

February 22, 2020

Dear Senator,

The First Amendment to the Constitution starts with “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise of religion.” Religions generally have rituals to mark major points in human life: birth, coming of age, marriage, and death.

My husband, John, and I were looking forward to having our second child late in 1971. A few months into the pregnancy, I started hemorrhaging. John got me to the hospital where they stopped it. Unfortunately, I started hemorrhaging again in the recovery room where I was in the process of dying according to my doctor. There was the most glorious light and I wanted with all my heart to walk into it, but there was a question asked of me. “Was I free to go?” I wanted to say “Yes!” but I knew I was not free; my husband was still recovering and getting to know the son who was born 2 weeks after he had left for Vietnam in 1968. Turns out that what I experienced is typical of near death occurrences.

John died in 2017, he suffered for over 12 hours because the night nurse was reluctant to start him on the morphine drops prescribed for pain by hospice. Even after he was receiving drops, he struggled on. Finally I said, “John if you want to live for any reason, do keep on, but if you are doing this for my sake only; let go.” He died almost immediately after that.

I am lucky to have found a faith that understands that I have little fear of dying, only fear of suffering and causing suffering. When aid in dying is lawful, if God’s path for me does not include help from a doctor, then what will be, will be. If I have a terminal illness and there is an option to have a doctor’s help in dying, I would opt for it. I would arrange to say my goodbyes to those I love and ask for their forgiveness and give them mine while realizing that what will be, will still be. However, having the hope of that bit of control would probably help me to live longer with the terminal illness. It probably would help many an elderly Vietnam Vet as well. John served in the Army Medical Service Corp in Chu Lai and got a bronze star. He was depressed when he came home but worked his way out of it. I recently found this statement in one of his last journals. “I’ve been dreaming about stacks of corpses again.” Great thanks go to those of you who passed SB521 last year. Please pass SB701 this year!

Bless you for taking the time to read this.

Sue Tavela

