

# 60 REASONS TO SUPPORT NEW YORK'S MEDICAL AID IN DYING ACT

## Eve Eliot

A humorist and author whose husband,  
Jim, died using VSED

Long Island, New York



### Reason #31

***So that no New Yorker is left with only one option: starving themselves to death in order to have any end-of-life autonomy.***

**M**y husband Jim had amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) and voluntarily stopped eating and drinking (VSED) at the end of his life — only took 6 days!

My mother had Hodgkin's lymphoma when I was 3, and I was raised by my grandmother from Greece. I was 11 when my mom died in 1954. Facing these losses, I became a stand-up "tragic" (instead of a stand-up comic).

Here is what I learned about dying from the handsomest man in North Hampton: My husband, James DelGrosso, was 72 when he was diagnosed with ALS in February 2013. Jim first noticed ankle weakness and foot drop months before the true nature of his illness was understood. He was given other misdiagnoses and ineffective treatments were tried. He first called Compassion & Choices in April 2013, seeking more information about VSED. He was admitted to hospice in May, after an evaluation at an ALS clinic concluded that he had less than six months to live.

Between the time of his diagnosis and hospice admission, he lost mobility in his legs, arms, torso and hands. He could no longer hold a paintbrush or engage in the activities that brought quality to his life. He always said that he wasn't afraid to die but didn't want to suffer. We received information about VSED and hospice and discussed the process.

He began his fast on May 18. Hospice provided medications for comfort including morphine, lorazepam and Neurontin for help with sleep and relief from neuropathy. The medications relieved some of his back pain and the burning in his feet. Almost right away, he started to feel weaker and more fatigued. Sometimes after taking sleep medication he experienced moments of confused speech. He did experience dry mouth, which was challenging to him.

**Jim died on May 24, six days after starting his fast. I was by his side. We are grateful he was able to exercise some control over the timing of his death but fervently hope for better options for dying New Yorkers in the future.**

**To join our mission, email Amanda Cavanaugh  
at [acavanaugh@compassionandchoices.org](mailto:acavanaugh@compassionandchoices.org).**

