

My grandfather's name was Thomas Patrick Boyce. He was a Korean war veteran who owned his own business. He was married to my grandmother for over fifty years, and had four children. He spent the last twenty years of his life dotting on me and my cousins, taking us out to eat once a week after school, giving us lunch money, and being a loving and supporting presence in all of our lives. Every Christmas, he would ask us to give to others. He was a Catholic and always said Jesus was his best friend. Before his death, he received dialysis multiple times a week for about ten years. It is safe to say that my grandfather was a strong person, but also a very gentle and charitable soul. The last year of his life, 2013, was a very difficult year for him. He developed the flu, pneumonia, and suffered from a fall. He spent most of his last months either in the hospital or in rehab facilities. He wanted nothing more to come home, but due to his illnesses, he could not. We visited him frequently, sometimes sneaking pistachio ice cream past the nurses to give him a little treat. On August 29th, 2013, which happened to be my 21st birthday, he decided to stop receiving dialysis, knowing that he would die as a result. He came back home and was fully aware and conscious for two days before becoming unresponsive. He passed at the age of eighty, eleven days after he decided to stop dialysis, surrounded by his family, myself included. I felt very fortunate to be given the chance to say goodbye and to care for him in his final days. The hospice nurses were incredibly supportive, caring, and informative. They helped my family immensely. He was devoutly Catholic, and he consulted the church before making his decision. He was allowed by the church, and the law, to stop receiving dialysis treatment.

But I wonder, if he had the choice, would he have wanted to endure an unknown amount of time before his passing? By his own personal standards, his quality of life was in rapid decline. If he was given the choice, when he knew he was ready to go and didn't have to wait for his body to shut down, would he have taken it? I will never know that. And maybe he still would have wanted to stop treatment. But what the Catholic lobbyists don't understand is that he never wanted to die. People with terminal illnesses don't want to die. Brittany Maynard didn't want to die. But in the face of incurable illness and a painful decline of health, some people make the decision to end their lives peacefully. So shame on the Catholic church, whose anti-choice campaign against end of life options is called "Don't Jump." That is offensive to victims of suicides and their families, and offensive to terminally ill patients who are considering end of life options. Compassion and Choices is about giving people CHOICES. At no point does it advocate for "suicide." It is advocating for giving mentally competent, terminally-ill adults the option to end their life peacefully. If a patient wants to stop life-prolonging treatment of illness, they are supported. If a patient wants to continue treatments until the very end, they are supported. If a patient wants to enter hospice care, they are supported. Again, it is about choices. How dare the church claim people are making rash decisions about their end of life care. How dare they call it physician assisted, when the only thing the doctor does is prescribe the pills. The patient must be able to administer the dosage himself. If they were really interested in giving people better education about palliative care options, would they really call it "don't jump?" Doesn't that reveal their bias from the start?

There are understandable concerns about end of life legislation, especially from disability and elderly activist groups. I urge these groups to work with the legislators to ensure all the safeguards are in place, such as who can be prescribed the medication and the involvement of social workers and doctors in the patient's decision. Compassion and Choices has a hotline and capable volunteers whom patients can turn to if they want to voice their concerns. And for many, just knowing that end of life options are available serves simply as peace of mind. They don't ever have to administer the medication. We do not ban incredibly helpful laws just because there is a potential for wrongdoing. We do not outlaw welfare because some people may abuse the system. So I ask those who oppose this bill to consider their position. I ask legislators to work hard to provide comprehensive end of life options to terminally ill, mentally competent adults. I'm asking on behalf of my grandfather, who didn't have that choice. I'm asking on behalf of the 63% of Connecticut citizens who support aid in dying legislation. Our state is still revolutionary, and it would be a shame to allow fear mongering to hinder our progress. It is my life, it will be my death, and it needs to be my choice. Thank you.