

In September 2015, The ABC had an Open Drum Forum called "DEATH & DYING: What I know about death". The following is a piece by Jessie Edney called "The Transition", where she writes about her many experiences with people she loves suffering and dying in awful circumstances. She speaks of her terminally-ill husband who really wants to live until the time comes that he says "enough is enough".

DEATH & DYING: What I know about death.

Life is pleasant. Death is peaceful. It's the transition that's troublesome. Isaac Asivov
What an understatement that is, 'transition troublesome'.

I will tell you how 'troublesome' it can be.

My Grandmother died with cancer over 55 years ago. I was 16 and remember it vividly. Gran lived with us and I remember the image of her slowly dying over a period of two years, bed ridden and looking like a skeleton as the cancer ravished her body. She was only sixty. I can cry today for the way she suffered.

One would think things have changed drastically over the years. We are told constantly they have.

We now have palliative care. Yes, but not for everyone. Many doctors keep patients alive either because they can or because the law insists. Not all pain can be controlled. Not all patients want to be drugged constantly. Many people would choose to get rid of the 'troublesome transition.'

My mother died with lung cancer many weeks, drugged so much we couldn't hold a conversation. Drugged so much that one day I had my hands wrapped around her hands and she said, "Why have you taken, my watch?" I started to cry, to think she thought I would do such a thing.

Of course, now I realise it was the drugs talking. But at the time I had to untwine our hands and show her that it was indeed her wearing her watch. Many days she would say things that were so 'out of it'. To watch someone you love so much doubting you at such a time is heartbreaking. Yet many of the dying are kept in that drugged state today.

My father died in a nursing home with dementia. I visited him most days although as soon as I left he forgot my visit. The next day he would often be distressed and ask, "Why have you left me here alone so long?" As I walked through that nursing home there were patients walking like zombies around corridors. I have seen things I don't want to write about and try hard to forget.

My brother Jim was diagnosed with early onset dementia at the age of 58, he is now 69. 11 years of suffering, not only for him but for his wife, children and extended family. He has been in a nursing home for the last six years and hasn't recognised anyone for many of those years. Jim is spoon fed and has his nappy changed three times a day. Lifted in and out of bed with a hoist and sits slumped in a wheel chair all day.

My husband John was diagnosed with terminal bowel cancer in April 2011. He has had half his bowel removed, sixty percent of his liver removed and broke his right femur. He had a steel rod put through from his hip to his knee. The latest P.E.T. scan shows the cancer has spread to the left hip with spots in the stomach and lungs.

John wants to live. In-between the many operations and the on-going Chemotherapy we have many good days, However, we know that he can only take so much. We know there is no recovery. We know what is to come. Surely if and when John decides 'enough is enough' then he should be allowed to make that choice.

Aiding and abetting euthanasia is illegal.

These things have affected my life and have formed my opinion.

We need Laws similar to the laws in Holland, Switzerland and several U.S. States. I want to choose when to go choose the people I want with me. I want to say goodbye in a comprehensible manner. Not in a drugged way.

I want to be the one to say, "Let me end this troublesome transition and die in peace".