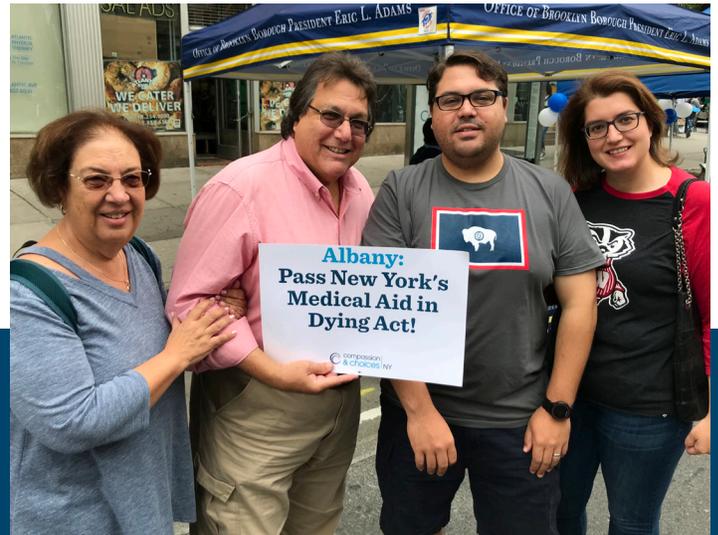


60 REASONS TO SUPPORT NEW YORK'S MEDICAL AID IN DYING ACT

John Picarello



Reason #19

So that all New Yorkers have the opportunity to be masters of their own fate.

As with most people, I have had many family members and friends die throughout my life. After my mom died while receiving hospice care, I became a hospice volunteer. Since then, I have visited dozens of patients, some for a few days or weeks and others for a year or more. Most had some form of a terminal illness, were mentally capable and would have been able to access medical aid in dying had it been available in New York. I watched as they deteriorated and passed on, often without an opportunity for me to say goodbye.

To be frank, I never even thought of medical aid in dying or the Oregon Death with Dignity law that first authorized the practice in the United States. That is, until my 56-year-old cousin Rob was diagnosed with lung cancer which had metastasized to his stomach, bones and lymph system.

Rob and I grew up together. He was a year and a half older than me and was better at everything. Rob was also very charismatic. People would be attracted to him immediately and his brash manner and wicked sense of humor made him the focus of any group he was a part of.

Rob was a leader in the financial world, working his way up the ladder to Chief Operating Officer in many major financial firms. He led divisions of hundreds of employees and was responsible for billions of dollars of assets.

He was hard working, a taskmaster, who demanded much of himself and his staff.

Rob lived by a motto taken from a poem by William Ernest Henley: "I am the master of my fate: I am the captain of my soul."

After two years, Rob exhausted his treatment options. He was relegated to waiting to die. It was a long process, taking weeks, wherein he became thinner, weaker and more dependent. He had lost control of his life and the emotional torment that it caused him was as great as the physical pain he endured. The physical pain could be managed, but the psychological and emotional toll was unbearable and untreatable.

Rob would have been comforted by having the option of accessing medical aid in dying to end his suffering. A man who was always in control, who controlled others, would have cherished the autonomy that medical aid in dying can provide. Rob was also sensitive to the feelings of others, and may never have utilized the medication to end his life. Knowing he had the option would have liberated his spirit.

Nine states and Washington, D.C., currently have laws in place that authorize medical aid in dying, including our neighbor New Jersey. Let's make New York next.. Failing to pass this compassionate law leaves New Yorkers to suffer the emotional and psychological torment of waiting to die when no hope is left.

I have still not quite gotten over losing Rob, even after 9 years. Since his passing, I have committed to helping pass New York's Medical Aid in Dying Act. Please, liberate dying New Yorkers to make their own end-of-life decisions. They deserve a better death than the one Rob experienced.

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

