

As Carrol Krause wrote, Indiana needs a ‘death with dignity’ law

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A moving and compelling argument for passage of a “death with dignity law” was published on the H-T’s editorial page on Nov. 7, 2015. The column was written by Carrol Krause, who for 22 months had undergone treatment for a rare and incurable form of ovarian cancer. The tumors were spreading throughout her abdomen, she was in pain, and she expected things only to get worse.

Last Friday morning, Carrol Krause died. It may not have been the kind of death she sought, but those who observed the way she lived after her diagnosis would certainly call it a death with grace, courage and, yes, great dignity.

Krause, 57, was a local author and journalist who planned and wrote content for the H-T Homes section for 11 years until well after she knew cancer would end her life. As she underwent treatments, she wrote with an unflinching realism about her disease and about her desire to get the most out of life rather than to sit around awaiting death.

She last posted on her “Stories by Carrol” blog on Jan. 18, addressing the death from cancer of David Bowie. The gist was that Bowie’s last documented thoughts were much darker than hers, as she continued to reject the “cancer-as-a-battle trope” commonly used when talking about a diagnosis.

“And I don’t believe in cancer as a shame-to-be-hidden. I have told everyone I have encountered, cheerfully and without gloom, that I will soon be gone,” she wrote.

And now she is.

One way Indiana could help keep alive her spirit and courage would be to heed her words and pass a “death with dignity” law similar to one Oregon passed in 1997 and a handful of other states have passed since.

“Many believe that doctor-assisted dying is tantamount to suicide,” she wrote in that November column. “But my situation is unlike that of a healthy person who kills himself. I do not end a healthy life filled with promise. Instead, I seek to hasten the inevitable and painful death that looms on my horizon. After carefully considering the question, I would choose physician-assisted death in a heartbeat, knowing what I am soon to endure. ...

“An assisted death would spare me horrible suffering, but it’s against the law for any physician to help me make a dignified early exit. Why do lawmakers believe that dying people need to experience every possible moment of pain? And why must other people’s emotional beliefs and religious scruples (which I do not share) dictate how I spend the end of my own life?”

What Oregon has done is put the decision squarely in the hands of the person dying. The patient must meet a comprehensive set of criteria that includes a terminal diagnosis and prognosis agreed upon by two physicians. The physician prescribes the lethal dose of a drug, but does not administer it. That's up to the patient. There are time lags from the first request for a physician's help before the prescription is written. The patient does not have to take the drug once the prescription is filled, and often doesn't. Just having the means to end their own suffering, though, can serve as comfort though it may never be used.

This is the kind of control of her own pain about which Krause wrote less than three months ago.

"It's too late to save me from a horrible fate," she wrote. "But it's not too late to save your beloved parent, sibling, child or friend from unnecessary suffering. Contact your legislators and request death with dignity in Indiana,"

On behalf of Carrol Krause, The Herald-Times today is making that request to the seven state representatives and senators who represent parts of Monroe County. Please become educated about what "death with dignity" is and isn't, and support this compassionate idea.