

My mother died in 2103 at 102 years old. She was not in any pain; she had no major disease. She could see and hear just fine. Her only major physical disability was severe arthritis in her knees - which confined her to a wheelchair.

My mother was a very smart and educated lady, well aware of current events and very interested in them. But, in her late 90s her memory failed. She never lost her verbal ability, but her short term memory failed badly. When I would tell her something, like where she was, she often responded with some statement showing that she had understood. But, 20 seconds later, she would ask the same question. Due to the memory impairment, she could not read a newspaper, magazine or book. By the 2nd or 3d paragraph, she had forgotten what was in the first paragraph. For the same reason, she could not understand TV, even the short clips of news, or watch a movie - she could not keep track of what the plot was or what the speakers were talking about.

I was very close to my mother. Her younger sister, who died later at 101, said she had never seen any son as close to his mother as I was. My mother would talk to me about everything, and with unstinting honesty. Her major complaint? She was bored. For a smart, aware person to be cut off from the world of events was very painful. She would ask me, Why can't I have a big party, kiss everyone that I love goodbye, and then push a button and be gone? She repeated this desire any number of times in different contexts. The only answer I could give her was, "The religious nuts won't let you do it!"

My mother did not have a terminal disease and was not in great pain, yet she wanted to be done with life. I would have gladly have acquiesced in her desires. This is an individual matter of privacy, pain and autonomy. Governments have no business to be involved in this intimate, personal decision.

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