may help me may be implicated in my death,” Eisenstodt said. “My mother died earlier this year, and my husband and I discussed that no one asked her about her end-of-life wishes, but she accomplished them anyway.”

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Whether retired or just starting a professional journey, Americans of every generation recognize the importance of having an end-of-life experience that aligns with one’s wishes. Though there may be differences in our political, economic and social priorities, we will all face death. And there seems to be a shared recognition that we want that “final chapter” to be one we write ourselves.

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Leading an Inclusive Movement

Diversifying the end-of-life movement and creating a welcoming and inclusive space for people of color is an organization-wide initiative. Led by Brandi Alexander, national director of constituency, Compassion & Choices has brought the issue of all African American healthcare disparities and end-of-life conversations to many communities at churches, conferences and even Capitol Hill.

This Black History Month we honor leaders from the African American community who are committed to ensuring that all Americans are empowered to make informed end-of-life decisions. Advocates like Dr. Omega Silva of Washington, D.C., Rev. Dr. Paul Smith of Silver Spring, NY and Rev. Madison Shockley of Carlsbad, CA, have been focused for more than a decade on advancing our mission. Compassion & Choices African American Leadership Council members are actively working to ensure that resources are being distributed widely and that people are having open and candid conversations about the end of life. In fact, the council launched a Facebook page to help get the message to an even wider audience and conducted 14 meetings with Congressional Black Caucus offices.

Compassion & Choices is also participating in Black History Month celebrations around the country, highlighting our African American supporters and staff through a blog series, and being included in USA Today’s Black History Month edition — on newstands during the entire month of February and distributed online to more than five million subscribers.

When recognizing our work with people of color this month, we must also recognize how far we still have to go. We invite you to join us in celebrating Black History Month, but also in extending that recognition throughout the entire year. We have a lot of work to do to ensure that equitable end-of-life care is available to all people, and we, as an organization, will work toward making that possibility a reality.

Honoring Rep. Elijah Cummings

This Black History Month, we continue to honor and celebrate the life and work of Maryland Rep. Elijah Cummings, who died last October. In 2018, Rep. Cummings publicly endorsed the Maryland End-of-Life Option Act. We are grateful to him for speaking out in his home state about medical aid in dying and join the countless others who remember Rep. Cummings’ leadership on so many important issues.
My story is not unique. Everyone knows about Alzheimer’s and related dementias. It’s a truly awful disease: unforgiving, relentless and ubiquitous.

Having Alzheimer’s disease means that every day you are forced to accept some degree of loss. The things that make you human are under attack.

At age 70, my super-independent, always-on-the-go dad got his Alzheimer’s diagnosis — and he died 13 years later.

The last day that I saw my father was several months before he died. We sat silently together; he couldn’t speak nor meet my eye nor understand the simplest words. He didn’t know who I was. He didn’t know who anyone was. He didn’t know who he was. It was advanced-stage Alzheimer’s, and it was brutal.

It occurred to me on that day that Dad was devoid of his humanity, his rabid individuality, his personhood. His distinct sense of self had slipped away. To me, the only thing left that defined him as a person was his failing body. There was no empathy, no intelligence, no humor, no self-awareness, no personhood. There was no HIM. It was lights out.

Then I got mad as hell. The tears in my eyes were not sadness; they were from anger. Had Dad been able to see himself on the day of my last visit, he would have been horrified. It was then that I vowed to myself I wasn’t going to die like he did — without agency, without choice... 

Immediately, I began thinking about my end-of-life preferences. Things had to be different than my dad’s experience. To honor him, I told myself I wasn’t going to die like he did — without agency, without choice, without the capacity to feel love.

Now I am trying to be up front with friends and family about the intentional life I want to lead from here on. I’m also up front about the death I want and the death I don’t want. I want to outsmart Alzheimer’s and deny it the ability to erase my personhood during my last lap.

After my diagnosis, I addressed my biggest fear about this unpredictable and stealthy disease. As I said to my loved ones, “I’m not scared to die. But I am scared to live — to the bitter end — with this insidious disease that will steal my capacity to do the things that make me human.”

I let my driver’s license expire this year because I don’t want my kids and my amazingly supportive husband to have to force me to do so as my disease advances, when I won’t be thinking straight about the risks that I present to others. The new Compassion & Choices’ Dementia Values & Priorities Tool already helps me face practical questions like that. With the help of these new tools, I am developing the emotional skills to address my end-of-life options. There is nothing else out there like this. To me, it’s been a godsend to realize I have choices that I didn’t know I had.
Connection Through Constituency Efforts

Compassion & Choices’ robust Constituency Outreach program has been actively engaging, empowering and educating communities of color, faith leaders, LGBTQ people and healthcare professionals.

With the understanding that the need for end-of-life education is universal, our focus has been continuing to build organizational relationships, develop resolutions and work with state leaders to help advance on-the-ground efforts.

In August, SAGE, the leading national LGBT elders organization, endorsed medical aid in dying. “Within our LGBT community, many elders are haunted by the memory of loved ones suffering from HIV/AIDS, for whom aid in dying became all the more important … LGBT and end-of-life options movements are deeply intertwined.” Compassion & Choices sponsored a SAGE event in Washington, D.C., over the summer.

On November 1, Compassion & Choices staff and African American Leadership Council member Shawn Perry represented our work at the fourth annual African American Leadership Council member Shawn Perry represented our work at the fourth annual African American Leadership Council member Shawn Perry represented our work at the fourth annual African American Leadership Council member Shawn Perry represented our work at the fourth annual African American Leadership Council member Shawn Perry represented our work at the fourth annual Caregiver Conference, which was hosted by TERRIFIC Inc. in Washington, D.C. This wonderful community-based event, held annually in the nation’s capital, focuses on providing quality caregiving services to those in need. The theme, “Caregiving: a Choice, a Challenge, a Commitment, a Celebration,” ties directly into our work with the African American community as we seek to educate and inspire communities across the country to embrace end-of-life discussion and planning. Shawn Perry was the master of ceremonies for the second year in a row, and Compassion & Choices was an exhibitor at the conference, engaging more than 200 attendees about the importance of advance care planning.

Later in the month, City of Hope, a world-renowned cancer research and treatment center, held its first-ever End of Life Symposium. Over 250 doctors, nurses, health professionals, researchers and others attended this daylong symposium located just outside of Los Angeles. Attendees were energized to learn how to support and honor their patients’ end-of-life priorities. The goal of the symposium was to address and manage symptoms at the end of life, define the role of hospice, outline California’s End of Life Option Act, explain advance directives and identify resources to help provide support for caregivers. The exhibit hall featured 11 booths, sponsored mostly by local hospices.

The symposium featured Compassion & Choices President Emerita Senior Adviser Barbara Coombs Lee as the keynote speaker. Compassion & Choices CEO Kim Callinan gave the closing remarks, summing up the monumental day. Dr. David Grube, Compassion & Choices medical director, and Samantha Trad, Compassion & Choices California state director, gave presentations on California’s End of Life Option Act. Dan Diaz, end-of-life options advocate, presented on the end-of-life experience and legacy of his late wife, Brittany Maynard.

Compassion & Choices was also an exhibitor at the National Baptist Convention Inc. annual gathering in New Orleans. This was an opportunity to speak to attendees about the importance of advance care planning and end-of-life education. Compassion & Choices’ Faith Communities for Choices — a new initiative to foster positive relationships with faith leaders — now has 42 members!

On October 9, People magazine featured a story on Hanna Olivas, Latina mother of four with incurable blood cancer who plans to move from her home state of Nevada to California to access medical aid in dying (see page 3 for more details). Hanna, a 45-year-old makeup artist from Las Vegas, was inspired by Brittany Maynard’s advocacy for end-of-life options. Hanna’s story was also covered by Today.com, the Tamron Hall Show, HLN, and Spanish-language giants Univision and Telemundo.

We again hosted a Day of the Dead (Día de los Muertos) celebration in San Diego on November 1. Nearly 60 people gathered at the city’s First Unitarian Universalist Church to remember those who died working to pass the California End of Life Option Act. The service was presided over by Elizabeth Semenova, MSW MTS, and ordained by the Universal Life Church. Speaking at the event about the importance of access to medical aid in dying were Hanna Olivas, Dan Diaz, Amanda Villegas, Dr. Lisa Heikoff and Samantha Trad. Diaz’s late wife, Brittany Maynard, died exactly five years prior, on November 1, 2014. A retired Kaiser Permanente physician, Dr. Heikoff specialized in geriatrics and palliative medicine. The event featured photos of loved ones displayed on the altar, and some attendees painted their faces in the traditional calaveras style of white skulls with colorful features.
advocacy in action

Reaching Across the Nation

Compassion & Choices Is Forging a Path for Expanded End-of-Life Options.

Five years ago, Brittany Maynard and Dan Diaz’s decision to partner with Compassion & Choices to share Brittany’s story super-charged the end-of-life options movement. Brittany had been diagnosed with terminal brain cancer at the age of 29 and wanted to bring attention to her forced relocation from her California home to Oregon, so she could utilize medical aid in dying and advocate for similar laws in California and other states nationwide. Brittany helped create an environment conducive to authorizing medical aid in dying in California (2015), Colorado (2016), the District of Columbia (2017), Hawaii (2018), New Jersey and Maine (2019).

The momentum for expanding and protecting end-of-life options across the country has never been stronger, with unprecedented support building in states such as Illinois, Florida and Minnesota. We have ambitious goals for the upcoming 2020 state legislative session, during which we expect lawmakers in as many as 19 states to introduce bills in favor of medical aid in dying. In addition to the good work being done in these states, we expect bills to be introduced again in Utah, Alaska and Arizona in 2020, and are laying the groundwork for successful campaigns in New Mexico and Nevada in 2021.

Read on for some of the advocacy activities we’re expecting next year and information about our efforts to educate and empower individuals to choose their end-of-life care.

Five States and D.C. Have Authorized Medical Aid in Dying in the Last Five Years Since Brittany’s Death

AK WA WI ME
MI UT CO ND CA
NV WA WI CO NE DE
MD KY UT VA MD
AZ VT WI CO NE MO KY
AZ NE OK TX LA KS
AR OK WA KS CO
LA AR TX UT GA
AZ OK TX GA FL
HI TX WI AL FL
ME NH FL
MI WI FL
WA VT NH
CA UT DE OK
AZ TN DE
HI GA

courtesy of Compassion & Choices

Our efforts in Massachusetts this session will include a letter from doctors urging a committee vote on pending legislation to authorize medical aid in dying. The 17-member Joint Committee on Public Health held a public hearing on the bill in June. If you are a physician who would like to sign-on in support, visit CompassionAndChoices.org/madocs19.

In November, we got some sad news from New Mexico: Our friend Bill Johnson, an important voice in the campaign to authorize medical aid in dying, died on Tuesday, October 29. Bill was a U.S. Army veteran and longtime public servant, having served as secretary of the New Mexico Human Services Department and for decades as CEO of the University of New Mexico Hospital. His legacy lives on in our advocacy work.

New Mexico remains primed to consider medical aid-in-dying legislation, hopefully in the very near future. We anticipate that our previous bill sponsors will reintroduce legislation for the next 60-day legislative session, scheduled for 2021. In 2018, Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham told the Albuquerque Journal, “We should provide patients with humane end-of-life options, including medical aid in dying for terminally ill, competent adults.”

In neighboring New Jersey, we’re prepared to face any legal or legislative challenges to the medical aid-in-dying law enacted in 2019. In August, a state judge granted a temporary restraining order preventing physicians from writing prescriptions for medications in accordance with the law. The appellate court granted a request by New Jersey Attorney General Gurbir Grewal to overturn the suspension and, as a result, the law was reinstated and will remain in effect pending future court activity. We will continue to vigorously defend the legal right of New Jerseyans to use this compassionate option when lawmakers return to Trenton.

Thanks to the continued support of advocates like you, we’ve been able to add New Jersey medical facilities — at least one facility within 50 miles of every city in the state — to our Find Care Tool. The Find Care Tool helps terminally ill individuals and their families find healthcare facilities that allow physicians to prescribe medical aid in dying. You can use the tool to explore facilities in New Jersey at CompassionAndChoices.org/find-care.
Members of our New Jersey team have led educational presentations on the New Jersey legislation at several organizations, including the state’s Home Care & Hospice Association, the New Jersey Advanced Practice Nurses Association, the New Jersey Hospital Association and New Jersey Board of Pharmacy. On October 21, Compassion & Choices Director of Integrated Programs Matt Whittaker and Planned Giving Advisor Sam Young, JD, LCSW, presented to a sold-out crowd at the New Jersey Association of Social Workers’ 2019 Health Care Social Workers Symposium. Their presentation focused on the role of social workers as advocates and educators on end-of-life care.

Also as part of our medical education efforts, in October the Western Clinicians Network (WCN) — a peer-led volunteer professional association of clinical leaders of community health centers in western states — sponsored a free educational webinar hosted by Compassion & Choices National Medical Director Dr. David Grube. Around 100 people signed on for the webinar, for which physicians practicing in California, Hawai’i, Arizona and Nevada were able to claim continuing medical education credit for attending.

Compassion & Choices launched a new statewide education campaign in Florida to ensure that healthcare systems, hospices, long-term care facilities and resource providers in the state have policies in place that guarantee access to all legal end-of-life options. In addition to those trainings, Barbara Coombs Lee hosted Finish Strong book presentations in Sarasota and Naples to sold-out audiences in November.

On Wednesday, September 11, the Minnesota End-of-Life Option Act (HF 2152) received an information-only hearing in the House Health & Human Services Committee. More than 100 supporters wearing our signature yellow t-shirts came out to show their support for the bill. Barbara Coombs Lee testified, accompanied by storytellers Marianne Turnbull, Bobbi Jacobsen, Dr. David Plimpton, Rev. Harlan Limpert and volunteers Tara Guy and Stephanie Jirik. The hearing made a big splash in the media with over a dozen stories and coverage in the Washington Post. While no vote was taken, this was a tremendous success and a milestone for the bill in Minnesota. Our hope is that the committee will hear the bill and pass it out of this committee in 2020.

Our California team celebrated the release of a new comprehensive study on aging and illness by the California Health Care Foundation (CHCF) on October 30. Among the findings is sustained support for the End of Life Option Act: 75% of Californians, a resounding majority, approve of the state’s medical aid-in-dying law across race, ethnicity and income levels. In addition to these very encouraging results, the CHCF report supports the education and outreach our Access Campaign is built on: patient-directed care and a desire to have complete information about end-of-life options. Nearly 9 in 10 people expressed a desire for palliative or hospice care if they become seriously ill, but only 4 in 10 receive this care. Only 1 in 5 seriously ill or senior patients talked with their physician about their choices for the end of life. We continue to encourage doctors to discuss these issues with their patients.

In October, nearly 250 Illinois residents attended forums in Normal and Chicago featuring Compassion & Choices President Emerita/Senior Adviser Barbara Coombs Lee, author of Finish Strong: Putting YOUR Priorities First at Life’s End. The forum was hosted by the Illinois End-of-Life Options Coalition, a group comprised of ACLU of Illinois, Final Options Illinois and Compassion & Choices. Support for end-of-life options continues to grow in the state, with nine Action Teams conducting outreach to local legislators and communities, hosting events, and raising awareness about end-of-life planning and the option of medical aid in dying in the media.

Access efforts continue in Hawai’i as we mark one year of implementation of the Our Care, Our Choice Act. In October, we worked with the Department of Health to host a summit on the new law. Our partnership with the Department of Health in Hawai’i is integral to the success of outreach and education efforts. We are also helping physicians connect with each other through our Doc2Doc hotline, which offers support as they consult with patients about their end-of-life values.

You can help propel the movement forward and protect the progress we’ve already made together.

» FOLLOW Compassion & Choices on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, and sign up for our mailing list at CompassionAndChoices.org/join for the latest legislative updates.

» VOLUNTEER any way you can; find options at CompassionAndChoices.org/volunteer.

» DONATE to help us protect decades of hard-won progress toward self-determination for the terminally ill in our country at CompassionAndChoices.org/donate.

With so much progress being made across the country, it can be hard to keep current! We have resources that keep you up to speed on the latest local and national news in the movement to expand and defend end-of-life options:

» VISIT CompassionAndChoices.org/in-your-state for the latest information on events and activities near you.

» SIGN UP for our mailing list at CompassionAndChoices.org/join to receive real-time updates on our advocacy campaigns, including our monthly e-newsletter.
Five Questions for Anna Camp

Star of such diverse works as HBO’s True Blood, the Pitch Perfect movie series and NBC’s new comedy Perfect Harmony, actress Anna Camp recently completed filming Here Awhile about a woman seeking medical aid in dying.

Q: You started acting in the second grade. Has the reality of a career in that industry been anything like you thought it would be back then?

A: No, it has not! It’s definitely been a wild ride. Where I am today I did not see coming at all. I thought I was only going to do theater when I moved to New York after college. I was going to do Broadway and off-Broadway. Then True Blood came along and pulled me out of New York and brought me to Los Angeles in this kind of surprising way, and I started doing more TV work, which led to film work. It’s been a lot of ups and downs. I’ve dealt with lots of rejection in this career, and as a kid growing up you don’t think about that as much. Luckily I keep working, but it’s been a rollercoaster for sure.
You seem equally adept at comedy and drama — even singing. Do you have a favorite type of performance?

I don’t really. I love all mediums and all tones. What I love the most is a very complex character whether I’m doing something crazy and off-the-wall like in Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt or True Blood, or doing something very real and grounded and difficult like I did in Here Awhile. So good writing is key for me to really enjoy acting.

Do you think entertainment such as film, television and theater can serve as an instrument for social change?

Yes, 100%. As an actor of course you want to make people laugh and be entertained, but it’s these types of stories you don’t get to play often that are the important ones. When you get to bring a voice to someone who’s fighting for their right to use the Death With Dignity Act in a state that doesn’t allow it, I feel that movies and TV shows like this can get the word out. This is a topic that people shy away from — most people don’t want to talk about death. But we’re all ultimately going to die at some point; it’s inevitable. Some of us are lucky and will die at an old age peacefully in our beds, and some are forced to suffer. No one should be forced to suffer. To have a method like this, to die at your own pace and to have control at a time in your life when you feel like everything is out of your control, there’s no greater gift than that because we do only get one life. I just hope that people see this film and are moved by it.

When I was 6, my father, Chester Nimitz Jr., read aloud Charlotte’s Web to my sisters and me. The book was our first encounter with mortality, and it triggered our first family discussion about the cycle of life and death.

During my teenage years, our parents talked a lot about how best to live and die. Along the way, they began to make donations to organizations that supported end-of-life liberty. Likewise, we baby boomers open our checkbooks and our personal networks to support Compassion & Choices.

Translating conviction into action has also caught on with the younger generation: In New York, my niece Beth recently opened her home for a Compassion & Choices fundraiser, and on the west coast, my son Peter serves the organization as an executive volunteer.

And so the cycle is renewed: My father’s initial investment in a cause close to his heart has become a family enterprise that continues to shape our own stories.

Betsy Van Dorn
Former Compassion & Choices board member and longtime donor
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