

THE



Dignity Report

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Cover Photo:
Sarah Witte with her son Andrew

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There are many ways to support our work: an outright gift, a gift honoring a loved one, becoming a Sustaining Partner, or including us in your estate planning. Please check the enclosed envelope for these options. In addition, you can help spread the word about our work and this important issue by following us on Facebook and Twitter.

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*A Message from
the Desk of
Dr. Peg Sandeen,
Executive Director*



We look forward to 2016 with much anticipation. The passage of California's End of Life Option Act represented a monumental success for our organization and for the entire Death with Dignity movement. Since Governor Brown signed the bill into law, we have seen a spike in requests for information about how to pass Oregon-style legislation in other states.

This pre-legislative session flurry of activity is sure to lead to more Death with Dignity laws seeing successful action in statehouses around the country. A few states show great promise for 2016, Maryland particularly so. Read more about this on the next page.

Amid this activity, the end of the year featured a somber note with the deaths of three staunch advocates occurring in quick succession: Dr. Peter Rasmussen, John Duncan, and Penny Shelfer. While those of us in the Death with Dignity movement know that the concept of deaths occurring in patterns of three is a myth, we are filled with a sense of loss and shock to experience three deaths in such rapid succession.

Look for the "In Memoriam" article in this issue. Particularly difficult for me was the death of John Duncan, our organization's former Executive Director, who died a month after being diagnosed with an aggressive cancer. John hired and trained me, and we later became close friends.

The New Year is a time to reflect on the past and look to the future. Doing so has been particularly poignant for me. I am so enthused and excited about our opportunities, but I am saddened by the magnitude of the losses we experienced in the last three months.

Before he died, Oliver Sacks said, "I feel a sudden clear focus and perspective. There is no time for anything inessential. I must focus on myself, my work, and my friends."

Through the loss of such essential colleagues and friends, we bring focus and determination to our work in the Death with Dignity movement.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Peg Sandeen'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

2016: A Look Ahead

California

Our first victory of the year came early: on January 4 our opponents in California reported they were unable to collect enough signatures to place a measure overturning California's new End of Life Option Act on the November ballot. The signature gathering threat was real, and our win means that terminally ill individuals in California will soon have the ability to control the timing and manner of their death in the most compassionate and dignified manner possible. Death with Dignity will be the law in the Golden State.

Looking forward to the rest of 2016, we see the potential for great policy reform success in Maryland and the District of Columbia. We have been actively working for over a year in both jurisdictions to lay the foundation for legislative progress.

Maryland and DC

Maryland's session is short. We will have our best political strategy staff on the ground for every important legislative date and event. Publicly, look for our Lobby Day and trainings for individuals who want to meet with their elected officials. Privately, we will be speaking with legislators, lobbyists, and staff members to help ensure that every word in the

bill will work to expand options for terminally ill Marylanders.

Later in the spring, we will see activity in the District of Columbia, which is considering a Death with Dignity bill based on the Oregon model. We have had staff on the ground in DC providing support to the Councilmembers since the bill was introduced last year. We are prepared for the tough battle this bill will face.

New York

Perhaps the most exciting opportunity for our movement in 2016 will be in New York. We are investing most of our resources in the Empire State, as advocacy efforts there heat up in the spring. At an organizing meeting last November, we told attendees that, in the early years of the Death with Dignity movement, a significant amount of money and resources to support Oregon's nascent law came out of New York. Now it is our time to return the favor and pay back the investment New Yorkers made in Oregon. 2016 promises to be an exciting legislative year for the Death with Dignity movement, and the Death with Dignity National Center is pleased to be at the center of all the strategy decisions being made. ■

“
I feel intensely alive, and I want and hope in the time that remains to deepen my friendships, to say farewell to those I love, to write more, to travel if I have the strength, to achieve new levels of understanding and insight.

I feel a sudden clear focus and perspective. There is no time for anything inessential. I must focus on myself, my work, and my friends.

—OLIVER SACKS, ON LEARNING HE HAS TERMINAL CANCER

An Individual Choice

by Sarah Witte

Five-and-a half years ago, on May 19, 2010, my 27-year old son Andrew Nicholas Marshall died from an aggressive form of malignant brain tumor known as glioblastoma multiforme.

Last Love Tour

We knew the day of his diagnosis that his odds of survival were slim. As we navigated through surgery, chemo, and radiation, we made quality of life a high priority. When we ran out of treatment options, Andy and I flew across the country on a last love tour, and then he returned to Maine to die.

Planning the Final Days

A planner by nature, I planned the caregiving and hospice arrangements to the best of my mothering ability. The one thing I could not provide, in Maine, was something that Andy wanted: the option to go when the end was near. So we went to the end. He was terrified.

Andy received amazing care at the Gosnell Hospice in Scarborough. When the cancer was taking over his brain and the pain became uncontrollable even with all the medication they have, I asked the

doctor to give Andy a little more and help him to leave.

The doctor looked me in the eyes and said very clearly, one word at a time, "I. Cannot. Cross. The. Line. Do you understand?"

Sadly, I did. And a while later, Andy died. I know that he would have availed himself of a less painful end if he could have.

Peace of Mind

Today I have two dear ones in my life who are facing terminal illness. They would find peace knowing they had a choice. Someday I and each of us will be there too.

I have always believed people should have this choice; my parents of 87 and 90 do, too. We were all very disappointed that LD 1270, a proposed Act Regarding Patient-directed Care at the End of Life, didn't pass last year. I read the proposed legislation in full, and I think it is what we need: It would provide peace (and peace of mind) and choice, and it would compel or pressure no one, neither patient or doctor, to act in any way other than their conscience would guide them. It's an individual choice at an extremely personal time of one's life. ■



I have always believed people should have this choice. It would provide peace (and peace of mind)...at an extremely personal time of one's life.

In Memoriam

At year's end, we mourned the deaths of three friends and Death with Dignity advocates: Dr. Peter Rasmussen, John Duncan, and Penny Shelfer. While our movement is experiencing tremendous momentum, the loss of these vocal advocates leaves a hole in our hearts.

A Doctor, an Advocate

Dr. Peter Rasmussen campaigned for Oregon's groundbreaking Death with Dignity Act in the 1990's. An oncologist and palliative care



physician, he was one of the first doctors in the state to prescribe medication under the law. He was also a respondent in a US Supreme Court case that affirmed the law.

Even after he was diagnosed with glioblastoma last year, he wrote op-eds advocating for Death with Dignity laws in California and New York papers and worked with

researchers looking into the Oregon experience with the end-of-life option.

He died on November 3 peacefully and surrounded by his loving family after taking medication prescribed under the Oregon Death with Dignity Act he'd advocated for so staunchly.

A Class Act

John Duncan was a long-time Death with Dignity advocate in Oregon; he was the executive director of our organization until 2005. He died on November 13.

An avid cyclist, theater buff, and environmentalist, John's sense of humor, direct communication style, and laid back demeanor won friends and bridged conflicts everywhere he went. Our board members remembered him as "a class act," "a role model," and "a calming and experienced leader."



“I Want to Control My Own Ending.”

We introduced Penny Shelfer in our Fall 2015 issue. Her tragic death, on November 21, came as a shock.

Penny had co-founded, with Cindy Merrill, the grassroots group Texas Death with Dignity. Thanks to Penny’s boundless passion, the group has been one of our most active local partners.

Penny’s dedication to the movement stemmed from a series of personal experiences, including her own



cancer and watching her parents’ deaths.

“I do not want to die in agony and have my family witness such a death,” Penny told us. ■

GEORGE EIGHMEY IS NEW PRESIDENT OF DEATH WITH DIGNITY

Our Board of Directors has selected George Eighmey to be President.

Thanks to his experience and boundless energy, George has been an exemplary ambassador for Oregon’s law and for our organization.

A long-time lawyer, George advocated for the Oregon Death with Dignity Act as a state representative in the 1990’s. For 12 years thereafter, George helped facilitate the implementation of the law.

George joined us in 2013. He has worked to educate legislators, journalist, patients, and others on Oregon’s unblemished record. Most recently, he worked with lawmakers in Vermont and California to pass their state’s own Death with Dignity statutes. The *U.S. News & World Report* featured George among the Best Lawyers of 2015.

George succeeds Steve Telfer who served as President for 10 years. Before retiring, Steve was a long-time lobbyist on state and national levels. His steady guidance and insight into political and legislative processes served us and the movement well, while his quiet, business-driven leadership has contributed to the longevity and stability of our organization. ■

Local Advocate Spotlight: Valerie Lovelace, Maine

Last year, Maine came closer than ever to having a Death with Dignity statute. The Maine House passed LD 1270, An Act Regarding Patient-directed Care at the End of Life, with a vote of 76 to 70, while a single vote held the bill back in the Senate.

Senator Roger Katz has vowed to bring his bill back in 2017, saying, "This will come to the legislature again. It's an end-of-life issue that isn't going away."

It's My Death

We've partnered with the local nonprofit, It's My Death, to help a Death with Dignity bill pass in the post-presidential election year.

It's My Death is the brainchild of Valerie Lovelace, who founded the organization to honor a promise to her dying sister Dee, "to teach others how to be with dying, how to speak and listen to one another the way we had learned to speak and listen, and how to go on even when afraid."

Val is a long-time supporter and volunteer with us. She has penned several articles on our website, for example. A renaissance personality, she is an inter-faith minister, a hospice volunteer, an artist, a homeopathic practitioner and a Reiki

Master, a U.S. Navy veteran, a trained EMT, and the parent of three adult children.

Dirigo

Val's viewpoint on the issue reflects the sentiment behind the bill and the state's motto—*Dirigo* (I Lead or I Direct): "I want human rights and civil liberty to prevail in our dying. I want my state to acknowledge the incredible intimacy and the very personal nature of dying as the final event of living a self-actualized, individual human life."

We are supporting the educational efforts of It's My Death. Val offers classes, talks, presentations, and workshops on the issue.

"We're gaining momentum," she said. But, as hopeful as she is about the future in Maine, Val recognizes that, "the more publicity the issue gets, the more the opposition rallies." ■

I don't want to die the way someone else thinks I should.

DONOR SPOTLIGHT: NANCY DANIELSON

Passage of a Death with Dignity bill in California has been momentous. Although legislation was completed in record time, it took twenty years of hard work at Death with Dignity National Center to bring the movement to a tipping point.

Many Californians have been with us every step of the way, including Nancy Danielson, a supporter since 1994. She recently shared her thoughts on death and life with us.

At Home in California

For Nancy, a sense of place was established long before she was born. Her family helped to settle Marin County, California, and, much to the delight of President Roosevelt, donated Muir Woods to the United States. This is where she raised her daughters, and where her grandchildren, fifth generation Californians, also reside.

In her 89 years, Nancy has watched Marin County change and her family grow and shrink. She lost both daughters and her husband years before she was ready to let them go. The losses forced her to think about death and to reflect on the importance of making Death with Dignity legal for all.

Courage to Discuss Death

"People are always saying to me: 'Don't mention death, talk about life!' But death is inevitable, nobody gives us a choice about this. Sometimes it happens early and sometimes it happens later. We want it to be smooth, and we don't ever want our children to die before us, but it happens. We certainly do not want any of our loved ones to feel pain, but endings can be very difficult, and this is why we need a law like Death with Dignity in every state, so that our loved ones do not have to suffer so much when the end comes."

We thank Nancy for her many years of supporting the Death with Dignity movement and for her compassion and courage to talk about death openly and honestly within her community. ■





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