

In Memory of Laura Vandergrift

Hi Everyone,

I wanted to share an update on my life with you. I understand that some of you may have strong feelings about my decision, and I respect your beliefs. I hope you will respect mine as well.

If you're reading this, it's because I have chosen to utilize Medical Aid in Dying. I am deeply grateful for the life I've had—filled with loving relationships, wonderful friendships, and enriching careers and experiences. I have been truly blessed. However, I want to end my life on my terms, with dignity.



Since my condition is **not** terminal within six months, I cannot take advantage of the Medical Aid in Dying (MAID) laws available in 10 states and Washington, DC. Therefore, I am traveling halfway around the world to Switzerland, where Voluntary Assisted Death (VAD) is legal. For those unfamiliar with my medical condition, I have a disease that will eventually leave me in a vegetative state, unable to care for myself. As Dr. John Elliott once said, "I want to exit this world free and with my head held high."

I am not depressed, just saddened by the thought of leaving my good friends and a few dear relatives behind. Like Dr. John Elliott did, I want to share my story in the hopes of prompting changes in how end-of-life care is managed in the United States.

The laws in the U.S. regarding end-of-life care need to be reformed. I belong to several right-to-die organizations and believe in the philosophy of Exit International, which asserts that "It is a fundamental human right for every adult of sound mind to plan for the end of their life in a way that is reliable, peaceful, and at a time of their choosing." It is my life, my body, and my choice.

I've faced many challenges in my life, but this has been the hardest. When I was first diagnosed with Inclusion Body Myositis (IBM), the doctor described it as an "insidious" disease. Unlike MS or Parkinson's, this disease robs you of muscle function, making it similar to ALS but with a longer life expectancy.

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Over the past 12 years, I've tried everything from Stem Cell Therapy to Ozone treatments and every other possible remedy. Unfortunately, there is no effective treatment for IBM except exercise, which I've always enjoyed. However, I am now very tired and can no longer continue. As the disease progresses, daily functioning has become extremely difficult. I do not want to be a burden to my partner or rely on our over-burdened medical system, which cannot help with IBM anyway. After experiencing senior healthcare for three years in Phoenix, I know it's not for me.

To those who will miss me, I thank you. Knowing I will be missed is a comforting thought as I write this. I am embarking on a new and exciting adventure! The constant pain and diminishment on this body will soon be over.

There are many groups advocating for the right to die. Many seniors I've met are ready for it. The taboo surrounding death in America is ridiculous. Death is a natural part of living and should not be feared. Modern medicine often extends life without considering the quality, making it feel like a prison when one can no longer contribute to society. We treat our pets with more compassion than we do ourselves.

I understand some of you may wish I had told you about this earlier. I apologize if my decision feels sudden, it was not. I did not want to burden you. You are in my thoughts and my heart, always. They say that we are gone only when we are forgotten. Think of me occasionally, and I'll be right beside you.

Thank you for being a part of my life! You brought me immense happiness, and I take that with me.

Au Revoir,

Auf Wiedersehen,

Adios, or

Until we meet again.