

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

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Pictured: Bob's wife Deborah, who passed away 2019.

Reason #55

Because no New Yorker should have to die from choking on their own vomit when people in other states have the compassionate option of medical aid in dying.

My wife and soulmate, Deborah Hay, died at the age of 65 in Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center (MSKCC) on September 30, 2019 after a fierce nine-year struggle against cervical cancer. I met her on a snowy day in 1996 and we married in 2003. We were joined at the hip from our first meeting. We loved travel (especially to Spain and New Mexico), hiking, jazz, museums and sharing laughs. Deborah grew up in Texas, came to NYC and loved the art, architecture, theater, and music that the city offers. She was a volunteer and longtime enthusiast for Open House New York, a charter member of the National Women's History Museum in Washington, a collector of Russel Wright vintage dinnerware, an animal lover, a word-puzzle ace, and a politics junkie.

With a stellar sense of humor and a ready laugh, she had a career in publishing, working first as a copy editor, then a writer and editor for various venues, including medical journals, the Rainforest Alliance, Verve Records, and finally Diversion, a travel magazine published by Hearst. A favorite job was with Wildlife Conservation, the magazine published for the Bronx Zoo. She was delighted that her office at the zoo sat snugly behind the Birds of Prey exhibit.

Before Deborah was diagnosed she had never had a serious illness. Over the nine years of her illness, there were hundreds of treatments, chemotherapy, radiation, four Phase I clinical trials, one heart attack, and numerous stays in the hospital for various lengths of time. She was active, strong and a game fighter, not wanting to give up. However, the treatment options ran out and Deborah was very tired. Her oncologist agreed with Deborah's decision to stop further treatments. At that point, she was told she had 3-6 months to live.

We had discussed end-of-life options many times and talked of moving to a state where medical aid in dying is legal. Deborah did not want to die with needless pain and

was afraid that she would bleed out, as her oncologist had warned. She wanted and would have used medical aid in dying if it were authorized in New York.

The summer before she died was very hard for both of us. There were multiple hospitalizations as Deborah grew increasingly weaker and lost much weight because she could not eat or drink very much. Her pain, discomfort and anxiety increased as her quality of life continually decreased to the point where she was too weak to walk to the park 3 blocks from our apartment.

We could not afford and Deborah was too ill to move to a state that allows medical aid in dying. I promised my dear wife that I would not let her die in pain and tried to illegally obtain the means to help her end her life peacefully. My efforts were for naught; Deborah died suddenly during the early morning hours, after being admitted to MSKCC, by choking on her own vomit. I am haunted by how she died and will be for the rest of my life.

I'm 74 years old, a cancer survivor and currently in good health. After witnessing all Deborah went through and how she died, I do not want to repeat her end-of-life experience. I want the option of medical aid in dying. In Deborah's memory, for countless terminally ill people in New York state and for me, please pass New York's Medical Aid in Dying Act.

I was born and raised in NJ and came to "progressive" NYC in 1972. If I'm diagnosed with a terminal illness and given a short time to live, I will move back to NJ (the ultimate irony), establish residency and avail myself of the compassionate option of NJ's medical aid in dying law.

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

