

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

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Reason #8

So that no family has to watch their mother starve to death for 11 long and torturous days.

My Dad, Peter Lacy, died in 1994 of mesothelioma. He was an old-school tough guy, a proud card-carrying IBEW (International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers) member who worked major construction projects including the New York State Legislative Office Building. At the end of his life, he had excruciating pain despite the great care from hospice and a lot of morphine. Watching him suffer was too much for our family to bear, especially for my mother.

Five years later my Mom died following a series of strokes. She lost her ability to swallow and was being kept alive through a feeding tube. She was admitted to a nursing home and after three days there she handed me a piece of paper. She'd drawn a line down the center of the page labeling one column 'What I have Lost' and the other, 'What I have Left.' She had lost so much, including her will to live. Mom asked me to support her decision to remove the feeding tube. We consulted her minister, my Dad's priest, her doctors, and the next day the feeding tube was taken out.

Over the weekend a covering doctor ordered the feeding tube be re-inserted. Again, Mom took out a piece of paper and wrote in her beautiful penmanship, "I want to die with dignity; I don't want the feeding tube put back in; let me die. Edna Lacy."

In case you still wonder if my mother had her full mental capacity, I'll share some stories with you. She asked me to contact each of her designated pallbearers to come to the hospital, so she could personally request their services. Stunned, they all said yes.

A few days into our 'death watch' Mom said to me, "You Catholics don't know how to prepare a good funeral."

She proceeded to pick out the hymns, psalms and the people she wanted to participate in the funeral service. She then asked me if I was going to give a eulogy. I

replied that I hadn't thought about it as she wouldn't let me do a eulogy at Dad's funeral.

Although the strokes had taken away her ability to smile, she said in her difficult speech pattern and a twinkle in her dimming eyes: "Yeah, but I don't have to listen to this one." Guess you know I prepared a eulogy.

Without any food or even a sip of water, my mother lived for 11 long days. As we held hands for hours, day and night, we laughed and cried recalling good memories and incredibly sad times. For the first time, I really saw and understood my Mom as a 10-year-old girl who watched her own mother with mental illness committed to a psychiatric facility. I saw more than a housewife, a loving mother, and grandmother, a devoted wife for 60 years who had mourned the death of her beloved Pete for every minute of the last 5 years. I saw a smart, religious, strong and determined woman who loved her family so unconditionally she wanted her children and adult grandchildren to remember her as a woman who taught us all how to die with dignity — not a woman kept alive by artificial means for weeks, months or years.

It took 11 agonizing days as my family and I watched our mother and grandmother starve to death. When the end finally came, my daughter and I were holding her hands. I can tell you from experience, forcing a person and their loved ones to live through that kind of torture is not something we should be proud of as a society. I hope none of you ever have to go through it.

To this day I still miss my parents. I am not going to presume that my Dad, a devout Irish Catholic, or my Mom an equally devout Methodist, would have chosen to ask for medical aid in dying at the end. But I am certain that they deserved the right to choose their own destiny, and I want the right to choose my own destiny in the end.

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

