



# COMPASSION and CHOICES Of OREGON

November 2008 Issue

Happy Holidays to one and all

[www.compassionforegon.org](http://www.compassionforegon.org)

## Washington State Joins Oregon

Oregon's Aid-in-Dying Law Adopted by Washingtonians.

Article by JANE GROSS – November 2008

Washington joined Oregon last week (November 4, 2008) as the second state where physicians are allowed to prescribe lethal doses of medication to terminally ill people who want to hasten their own deaths. But the question of whether doctors should help



patients die is far more nuanced than it was 11 years ago, when the Oregon measure took effect.

The Washington proposition passed **59 percent to 41 percent**. Like the Oregon measure, which withstood legal challenges, it includes safeguards intended to prevent hasty and ill-considered decisions.

State residents requesting this assistance must be mentally competent, have six months or less to live according to two physicians, wait 15 days after their request and then repeat that request orally and in writing. They must be capable of administering medication themselves and agree to counseling if their physicians request it. The patients also must be told of alternatives.

(Washington Joins Oregon – continued on page 4)

## Compassion & Choices of Oregon's Annual Dinner/Auction

Our 2008 dinner/auction celebrated **"Eleven Years of Courage & Grace."** More than 160 guests raised more than \$50,000 to be used to help Compassion's clients. The net proceeds go toward client services. Thank you to all who donated their time, auction items and, money to aid the terminally ill.



Jasmine Ruthdotter with  
Sec. State Bill Bradbury



Keynote Speaker  
Rabbi Emanuel Rose



Newly elected Sec. State  
Kate Brown & Dan Little

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## Executive Director's Page

(GeorgeEighmey)

### Reflections on What Drives Me Forward

On August 31, 1998 yours truly began a journey that at the time I thought would last two or at the most three years. Now, well past one's usual retirement age, I remain at the helm of this incredible organization that not only possesses my time, but also controls my mind and heart.

I took a few moments away from my duties this week to reflect on what has kept me with Compassion & Choices of Oregon for this long and what is it I will miss when it comes my time, within the next 2 or so years, to step down.

In the late 1950s, while eagerly anticipating graduating from high school, I worked in a nursing home as an orderly (glorified name for a bedpan changer). As the months went by in my job I witnessed far



Mary Overgaard and Dave Cook are among our generous auction winners each year. Mary loves the jewelry up for auction and for 3 years in a row has out bid others to win it. A huge thank you goes out to Mary & Dave for their generosity.

too many bad deaths. Patients screamed for relief and some called my name in the middle of the night to help them to end their pain.

As a teenager I could not understand why these patients didn't receive the relief they sought. I was often told that what they were experiencing was *"Redemptive Suffering,"* the type that cleansed one's soul so they could enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

In the 1950s teenagers did not often question the decisions of their elders, but being one of those who constantly questioned authority, I could not and do not accept one needs to endure suffering and pain as did those nursing home residents in order to become a worthy person.

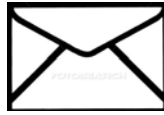
My youthful experiences shaped the person I became 40 years hence. They led me into service for others - as an

attorney who specialized in estate planning for clients, as an elected official who responded to the needs of constituents, and as chair of a facility caring for people living with AIDS.

At the AIDS facility I once again witnessed the inhumanity that I had seen in my teens. Young men experienced unbearable suffering and took their lives in tragic ways to escape their miserable existences.

Fast forward to today where for more than 10 years I have been privileged to work for and with dozens of volunteers - who are the true angels on this earth- and hundreds of terminally ill clients and their families and friends- who are among the most courageous and loving people in the world. These are the ones who keep me driving forward and the ones I will miss the most when it is my time to say goodbye.

## Send Your Donation Today



We are thankful for your support, which allows us to serve Oregon's terminally ill with end-of-life options. In these difficult economic times your donations; we need your donations more than ever. Please donate generously to **Compassion & Choices of Oregon**, PO Box 6404, Portland, OR 97228. You may also choose a direct gift from:

### COMPASSION'S WISH LIST

1. **Printing Cost for Newsletter - \$2,100**
2. **Tobii Eye Tracking technology - \$4,000**

Thank you to our anonymous donors who contributed \$1,000 toward the purchase of our new lap top computer and \$600 toward the purchase of our PowerPoint Projector.



## LETTERS and EMAILS

It is gratifying to know that what we do to inform the public and to guide the terminally ill is appreciated. Here are two letters, among several, we recently received.



*Dear Compassion & Chocies of Oregon,*

*Just a brief note of thanks for all of your efforts, care and concern during my mother's illness and passing. She passed away on her 68<sup>th</sup> birthday.*

*I believe your organization serves an important and special service to those who choose to take advantage of their ability to make life ending choices. Without your guidance this would not be possible.*

*Again, thank you for being there for us. Sincerely, A*



*Dear Mr. Eighmey –*

*Thank you for your assistance and guidance in regards to my mother, B. Although she was only a few hours away from the delivery of the prescribed medicines she died a natural death with me by her side. It was extremely important to her to have this aid in dying in place. I have no doubt that she would have utilized it.*

*The two of us agreed upon the right to die and we felt fortunate to live in a state where there was a choice. Enclosed is a check from her estate.*

*With sincere thanks, E*

## Washington Joins Oregon

(Continued from page 1)



In the view of Dr. Timothy E. Quill, director of the palliative care program at the University of Rochester and a leading expert on end-of-life issues, these options have gained acceptance over the past decade.

In 1997, the Supreme Court ruled that there was no constitutional right to physician-assisted suicide and upheld a prohibition against it. But in the ruling, the justices conceded that terminally ill patients were entitled to aggressive pain management, even if opiates or barbiturates had the “double effect” of hastening death.

Dr. Quill recommended that a palliative care consultation be mandatory before anyone considers the following “last resorts,” which he listed from least controversial to most:

### *Lasts Resorts*

1. Pain management so aggressive that it may well hasten death, although that is not the primary intention. (This is the doctrine of “double effect.”)
2. Invoking a patient’s right to forgo life-sustaining therapies or discontinue them.
3. Voluntarily stopping eating and drinking. Dr. Quill believes this is a “more morally complex” choice because over the last decade the practice has expanded beyond those with end-stage cancer or Alzheimer’s disease — who often lose interest in food or forget how to eat and drink — to people who are not “actively dying” but nevertheless have had enough of disability or dependence.
4. Sedation to the point of unconsciousness. Although it was endorsed this year by a panel of the American Medical Association, Dr. Quill called it the “last, last resort.”

“Most patients will be reassured by the possibility of an escape,” Dr. Quill said, “and will never need to activate that escape.”



### **Outstanding Volunteer of the Year**

**Michaele Wilk Houston**

Mike, as she prefers to be called, is Compassion’s Client Support Team Coordinator. She gives 40 hours a week of her time and talents in that unpaid position. This year we recognized her volunteerism and commitment to C&C of OR and to the terminally ill. Mike received a Masters in Sociology at Indiana University, became Executive Director of the Parenting Skills Center for the Prevention of Child Abuse, and Director of C and F Gifts at Reed College. She also generously volunteered her time and talents in counseling and supporting people living with HIV/AIDS. We are fortunate to have Mike.



**Outstanding Contributor of the Year James Ora Powell**



**Autry Powell, widow of James with George Eighmey**

This year C&C of Oregon also recognized **James Ora Powell** posthumously. Autry and James were instrumental in getting Oregon's aid-in-dying law passed and volunteered for Compassion & Choices of Oregon for 7 years. Survivors include his wife; daughters, Katy Powell and Elizabeth Pastor; sons, David, Todd and Richard; brother, Gordon; 17 grandchildren; and one great-grandchild.

He was born June 20, 1926, in Portland and died peacefully surrounded by his family on October 15, 2008. He graduated from Jefferson High School and Oregon State University. During World War II, he served in the

Army in the Panama Canal Zone. He was a salesman for IBM for 10 years. He later owned United Data Processing & Rumpelstiltskin's, a rug-tufting needle business, for the past 20 years. In 1947, he married Autry Michael.

James's son Richard accepted the award on behalf of his father with the family present. Richard thanked Compassion & Choices of Oregon for all the assistance our volunteers and staff provided his father and the family.



**Compassion & Choices of Oregon covers the state of Oregon**



**The following two stories are about Compassion & Choices of Oregon Clients included in an AARP article written by Harris Meyer on October 17, 2008.**

**Story # 1 Joe D. Smith Eugene, OR**

Joe D. Smith and his wife, Susan, were longtime members of the Hemlock Society. So it wasn't surprising that when Joe was diagnosed with lung cancer in July 2005 and told he had less than six months to live, he turned to the Hemlock Society's successor group, Compassion & Choices of Oregon, for help in dying.

Smith and his wife were psychotherapists who had a practice together in Washington State and later moved to Oregon. According to Susan, a trained nurse, Smith was a spiritual man who studied the teachings of all religious faiths.

After being diagnosed, Joe considered all his medical options, but chose only procedures to make his breathing more comfortable. He also entered a hospice program. His pain was relatively well controlled with morphine and Tylenol with codeine, but he had fevers every night and was in bed most of the time.

Joe's pulmonary physician and his medical partner knew Joe didn't want chemotherapy and desired aid in dying, so they prescribed the lethal medication for him at his request. With his family's support, he picked Oct. 6, 2005, as his final day. "He was very comfortable with what would happen next," Susan says. "He called it a mystery and was not afraid to die."

Hearing about his plan, his friends e-mailed and called him to talk. On Oct. 5, Joe, 77, gave an interview on a local TV news show in which he lucidly explained that this was his choice, even though it wasn't for everyone.

The next afternoon, he gathered his wife of more than 30 years, his three children, a friend and his dog in the front room of his house. At the prearranged time, some of his friends gathered in parks near their homes to think about Joe as he passed.

Sitting in his favorite chair, Joe took the barbiturates, mixed with applesauce and cinnamon to lessen the chance of regurgitation. In less than a minute, he was asleep, and 45 minutes later a hospice nurse pronounced him dead.

"It was a very moving, life-changing event for me and my family," says Susan, who now works as a volunteer for Compassion & Choices of Oregon. "In some ways it was a celebration. That was who Joe was. He was someone who believed in personal choice, and he got to exercise that as he passed."

## **Story #2**

### **Martha, Central Oregon**



Martha, 80, is a retired social worker living in central Oregon who raised her three children by herself after her husband died in the 1960s. She enjoyed traveling, hiking, gardening and walking her dogs. Until recently, she lived on her own.

But a few years ago, Martha, who did not want her real name used, was diagnosed with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. Because of her difficulty breathing, she had to give up the activities she loved, and in 2002 her son and daughter moved in with her.

She entered a hospice program in April of this year, but wants to use the Oregon Death with Dignity process because she prefers to die before she is totally debilitated, dependent or in extreme discomfort, her daughter says.

So, with her children's support, Martha contacted Compassion & Choices of Oregon this summer. She was referred to a physician, who met with Martha and her daughter for two hours.

He was assured that Martha was of sound mind and not depressed, and that she had no more than six months to live. He and a hospice doctor approved Martha's request for aid in dying.

In July she obtained 100 secobarbital tablets from the one pharmacy in town that participates in Death with Dignity. She hasn't yet taken the drugs, but she knows that when she does, she wants her three children, a volunteer from Compassion & Choices of Oregon and the hospice social worker with her.

But first, Martha has goals she wants to meet. In August her children finished her kitchen remodeling project. Next, she wants to vote in the presidential election, either by absentee ballot or in person.

"This is a hard process to go through," says her daughter, who works for a senior services organization. "I support my mother, but I'll miss her. This is her choice, even though other people might not choose it. I'm grateful for the Death with Dignity law because choice is important."

**(Editor's Note: Martha set her date to take the medication in late November.)**



## **Sean Strub Author & Publisher Begins Research On New Book**



Sean Strub on left  
Attended C&C of OR's  
2008 Dinner/Auction

Sean Strub, a well known activist, writer and entrepreneur is writing a comprehensive book on Oregon's aid-in-dying law featuring several of our volunteers and clients.

Sean founded many successful fundraising, publishing and marketing organizations, virtually all in support of progressive social change efforts.

He has written extensively on the topics of corporate social responsibility, smart growth and land development issues, direct marketing and AIDS, among other topics.

We are fortunate his next book will be on our topic.



## **Peter Richardson Producing Film on Death with Dignity Law**



Peter Richardson, shown above, was educated at Philomath High School, ORE.

Almost 7 years after his graduation, he returned home and at the age of 26 he produced and directed his first documentary film, **Clear Cut: The Story of Philomath, Oregon.**

Richardson's film was selected by the prestigious **Sundance Film Festival** and made its debut in Park City, Utah at its 2006 festival.

Peter is now turning his talents to producing his second documentary on Oregon's aid-in-dying law. We are also fortunate to have him filming C&C of Oregon.

Portland Monthly Magazine and Oregon Community Foundation awarded Julie McMurchie the "2008 Light a Fire" honor for making a significant contribution to C&C of Oregon.

Julie is a C&C of Oregon board member, active fundraiser, and donor. She received a well-earned honor as the Extraordinary Board Member of 2008.



Julie McMurchie, on left, is shown with her father, Dr. Donald Sutherland, and her sister, Ellen McMurchie



Julie was presented the award at a ceremony with a guest list of 400 held at the Nines, Portland's new ballroom.

During the past 3 years Julie has increased Compassion of Oregon's fundraising abilities and our recognition within the community.

We are pleased Julie's talents have been honored.



### Presentations on Oregon's Experience



Please contact us if you or a group to which you belong wish to have one of our experienced speakers give a presentation. **Call us at 503-525-1956** or email us at [contact@compassionoforegon.org](mailto:contact@compassionoforegon.org)



**HAPPY HOLIDAYS**



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