

My name is Joyce Hilda Stewart and I am 89 years old. I have had a good life that up till now I have absolutely thoroughly enjoyed. I've a loving family, enough money to do what I wanted. Like most older people I have had health problems; with Bells Palsy, Rheumatoid Arthritis, which has affected my back and have 2 shoulders and a hand that doesn't want to work, which makes many day to day living things very difficult to do.

Up until two years and 10 months ago old age was all I had to deal with. Then I was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease and I gradually began to change, I can't now stand up straight I have become more hunch backed. This has lead to serious balance problems. I once walked freely, then used a stick, now a walker. This has not allowed me to avoid multiple falls, the last resulting in a brain bleed and a damaged eye brow and eye lid.

I have always enjoyed my independence and live on my own, but I now have to have lots of help; with meals, housework, the garden. To try and maintain my condition, I have spent time in St John of God rehabilitation for 2 ten day stays after the last 2 falls and for regular support sessions such as speech therapy and muscle strengthening sessions.

My greatest worry is my useless hands. It is almost impossible for me to write, including signing cheques, forms and filling out birthday cards, (so imagine how long this submission has taken to prepare).

I used to do a lot of sewing, I can no longer do this, I loved gardening, now an impossible feat. I can't prepare food, simple things like opening jars or 'ring thing' tins are impossible. Doing my nails, fixing my hair, applying lipstick can't be done. Opening and closing doors takes forever and turning light switches can be vexing. My shopping is done for me. My speech is a major problem. Parkinson's victims have to think loud. If I don't, my words are continually slurred and actually talking and swallowing is very difficult. Eating is so hard, no knife and fork only a special spoon and I drink through a straw. This makes for a difficult social life. My ability to shower and dress myself is becoming much more difficult/demanding as is getting myself in and out of bed. I am incontinent. I can see myself losing all ability to do things for myself. That means a nursing home, then palliative care. I want neither of those. I have spent many years thinking that euthanasia is the way to go. I was widowed at 40 and have been very independent since then.

Now I find I can't choose what I want to do and I know for me going into a nursing home is a fate worse than death itself. My brain is still working but my body is just disintegrating. I should be allowed to have a choice on when and where I want to die. I don't want to end up having someone wiping my bum, dressing and undressing me. Where is the dignity in that. I'll be a baby again and I don't want to be a baby again.