End of Life Assistance (Scotland) Bill

Anonymous

I am not a stranger to suffering and my heart goes out to Margo Macdonald and the struggle she has ahead of her.

My name is Christine Alford and I would like to tell you my story:

My dad suffered a cerebral aneurism in 1969 when I was 12 years old. He was in a coma for many months and was left paralysed down his right side and unable to talk. Assisted suicide would have been an inviting way out from our suffering as a family. After two years, we brought my dad home and I was very involved in his care. He became my best friend during my late teens, such was our relationship. My dad was at my wedding. I was so proud of him. What joy I would have missed if we had taken ‘the easy way out’.

Much was tried to give mum some quality of life – the problem was she needed sips of water desperately to stop her mouth drying out but we couldn’t stop the water going into her lungs. It was such a struggle and caused infection upon infection. Mum was admitted to the Southern General Hospital on 2nd January 2008. The hospital considered another operation but the result of which would be status quo. It would stop the situation getting any worse but there would be no improvement to her current state. Mum said she had enough. If they could improve things, she would have the operation but not to stay the same.
Please realise that when people are in the midst of suffering they do not see clearly, they are tired, wearied by it all and would take a path they don’t really want. If they are the person causing the suffering they will want to end it so as not to be a burden – that’s a wrong reason. Also, when they are in the midst of suffering, I’m ashamed to say that they are so easy to manipulate – I could have talked my mum into anything, I really could have. She was so trusting of me, I could have taken advantage of her, believe me. The one thing I have is – no regrets. I would find it extremely difficult to live with myself if I had any regrets. I am so glad assisted suicide was not an option in any of these situations because what if we had taken it….

No-one helped my mum die. She did make the decision no more operations and we honoured this, that was all. It was her time. The nursing staffs were excellent. They prepared us well with what to expect, allowed us free access to mum’s bedside, ensured she was pain free and mum passed away in March 2008 dying with dignity, with peace, with security in ward 21 of the Southern General. No-one helped her die but the family were all around her bed and I held her hand as she left us, she was totally at peace and experienced absolutely no distress. She simply sat up, looked up, opened her mouth to speak and died.

Now I tell you all this because there were difficult times when an easy way out would have been an attractive proposition but in hindsight it would have been so very wrong.

I believe all life has meaning and worth. The greatest right is the right to life and the law should reflect this and protect it and all costs. All effort should be expended in improving the quality of life for those who suffer and make dying as positive as possible. I counted it a privilege to experience my mum’s death journey with her. Yes, we were all scared and upset but it was such an honour to be part of her care and to be with her through these end times. She wasn’t in a hospice, just in the local hospital where I was born and my kids were born but the attention the nurses gave her was lovely.

I work as a community pharmacist, my choice of profession probably influenced by my background. I would find it very difficult to do my work if I thought drugs that I was dispensing were potentially to be used to assist suicide. I couldn’t knowingly do this and would want no part of it. Would I therefore have to give up my work?

I believe suffering shapes us and makes us better people. I value how I have been shaped through the suffering I’ve experienced and the type of person I’ve become today is because of my life story. Suffering brings empathy and allows us to be thankful for what we have. I see various degrees of suffering every day but I believe with all my heart this Bill is wrong. We don’t need it. I implore you do not allow this Bill to proceed.

Anonymous
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