

My father suffered nearly two years with an intensely painful cancer that affected his sinuses and head and five increasingly invasive surgeries (the last one included lifting his ear and much of the back quarter of his scalp, removing tumor material, and replacing the moved parts).

Throughout his illness, he fought the cancer intensely, but he hated taking the proffered medications, as they made him fuzzy and incapable of the creative activities that were his primary source of joy. I caught him banging his head against the basement wall to try to replace the inner head pain with an outer, more tolerable, one.

On Christmas eve, near the end of his final six-month hospitalization, he begged me to untie his hands so that he could remove the tubes through which he received water, liquid food and medication. He had been caught trying to do that previously, and staff had *fastened his hands to ping-pong paddles and tied them to the bed sides*. Helping him would be a crime, so I asked him to let me think overnight. I talked about it with my brother, who told my mother, who told me, vehemently, that she would have me arrested for murder if I helped him. I knew she was telling the truth and, as much as I wanted to let my father have the peace he so desired, I did not. He died three weeks later, and I have felt sad about my lack of courage in the ensuing 40 years.

My mother, at the Christmas in question, was in another hospital, also with cancer. Their conditions overlapped. Hers was an abdominal cancer that was so metastasized by the time they found it that they could not be sure of the origin. However, since she had had eleven miscarriages along with her 2 children, uterine cancer was considered the most likely source.

The reason her cancer had advanced to such a degree before it was discovered was that she was one in THOUSANDS who experienced absolutely no pain during the year-and-a-half period she lived after the cancer was discovered. Doctors marveled over her case and good fortune. She was released from the hospital after my father passed and was able to attend his funeral, travel extensively and live fully until three months before her passing. At that point, she was hospitalized, largely because she had lost so much weight and body mass (at 53 pounds) that she could no longer care for herself. Her feeding and medicines were done intravenously...at sites one her shoulder, because her blood vessels had shut down in her arms. Still without pain.

A nurse who changed a dressing left a pair of scissors on the tray near my mother's head.

Mother took the scissors and spent most of the day stabbing at herself all over her body, trying to make herself bleed so she could die. When that was discovered, my brother was called, and he contacted me. (I was working out of state and visited two weekends a month.) My mother had demanded that he not tell me, because she knew how I would feel about it, and I promised my brother that I wouldn't bring it up when I visited.

But just before I left, I couldn't hold back...I asked her why, after the good fortune of suffering NO pain and knowing that she was literally at death's door, she would gamble on causing herself a painful death. She could not answer and I left. I got back to the work site that evening, and received word that Mother was passed and returned immediately.

At the funeral, the hospital chaplain ran up to me and embraced me, saying that my mother's final words were: "My daughter was the only one who understood me!"

These two experiences — and knowledge of the miserable deaths of others — are a part of my reason for wishing to have the option to choose quick, painless physician-assisted suicide at a point when I will no longer be able to live without pain or disabling medications, and by means of artificial support and machines, or when I no longer recognize the world around me, etc., and know that those conditions will only worsen. I cannot imagine a good reason to keep this body functioning artificially when no improvement is likely.

1. I do not believe that "I" am skin, bones, and other body parts. I AM a soul that should be freed to go on, when there is no value to be gained or given in being here.
2. There is no one who would want (or be able) to attend a funeral, or who would need a stone to visit. \$255 from Social Security wouldn't provide much for either.

After I have passed, I want to donate organs and, in fact, all my body to medical schools, labs, or whatever for use, research or education.

3. Keeping me alive would cost money for drugs, care and space to no viable end, except waste of money...and, since I am not wealthy, that money would likely come from sources other than myself (the State or other).

I'm not asking that people have such a choice forced upon them. But I sure would love to have the option to choose that for myself!

Thank you for humane — and pragmatic — consideration.

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