

*Private Members' Business*

**Mr. Lyle Dean MacWilliam (Okanagan—Shuswap):**  
Mr. Speaker, it is a sombre moment to stand and congratulate my good friend, the hon. member for Port Moody—Coquitlam, on having the conviction and the courage to bring an extremely important motion before this House. That motion says that:

The government should consider the advisability of introducing legislation on the subject of euthanasia and, in particular, of ensuring that those assisting terminally-ill patients who wish to die not be subject to criminal liability.

This issue has been around a long time and it will continue to be. It is the responsibility of this government and of this Chamber, if we have the courage of our convictions, to approach this issue and debate this issue in its fullest context.

Euthanasia is not about murder. Euthanasia is about compassion, about an understanding of the needs of those who are terminally ill to face death with dignity. It is about an understanding of the trials in making that transference from life to eternity and an understanding that in many cases those individuals who are facing the end of their lives are doing so in great pain and great suffering.

Euthanasia is an act of humanitarianism. We have to realize that there are times when individuals with terminal cancer or other serious chronic diseases have prepared themselves for death. They have made their minds up that life is no longer worth living. There is the situation out in Victoria concerning Sue Rodriguez, who is rapidly losing her ability to make that decision for herself. It is not an easy decision to make by any means and those who have made that decision have great courage in reaching that point in their passage.

I am sure all of us have faced, either directly or indirectly through our families, similar occurrences. I faced that situation with my mom and dad. It was a difficult situation to see my mom, for many months knowing she was dying with Alzheimer's disease and knowing that as she was slipping into that terrible disease that she was losing her ability to make those decisions for herself. She was losing her ability to control herself and to control situations around her.

• (1555)

I remember her telling me before things got too bad that she hoped she would be able to face that time when she knew it was time to go. She knew that she had prepared for that. She hoped that the situation would not be such that she would be unable to face that choice and unable to control her future. But as we all know, in Alzheimer's disease, with the progression of that disease, it takes away the ability of the person to truly understand and to control the situations around them. Before she got too bad she said that she was ready to go and she only hoped that it would not be too long.

It was a long, long time. It was a very painful time for us to have to watch a person whom we loved very dearly slip away. What made it worse, and I guess it is why it takes me so personally, is that at the same time as my mom was facing that situation, my father was facing the spread of prostate cancer that had gone to the bone and had metastasized through the body. He was in great pain himself and he had the difficulty of being the caregiver for my mom. How much more difficult it was for him, facing his trial, knowing he was responsible for his loved one and seeing her slip away before him.

The most painful thing that I saw as the son after my mom had passed away and my dad was becoming very ill, was to see him, the proud individual that he was, lose the dignity that he had, and how it hurt him to lose that dignity and to understand that he had lost complete control over his own facilities, over his own bodily functions, and how terribly frustrated and embarrassed he was to have to come to that end. As he lay on his bed in his last days I could do nothing as a son except try to comfort him in his last very painful hours.

He did not ask me, as my hon. colleague from across had indicated the difficult choice that he had made. I did not face that choice of having to have my parents say: "I want to die and I want you to help me". I do not know what I would have done had that happened. All I can say is in having experienced that situation directly, that there are situations in our lives when individuals face that choice and want to make that choice, they have the courage of making that choice, because they want to have the chance of dying with dignity, of controlling their lives to the end.