

THE DIGNITY REPORT

**GOING BOLD
IN THE NEW YEAR**

**FIGHTING IN
HONOR OF OUR
DAUGHTER**

**REESTABLISHING
AUTONOMY**

**A RIGHT WE
SHOULD ALL HAVE**

IN MEMORIAM



Mark Glaze, our National Political Strategy Consultant and New York Campaign Manager, died on October 31, 2021. Mark was a brilliant political strategist. Among many other professional accomplishments, he led Death with Dignity's successful campaign in Washington, D.C. We worked alongside him for many years and we miss him tremendously.

GIVE DIGNITY

Death with dignity laws provide peace of mind to qualified terminally ill residents in **California, Colorado, District of Columbia, Hawai'i, Maine, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oregon, Vermont, and Washington.**

You can help expand the options to all Americans with a generous contribution:

- a one-time or recurring gift
- a gift in honor or in memory of a loved one
- a gift of stock or mutual funds
- a legacy gift

Learn more and donate at deathwithdignity.org/support.

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The mission of the Death with Dignity National Center is to promote death with dignity laws based on our model legislation, the Oregon Death with Dignity Act, both to provide an option for dying individuals and to stimulate nationwide improvements in end-of-life care.

Death with Dignity Political Fund is a 501(c)(4) nonprofit organization that acts as the political arm of the National Center. The Fund drafts death with dignity laws based on the Oregon model; campaigns, lobbies, and advocates for death with dignity legislation in the states that lack it.

GOING BOLD IN THE NEW YEAR



A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of stylized initials 'PS' followed by a flourish.

Peg Sandeen
Chief Executive Officer

2021 was hard. We continued to face uncertainty and experience losses and heartache resulting from the pandemic. As a nation, we are tired. But I'm encouraged by the shifts I'm witnessing in the death with dignity movement.

Collectively, folks are taking stronger stances. **We're demanding (more loudly than ever!) a more humane future, we're advocating for autonomy, and we're showing up for each other.**

I'm energized by advocates talking about death at the dinner table. They're shunning the euphemisms we often use to avoid talking about death and mortality. They're pushing legislators harder than ever to pass death with dignity laws. They're exclaiming, "LISTEN TO US!"

Advocates in this movement don't apologize for being bold. And neither do we.

Last year, our organization created a new look to reflect the boldness of this movement. You will see these changes on our website, social media channels, and print communications.

Death with Dignity was named after the groundbreaking Oregon Death with Dignity Act, the bold legislation that paved the way for more than 73 million individuals to have access to assisted dying today. We proudly carry this legacy forward, with a new visual brand, while continuing to aggressively advocate for the right to a peaceful death we all deserve.

I hope you like our bold new look as much as we do.

FIGHTING IN HONOR OF OUR DAUGHTER

BY KEN LEE, MISSOURI

Our daughter, Kristina Lee-Mitchell, was such a healthy child. In fact, I barely remember her ever being sick. We were shocked when she was diagnosed with multiple myeloma at age 34.

Kristina did everything to survive, wanting nothing more than to stay alive for her family, including her three young children. She sought out consultations with top oncologists and endured aggressive treatments.

Something I Will Always Regret

After three years of exhausting treatments, Kristina died on October 13, 2021, at age 38.



Kristina in 2020, looking healthy and radiant, despite undergoing cancer treatment.

In June of 2021, as we were waiting for her acceptance into a new clinical trial, Kristina broached the topic of her death and wanted us to look into death with dignity for her. I was so hopeful about the clinical trial that I could not possibly have this conversation.

Soon after, she was rejected from the trial, stopped all treatment, and declined quickly. I will always regret not listening to her wishes about death with dignity that day.

Advocating in Her Honor

Death with dignity is not an option in Missouri, but I know this is what Kristina wanted. As her father, I will never forget the last four hours of her life, full of pain and heartbreak.

I cannot take away the final days of what Kristina and our family went through as we helplessly watched her die. But I can advocate for death with dignity by sharing her story. If Kristina had had this option, I know her death would have been better and brought peace to all of us who loved her so dearly.

REESTABLISHING AUTONOMY: 5 QUESTIONS FOR AN ADVOCATE

SHERRY SKILLWOMAN, KANSAS

Sherry Skillwoman, MSW, BS, founder of the Wichita Death with Dignity Group, has a vibrant past in social services, endurance physiology/athletics, and environmental science. She hopes to hike the Grand Canyon rim to rim once the pandemic settles down.

Why did you get involved in advocating for a death with dignity law in Kansas?

My mother brought me to civil rights marches back in the 50s. Later, she suffered intractable pain while dying from congestive heart failure, despite hospice pain management. After valiantly hanging on for months, she asked me to help her die. When I reminded her there was no such legal option in Kansas, she said, "You need to get busy on that."

What are you doing to get this law passed?

After stumbling through a DIY orientation to the Kansas State Legislature (KSL) history of death with dignity bills, I gradually found online resources and a handful of Wichitans who could say "the D word" without choking up. I founded the Wichita Death with Dignity Group and we met regularly until the pandemic shutdown. Now, we're reactivating to broaden the base and strategize toward passing an assisted-dying bill in Kansas.

Why should Kansans be interested in this issue?

We will all die. Most of us avoid thinking about this reality. Once you sort through your end-



Sherry posing with her Chinese birth-year icon, "Year of the Pig," in 2021.

of-life options, it is startling to find there are many barriers to implementing your wishes. Death with dignity ensures we have autonomy over our deaths, when and if we decide we need it.

What obstacles have you identified for getting this law passed?

The KSL Health & Human Services Committee has declined to consider death with dignity bills, submitted annually since 2013. They use a tactic that lets the committee chair "kill" a bill by refusing a hearing. Although governance by religious belief is contradictory to the Founding Fathers' wise separation of church and state, this frequently escapes the KSL. They are currently working to amend the Kansas Constitution to deny the legal right to "bodily autonomy," which would affect medical aid in dying. Kansas has no citizen ballot initiative to work around this undemocratic and religious censorship.

What does the death with dignity movement mean to you?

It reestablishes the basic right to bodily autonomy. Our bodies belong to us and are not owned by the state or anyone else. When faced with a life-critical condition, we have the right to decide about our death. This decision should not be dictated by a legislator imposing their personal religious beliefs on others.

A RIGHT WE SHOULD ALL HAVE

BY MERLOYD LAWRENCE, MASSACHUSETTS

I really started to consider the concept of a dignified death in the 1960s after both of my parents died of cancer. They were the first relatives close to me whose deaths I witnessed. The torment that cancer caused my parents is something I will never forget. They both endured radiation, surgery, pain, sleepless nights, and immense fear.



Merloyd enjoying the sights in Nova Scotia in 2020.

What I Want

Fortunately, I have also witnessed dignified deaths. My aunt was an early supporter of medical aid in dying. A caretaker for my mother, she knew she wanted a different type of death. She had conversations and plans around choosing death with dignity when her time came. Although she did not ultimately need this option, she took comfort in knowing it was available to her. I want the same comfort.

Fear of an excruciating death can permeate one's later years. I see the right to choose death with dignity as the ultimate human right.

Supporting the Cause in Massachusetts

Death with dignity is now an option for folks with terminal illness in ten jurisdictions across our country. Unfortunately, in Massachusetts, where I live, we don't have an assisted-dying law yet. I've been involved in the movement here for quite some time, and I believe donating, advocating, becoming educated, and spreading the word will help pass the law here and in more states.

The experience of my parents, as well as my belief that we should all get to choose how we die, is why I support Death with Dignity and their valiant mission.

To learn more about making a gift to support Death with Dignity, contact Ben Flax, Leadership Giving Manager, at bflax@deathwithdignity.org.

STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS

WHAT WE'RE READING, WATCHING, AND LISTENING TO



***Extremis*, Netflix, documentary**

This Oscar-nominated documentary follows a palliative care specialist supporting patients with terminal illness in an Oakland ICU. In under 30 minutes, *Extremis* reveals the challenges patients and their loved ones and medical teams experience when a person's wishes are not discussed until they need end-of-life care, and the profound conversations that transpire."

LANE WILDE, SOCIAL WORK INTERN



***Between Two Kingdoms: A Memoir of Life Interrupted*, Suleika Jaouad, book**

At *Death with Dignity*, we focus on death and dying, but this book takes us on the journey of a young woman with a devastating diagnosis who navigates the medical system throughout her illness and emerges to a new understanding of life. The author chronicled her sickness-to-health journey in a *New York Times* column, forming the basis for this book.

PEG SANDEEN, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER



***The Death with Dignity Podcast*, podcast series**

Meet Andrew Flack. He's a 33-year-old guy who loves gaming, hockey, his family, and his friends, and happens to be living with stage 4 colorectal cancer. In this podcast, he talks about his personal experience, which can be grueling, but he does it with humor and relatability. You'll get to meet his friends and family and be inspired by his honest feelings about life, death, joy, and love.

MOLLY GRAZIANO, SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGER



I SEE THE RIGHT TO CHOOSE DEATH WITH DIGNITY AS THE ULTIMATE HUMAN RIGHT.

**MERLOYD LAWRENCE
ADVOCATE, MASSACHUSETTS**

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