

I'm Ending My Life Today. Here's What I Want You To Know Before I Go

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I am ending my life at a clinic in Switzerland today. This piece was written three weeks ago. I've been trapped for decades in a body that doesn't function the way other bodies do and I am ready to finally be free.

I have severe multiple chemical sensitivities, also known as MCS or environmental illness, which means my body reacts to the world around me in deeply painful, incredibly draining ways. Not only do perfumes and colognes cause unbearable respiratory, neurological and skin reactions, but so do most detergents, fabric softeners,

shampoos, deodorants, lotions, sunscreens, smoke, household cleaners, and many other substances.

I've been dealing with MCS for 40 years. It was mild in the beginning, but it's continued to escalate to the point where I'm now sensitive to almost everything. I can't take medicines — not even something as common as ibuprofen or Tylenol — without a reaction, so pain management is very difficult for me.

I also have fibromyalgia, which is another illness that many people know nothing about, and many others don't even believe it really exists. It does and it's debilitating. I can barely use my hands, and my muscles are weak. I experience pain at night, and it's very difficult for me to sleep.

My issue with my muscles has also been going on for almost 40 years. I used to be very active. I loved playing sports like tennis when I was younger. All of a sudden, in my early 20s, I couldn't hold the racket anymore. I'd try to hit the ball and I couldn't.

Because of both of these conditions, I have been unable to leave my home or lead anything close to resembling a "normal" life. I can't even hug people anymore. That hurts so much because I'm a hugger. I love expressing my love and I can't. I'm not a part of the world anymore.

It's difficult to put into words the misery I have suffered but I have tried to make the best of my situation. For many years, I hoped doctors might discover something that would give me some relief, but they never have. There is nothing for someone who can't take medicine.

Last summer I was diagnosed with breast cancer, which has metastasized to my lymph nodes. I told my doctors, "I don't want any treatment." I knew undergoing anesthesia for surgery could kill

me, and if I didn't die on the operating table, I could end up even sicker

I knew I wanted to end my life within seconds of learning that I have breast cancer. I said, "Thank God, I can go now," because I knew that in order to qualify for "death with dignity" — or medical aid in dying — in the United States, you must have a terminal illness. Suddenly I was in a position where I could finally stop struggling and go in a peaceful manner — or at least I thought I could. I thought, *someone gave me a golden ticket!*

My surgeon said he respected my choice, but my oncologist was not receptive to my plan. She wanted me to see a therapist for depression. I told her, "The depression I have is from suffering all the time — that's what's causing my depression." When I asked her nurse for my records, I was told my oncologist "doesn't support my decision."

But it's not her decision. It's mine.

I began researching options in the United States and discovered not only is there a lot of legal red tape about who qualifies (I wouldn't at this point because I would have to wait until my body was eaten up by the cancer and, since I can't take pain medicines, to get to that point would be literal torture), but you're also required to take the end-of-life drugs orally, which I know I can't do. I will throw up anything I take — it just won't work.

I [kept researching](#) and found a nonprofit clinic in Switzerland that administers the drugs intravenously, accepts nonresidents, and you don't have to have a terminal illness to qualify. Fortunately, I do have one, because that clinched the clinic's decision to approve me.

I filled out a thorough application that asked questions about my condition, my mindset, even my childhood — and provided them

with documentation of my cancer, my ultrasound scans showing it has spread to my lymph nodes, and a letter from my primary physician stating, "I've been treating her for years, she's been going through hell, and I highly support her decision." I also had a medical history compiled by a physician that went back to

The clinic charges \$10,000, which people think is expensive, and it is, but if you were suffering the way I am, how much would you spend to end your misery? I applied in early March and heard back a few weeks later. They said my application had been approved and asked when I wanted to end my life. I told them I needed two months because I had a lot to get done before I leave. I wanted to go immediately, so I can end my pain, but I have loose ends to tie up and I want to say goodbye to the people I love.

My husband and I built a new home a year ago and I want to help him get it set up before I go. I want it to be a welcoming space for his friends and his next girlfriend — if and when he finds one. That's very important to me. I'm also the one who does all of our paperwork — the bills and all of that — so I'm going through it all with him to make sure everything makes sense to him. I've always been good with those kinds of details and he isn't, so that's a major concern for me. There's just so much to do: signing the title of my car over to him; closing bank accounts; all of the stuff you do when you're a human being living a life. But that's over for me now.

We've been married for 20 years. He has been so incredibly supportive. He has watched me suffer and taken care of me all of these years and it has been so hard on him and I don't want that for him anymore. I know he's devastated — he's broken down a few times — but he's trying to keep himself together because he knows that is what I want. He would never ask me not to do this.

He knows this is what's best for me — for both of us. He will grieve because he will miss me but I want him to move forward and truly

live. He will finally experience a freedom he hasn't had for a long time and he can go anywhere he wants. He can finally *eat* whatever he wants. Right now I can have reactions just from his breath if he's eaten something that can trigger me. Spending every minute of your day worrying that something you've done might hurt the person you love is no way to live.

My friends have also been supportive. I've withheld a lot of my suffering from them because I didn't want to burden them, but they know how hard it's been for me and they're happy that it'll be over soon.

My mother is having the hardest time out of everyone I know. She understands why I'm doing this, but she doesn't want me to leave. She doesn't want to see her daughter go. Who would? Despite how she feels, she supports me because she knows I will be free and at peace.

It's very hard for people to wrap their heads around death, especially someone *choosing* death. I know some people are probably thinking, "What if next Tuesday there's suddenly a cure?" or, like my oncologist, "Just try treatment and see what happens," but I've had too many health issues that are too debilitating and isolating. I just don't have any quality of life left. There's not going to be a magic solution for all of it. And ... I'm ready. I feel like I've done what I came to do in this lifetime.

I believe there is an afterlife. I lost my daughter several years ago and I can't wait to see her again. Knowing that she is waiting for me on the other side has made this easier, but this is not easy. I'm happy that I'm going to be experiencing life again in the most free-form, painless way, but I'm sad because I'm leaving so much of what I love behind me. I'm also sad about the condition of the world. Part of me wants to be here to help, but what can I do?

My husband is taking me to Switzerland. We're going to visit Europe for two weeks before my appointment. We're staying at an organic farm in Tuscany — I've been there before and I can breathe there. I'm too weak to travel to the little towns around it and sightsee, but just being surrounded by all of that beauty and peace will be enough. And I'll get to be there with him. It'll be our time to connect and say goodbye. That's really important to me.

I've been thinking a lot about life since I decided to end mine and I think to get the most out of it, we need to support each other, be compassionate, and do whatever we can to help others. That's what it all boils down to for me. No, it's not rocket science, but that doesn't mean it's easy. Looking back over my 65 years on Earth, I see that's what really matters. I hope I've done that. I hope I've made some kind of difference.

That's partly why I wanted to tell my story. I want people to remember that many people are struggling with something and we have no idea what it's like to be in someone else's body or mind or position. Offering less judgment and more grace would go a long way.

I also want people to know that if they are suffering with a condition that will not get better and they have no quality of life, there are options. There is a way out of here. If you can't get to Vermont or Oregon (which both accept nonresidents) or you don't qualify for medical aid in dying in the United States, there are other places that will help you.

It's so sad to me that in our country, psychology, our laws, and religion have taught people it's a sin to die — especially to kill yourself. I don't think I should have to travel thousands of miles away to end my life. My life. And my death.

We have mercy for animals that are suffering, and we put them to sleep. Why can't we give people that? I just can't conceive of how we would rather watch someone suffer for months — even years — when they can find peace ... if that's their choice. It blows my mind.

Maybe people think doing it this way sounds way too flip — like making an appointment for a haircut or getting a ticket to see a concert next month. You're probably wondering what it's like to have the day I chose to end my life approaching. It's strange — but it's also strangely comforting.

I will miss some things in this world and the people I love, but I will not miss the pain. Life is meant to be lived and that's not what I'm doing. I haven't done that for a very long time. I'm ready to go home.

Mary Elizabeth Holliday is the pseudonym of a writer, wife and mom who lived in the southern United States. She chose to end her life on July 12, 2024, with the help of medical intervention at a nonprofit clinic in Switzerland after decades of pain due to several debilitating conditions and a diagnosis of metastatic breast cancer.

This piece was previously published on HuffPost and is being shared again as part of HuffPost Personal's "Best Of" series.