

This November the voters of WA State will decide whether our state will follow in the footsteps of Oregon and pass Initiative 1000 - Death with Dignity. I-1000 will allow the terminally ill, who are of sound mind, to request and self administer a lethal substance, after a six month waiting period and consultation with two separate doctors. Who could be against death with dignity for their loved ones or themselves?

I have no doubt that the people behind I-1000 are there for reasons of compassion. No one wants to watch their loved ones go through an agonizing, excruciating death . For ourselves, we want the right to choose. We don't want the state, other people's morals and religion to decide for us. Surely, only right -wing nut jobs and the Catholic Church could oppose this initiative and yet . . .

I'm not afraid of a "slippery slope," unethical doctors , or obvious corrosion and abuse. I'm afraid of the influence, the pressure , that the society we live in exudes and that we absorb. We already live in a culture where youth and beauty are idealized. That influence makes us try to defy old age with face lifts, anti -wrinkle creams, and hair dye. We use surgeons to hack away our imperfections, tuck in our tummies, and suck out our fat. Beyond getting bigger boobs, some women get butt implants to make their rear end shapelier, get their toes shortened to look better in shoes, and even get their labia reshaped so they'll look pretty "down there." Men go under the knife too. If nature didn't give them a big enough penis or large enough pecs, those can be bought. We are bombarded with images of beautiful, perfect, people and we want to be like them.

We are easy to influence. Companies hire celebrities to endorse their products so we will be more inclined to buy them. They pay to have their products placed in movies and television to subject us to some subliminal advertising .

Now, imagine that you are terminally ill, living in an area where "death with dignity" is accepted and practiced. Would you be able to value your life enough to live it to a natural end? Or would you start to view yourself as a burden, a drain on resources, and an inconvenience? Would you start to feel obligated to leave this earth as soon as possible to spare your family the expense, the grief, and the labor involved with keeping you alive?

I know this pressure first hand, not because I'm terminally ill but because a chronic disease has me in its embrace. I'm physically disabled. I'm no longer able to hold down a full time job and my medication is expensive. I've had days where I've thought that my family would be better off without me. I have days like that even though my family is wonderful, loving, and supportive. What about people who don't have that kind of support?

A good friend with the same disease is in the process of getting a divorce. She found out that her husband considered a disabled wife to be a lodestone around his neck. How many people feel that way about the terminally ill person that's in their life? Does that feeling come through even if no negative words are spoken? Tell me, when a morbidly obese person steps into a room full of thin people, do any of the thin people

think something like: “Yuck.” Do you suppose the fat person knows that some of the thin people are thinking things like that?

My uncle, when observing an acquaintance using portable oxygen, told my father, that when things got that bad it was time to pull the plug. Ironically, my uncle ended up needing to use portable oxygen before his life came to an end and apparently he no longer felt like the plug should be pulled. What if it had been my father that needed the oxygen? Would he have been able to look at my uncle without hearing in his mind my uncle saying that it was time to pull the plug?

If “death with dignity” starts to pervade a society, how long will it take for its people to start expecting the terminally ill to take that dignified death?

~Just another disabled person in Whatcom County~