

Only one month ago, in her final stage of Alzheimer's Disease, my 85 year old mother literally choked to death. When we got the call from my father who cared for her at home, my two sisters and 26-year old niece, who live locally, and I, who live further away, rushed to be by her bedside. Finally, we assumed we'd be witness to her peace and thankfully, in her own bed. Our dear mother who had lost everything to this horrific disease for nearly ten years would finally and mercifully be at rest. But her final moments were far from peaceful. I live an hour and half a away and didn't make it in time to see her take her final breaths, but I am grateful and I know my mother would be too. My family who did make it in time are so haunted by what they witnessed; working to offer her comfort for 45 minutes, while she gasped through minimal doses of morphine administered by a Hospice nurse- morphine that did little to calm her gasping, or more swiftly and humanely end her obvious finale of suffering.

The onset of this seventh and what was deemed terminal phase of her illness by Hospice last November, came piece by piece over a decade. But there is always something to be grateful for. Our mom, who lost nearly all of her abilities, knew her family at times, right to the end. Yes it was both a gift and a curse, for her and us-to be aware. She could, occasionally,

speaking and would reach within herself finding what was left of her voice and did intermittently beg us to help her, "I don't want to do this anymore," she would cry. "Please help me." Unless you have ever been witness to someone you adore who is emotionally suffering at the hands of a terminal illness like Alzheimer's, you cannot imagine the torment I felt each time I walked out the door of my childhood home, leaving her in her final months, on the couch, in a fetal position, no longer able to stand, swallow normally, or control any of her bodily functions. I pleaded with God to take her. Mercifully allow her to pass away from something like pneumonia or another infection, before she makes it to the terminal phase, I would pray. But that never happened. Instead she spiraled into what I know for her was a tormented abyss. When I got the news this past fall, that Hospice had qualified her under guidelines that stated she could likely pass away in six months, I was relieved for her and for our family. I assumed we would gather together in the near future, by her bedside before, what I had read, could be her death by choking. I envisioned us holding her hand and seeing her through to what was her inevitable death, in peaceful, compassionate moments. I naively assumed that Hospice had the ability and legal right to manage those final moments, ending her suffering, with

the only drug at their disposal-morphine. As you have heard, that wasn't the case.

Two weeks later, my father who was married to my mother for 64 years and as I mentioned cared for her in their home, gave up and told all four of his daughters, he no longer wanted to live without her. We all believe he was willing himself gone because he suddenly and surprisingly had a stroke that fully compromised the left side of his body and his ability speak. He was also diagnosed with a severe MRCA infection. Over the course of a day in the hospital, he rallied somewhat from the stroke and regained his voice, now weakened, begging the hospital staff to end his suffering. He did not want to perish, now incapacitated, for what could be months, in a nursing home bed. This had always been his and my mother's worst fears and they had throughout their lives, shared those thoughts with all four adult daughters. The doctor told him that in years past, his stroke and infection were examples of how elderly people died of what was called natural causes. She told him she could stop all treatment and allow him his ultimate choice. We were once again relieved, again naively thinking that our other parent would have the peace he was seeking, even though it was just two weeks after losing our mother. Once again the only route available

to his end was Hospice. They qualified him, stopped all antibiotics for the infection and began a morphine drip. I sat by his bedside for four days, as he appeared to drown in his bodily fluids, choking before my eyes; his face nearly purple and at times contorted, as nurses suctioned his throat and mouth, trying to offer some relief from what was obvious distress. When I noticed, after the third day of this slow decline, that he, had turned yellow, I assumed his liver was failing. The doctor stood by his bed with me witnessing his gurgling and choking and concurred; saying it wouldn't be long now. She examined him and said he'd go within a few days. I pleaded with her to just administer something to bring him to a peaceful end. There was obviously no turning back. She told me that was illegal and that this was his process of death and that he must go through it. I was speechless. Because this only happened a week and half ago I am still literally shaking from the memory.

He did finally pass away alone at 2am without any of his family by his bedside. As I said, we had been informed by the Hospice doctor, that death was imminent but that could be within three more days. My sister and I were exhausted from the vigil and left him for our much needed sleep. And so, he died alone; a memory that will forever break our hearts. With a

dignified death and compassionate ending we could have more humanely seen him through in a loving manner, holding his hand and getting him where he wanted to be-with our mother once again.

Seven years ago my elderly father-in-law who suffered from severe COPD took his own life in a horrific solitary event that spurred me to begin my journey supporting Compassion and Choices and death with dignity laws. He was a brilliant and sensitive man, whom we all loved and respected beyond words, who was told by medical professionals that he was terminal- that there was nothing more to be done for him, other than send him home with an anti anxiety prescription, one that may help when his breathing became labored to the point of panic. It did nothing for him as he lay awake at night gasping for breath. And so after months of struggle, he eventually planned suicide; trying desperately to spare himself and his wife and family what lay ahead, with no peaceful or merciful solution offered or in sight. He waited until she departed from the house for a shopping trip with my sister-in-law, left my mother- in- law a letter, called 911 and told emergency personnel, he would use a gun; his only means of swiftly ending his suffering, without implicating anyone, and to please be sure his body and all signs of his death were eliminated from the patio

before their return. He got his wish. He was gone before they got home and yet we were told he did not die instantly. Our family is still reeling from what he saw, as the only alternative to end his suffering. We relive what could have been his peaceful ending with us by his bedside, honoring the wonderful man that he was, seeing him through to a compassionate end-not the one that he was forced to desperately seek out in such a violent final act that defies what he or any family of a terminal patient should endure.

I struggled with a final message, wrapping up what I have shared with you. I can only come up with one poignant thought. How could any of us who love, possibly speak against death with dignity for terminal patients, deemed so by a medical professional? How could any of us who love or believe in a merciful God, not wish for our own family members, their right to end suffering, which has been medically qualified as inevitably fatal? There could be no abuse of this law which states just that. The time is now for Connecticut residents to bring this bill to loving families and to fruition.