

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

Scott Barraco

His partner, Cathy, wasn't able to die in accordance with her values

Rochester, New York



Reason #35

So that no one has to worry when they open the front door that they'll find their girlfriend has taken her own life.

The love of my life, Cathy Quinn, "Quinny" to her closest friends, died after a two year battle with tongue cancer.

Cathy didn't want to die. She was a vibrant person full of plans. Whether it was where we should retire in our old age, a luxury cruise, or my next delicious meal, she loved to get deep into the details. She loved looking forward to events.

She lived by the concept that it's the journey, and not the destination. Although I must say, the destination was always great, especially if it was her lasagna! Cathy was a problem solver and fed off the challenge her cancer presented. So, it should be no surprise that when she was diagnosed, she took an active role in her treatment.

Cathy challenged her doctors. She asked probing questions. She made well-informed decisions about her health care from day one, which was no easy task. She endured multiple surgeries, several rounds of radiation and chemotherapy, and countless more doctors visits and procedures. Her cancer was relentless and miserable. For the last 10 months of her life, she could not eat, drink, or speak since her voice box was removed and her tongue was reconstructed from chest muscle. She had open fistulas in her neck.

In her last two months, it was clear that she would die soon. She became intently focused on how to make the most of her limited time, and how to die peacefully. She hated hospitals and really wanted to die at home.

Without access to medical aid in dying in New York, she contemplated options like automotive monoxide poisoning. During that period, whenever I came over to her house I hit the garage door opener and trepidatiously looked for exhaust fumes. One day she let me know she was finished with life and planned to overdose on pain medication. I rushed over but could not dissuade her. I told her that I understood her decision, but that I couldn't be a part of it. We told each other we loved each other, we hugged and we cried, and she left the room.

An hour later I found her comatose in a chair but breathing. I stayed with her but many hours into this process she was still alive and I finally called an ambulance.

This was the worst day of my life; I had betrayed her dying wish. She awoke furious, but at least her caregivers finally gave her thorough counseling on available options for end-of-life actions in our state. Intensely disappointed that medical aid in dying was not available, she decided to stop eating and drinking a couple of weeks later.

She suffered grand mal seizures and I needed to admit her to inpatient hospice, very much against her wishes. She died a few days later.

I beg you to help me fulfill her last wish, and support the New York Medical Aid in Dying Act. Cathy deserved better, and I think we all do.



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

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