

## Glad to be alive

- Australian father of two [Stephanus Breytenbach](#) was diagnosed with stage 4 pancreatic cancer in 2022 and given a few weeks to live. He quickly lost six stone and became wheelchair-bound. He lives in Victoria, where assisted suicide is legal. May 2025 marked three years since his diagnosis. Stephanus still has terminal pancreatic cancer but he is stable, and now enjoys a largely symptom-free, active life. After his diagnosis, his wife also found out she had terminal cancer, and died soon after. Stephanus reflected: "If I would have chosen assisted suicide, look at what I would have missed. My kids would have been orphans. I've got chemo, and my cancer has spread a bit, but I've got a good quality of life."



- [Rue Grewal](#), a district councillor in Hertfordshire, was diagnosed with ovarian cancer in 2017. It caused her to spiral into despair, and she says if assisted suicide had been available, "I would have gone down that road". She described going through "a moment – or period – of despair that felt permanent, but wasn't", and said she understood how easily a person can fall into thoughts "that it would be better – for you, for everyone – if you just slipped away". She continued, "I just don't want people to be written off and think that's the easy option". She now works with the cancer support charity One Vision, and describes herself as a "cancer thriver".



- [Romy](#), age 22, changed her mind about euthanasia as the syringe was about to be plunged into her arm. She had been abused as a child, and struggled with self-harm, anorexia and mental illness. But when the moment came, she questioned if she really wanted to die. Thanks to a "persistent psychiatrist and friends", Romy continued with therapy and sees value in living. "Now I know there is light at the end of the tunnel".

- In 2005, [Chelsea Roff](#) from Texas was hospitalised with severe anorexia. She was a very difficult patient and the doctors had little hope for her. She says: "If the option for assisted dying had been available, I would have taken it." However, she recovered after 16 months of mandatory treatment and today she runs a group that helps people with eating disorders. "I am alive today thanks to those who never gave up on me, and for that, I will always be grateful."



- After being diagnosed with terminal cancer in 2000, Oregon resident [Jeanette Hall](#) asked her doctor for assisted suicide, not cancer treatment. She had been given six months to a year to live. Her doctor asked her to reconsider and to think of her son, who was about to graduate from police academy. In 2011, [Jeanette wrote](#): “I am so happy to be alive! It is now 11 years later. If my doctor had believed in assisted suicide, I would be dead. I thank him and all my doctors for helping me to choose ‘life with dignity’”.



- US Army veteran JJ Hanson was diagnosed with terminal brain cancer in 2014, at 33 years old, and was given four months to live. JJ said that in his [darkest moments](#) he had thoughts of giving up: “If I’d had suicide pills with me in my nightstand during my 5th month of treatment, I might have taken them, and you can’t undo that.” After surgery and treatment, he went on to live for another [three precious years](#) with his family, including welcoming another son.



- [Alison Davies](#), who died in 2013, suffered from spina bifida, hydrocephalus, emphysema and osteoporosis. Though she attempted suicide several times, and wanted to die for a period of ten years, over time, with friends’ support, she saw that her life was valuable and had meaning. She dedicated many years to working with children with disabilities in India, and to campaigning against assisted suicide and euthanasia in the UK. Alison said: “If euthanasia had been legal then, I would have requested it with no hesitation at all... And no one would ever have known that the future held such good times, and that the [doctors were wrong](#) in thinking I didn’t have long to live.”



- For twenty years, [Claire Freeman](#) was an ardent supporter of euthanasia and assisted suicide and wished they were legally available in New Zealand. She has been tetraplegic since a car accident when she was 17. Following four suicide attempts, a suicide outreach clinic suggested to Claire that she go overseas for assisted suicide. At that time, Claire felt like a burden on those around her: “I just didn’t feel like I was of any value”. Now in her 40s, [she says](#): “I’m so glad that assisted suicide wasn’t available in New Zealand, because if it were, I wouldn’t be here today. That’s scary for me.” [“Now that I’ve put the support in place, I love my life.”](#)



- [Christopher Jones](#) was diagnosed with colon cancer in 2009, which led half of his large intestine being removed. Despite this surgery and subsequent chemotherapy, new tumours were discovered just a few months later. Writing less than six months before his death at the age of 58, Christopher reflected: “I was subject to extreme stress and a sense of hopelessness, and I might have been open to the option of ending my life by legal means, had these existed. The legal prohibition of [assisted suicide] was immensely helpful in removing it as a live option... My experience has reinforced my conviction that the law prohibiting assisted suicide is an essential bulwark against well-meaning but unwarranted judgements about the value of life”.



- [Lenora Lemay](#), from New York, was diagnosed with Complex Regional Pain Syndrome, a permanent condition also known as ‘suicide disease.’ She used to wonder if she would qualify for assisted suicide, and if so whether she would do it. Her pain is now under control and she says “every day is a gift”.



- Most people with [Sarah Steele’s](#) kind of brain cancer live for about three years. But writing over 13 years after her 2005 diagnosis, Sarah expressed her fears that a terminal diagnosis might push people to choose assisted suicide when they could live for years or decades. This is especially true for those who experience illness-induced clinical depression and anxiety – which she says come and go. She urged her home state of New Jersey to face the challenges of terminal illness and disability with “compassionate counselling, in-home personal care support, and painstaking social work”.



- [Michael Freeland](#), from Oregon, had a 43-year medical history of [acute depression](#) and suicidal ideation. Yet he managed to obtain assisted suicide drugs, keeping them at home for more than two years before his death from lung cancer in 2002. His prescribing doctor said he didn’t think that a mental health evaluation was necessary. Thankfully, through a non-profit group, Michael was offered improved medical care and suicide prevention services and chose not to commit suicide. Before he died, he was able to reconcile with his estranged daughter which may have not been possible had he taken his life.

- Former Sheffield GP Mark Houghton suffers incurable pain, and is [“very grateful”](#) that assisted suicide has always been illegal. “When reduced to despair and wanting to die, devoted medical care has got me through.” Speaking to [BBC Radio Leeds](#), he said: “If there had been even one of the milder laws which are being proposed in place then there’s a fair chance I would not be speaking to you today”.

