

FINALEXIT™ NETWORK NEWSLETTER

VOL 7 NO 3

SPECIAL EDITION 2010

SUPPORTING THE HUMAN RIGHT TO A DEATH WITH DIGNITY

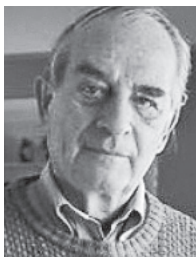
SPECIAL EDITION

President's Preamble to "My Purpose-Driven Death,"

by Annie Chase

By Jerry Dincin, Ph.D.

President, Final Exit Network



This slimmed-down version of an extraordinary memoir by the late Annie Chase marks the first of what we hope will be several special editions of our Newsletter. Such publications will cover a wide variety of topics and will be published irregularly, when relevant and important material crosses our path and should be shared with our members.

Annie's journey toward the end of her life is must reading for any human who values control over her life and her death. It demonstrates a sensitive, loving, rational, fearless approach to death that many of us aspire to, but few are actually able to consummate. Though Annie was an atheist, her finding a positive beauty in the preparation for her death and genuine peace as she neared the end, provides meaning and hope for all of us, believers and non-believers alike.

We hope you will share your reactions to the article. Email me at president@finalexitnetwork.org, or use our regular P.O. Box 665, Pennington N.J. 08534.



Introduction

Annie Chase is now, in her words, “one lucky stiff,” after achieving self-deliverance on Monday evening, March 8, 2010. This was no act of grim acceptance that life ends, but one of good-humored satisfaction at having lived it fully.

Annie was a member of Atheists for Human Rights and an advocate for Final Exit Network’s work on behalf of self-deliverance. She was so happy to have found our atheist community and the support she received from us as well as from Final Exit Network in her otherwise lonely quest for like-minded companionship and understanding.

Annie asked us to tell her story to encourage open discussion of end-of life decision-making. She began writing her thoughts in January of 2010 and switched to an audio recording as her eyesight began failing. She completed the project on March 8, recording her final thoughts in an unforgettably compelling testimony about what it means to be human. Her astonishing grip on reality is expressed with wit, intelligence and humor. It is as much about life as it is about death.

There is nothing in the death –with- dignity literature to compare with her story. There needs to be, and Annie has provided the definitive narrative.

Maria Alena Castle, Editor and Publisher
Atheists for Human Rights

Annie Chase Is One Lucky Stiff

Helloooo from the other side.

This is my disembodied voice from The Great Beyond.

I had always hoped to choose the course and quality of my last days. When the deciding time came, I discovered how profoundly different the experience of death can be when reality, reason, and self-determination supplant our nation’s cultural fears, superstitions and delusions. I hope that by reporting in my atheistic (and therefore somewhat irreverent) slant I can help remove the fear that keeps the taboo of D-E-A-T-H out of polite discussion. When we can talk, even laugh about death, fear loses its grip on the discourse.

Being in tune with reality helped me see death’s necessary inevitability as part of the terribly, wrenching beauty of life. Dying is not a choice. No one is exempt from the One-Death-per-Birth rule. I wanted to make it a fulfilling, consciously enacted final stage of the only life I would ever have.

My “Best-If-Used By...” Date Came Up

I got inklings that my “best-if-used-by...” date was becoming gradually decipherable, like the fortunes that float murkily up to the little window in a magic 8-Ball oracular device.

Four years ago, after occasional, sudden and puzzling symptoms, I was diagnosed with Wegener’s Granulomatosis, a degenerative disorder similar to lupus. In an active phase, it can flare up in sporadic, unpredictable periods of debilitating fatigue, dizziness, joint pain and weakness, extreme sensitivity to light, noise, heat and cold, rapidly-growing and randomly-appearing tumors, and sometimes, as in my case, loss of sight.

About a year ago, the unmistakable rapid reduction of my visual capacity made it necessary to consider whether, in such drastically changed

circumstances, to continue to be or not to be. I also needed to decide how soon I must act, since I would need sight to research and carry out my exit plan.

I owned my body! No one but me had the right to decide what I did or didn't do with it. I was 64 years old, single and fiercely independent, with no one reliant on me for support.

Beginning with my life-long, voracious appetite for books, almost all the activities meaningful in my life depended on the use of my eyes. I had no willingness to spend time re-learning every small, daily survival skill to live as a nonsighted person, bereft of reading and art and dance performances, fall colors and unfettered mobility. That was my personal decision and mine alone to make. Yours is, likewise, yours alone.

In recent years, led by organizations such as Final Exit Network and supported by groups such as Atheists for Human Rights, people have begun to talk openly about end-of-life options, including the right to die and the recent availability in some states of a medically assisted death.

The kind of death I wanted didn't include suffering, loss of control over bodily functions, or allowing some "expert" or panel to dictate the terms of the last stage of my life.

I wanted two kinds of practical information: First, I needed a dependable method for ending my life. The book *Final Exit* by Derek Humphry proved invaluable! It offered several dignified procedures and explained why some methods most people call to mind were not good at all. The second sort of guidance I wanted was more philosophical. I hoped to find a basic template for planning and executing my own demise. Most of

the books available assumed that all humans feel fear, reluctance and a desire to fight to the bitter end, despite great suffering and futile depletion of emotional and financial resources, both their own and their families'.

Many religious and otherwise "spiritual" books also haunted bookstore shelves. Even others that weren't specifically religious often assumed some degree of belief in an invisible controlling power or group of forces, an afterlife, and a soul to interact with both. Death functioned as a release from unbearable suffering and a gateway to some kind of better (or worse) inescapable, eternal non-physical version of life. Or, if the death had been sudden and unexpected, those books offered as dubious comforts the idea of an afterlife and "God's will" and angels carrying away the newly invisible person who had been tragically "blessed" by being called home "to a better place." Those books proved the difficulty a free-thinker who knew she was dying faced, just to find kindred spirits who were willing to deal with reality head-on, sans denials and euphemisms, without characterizing the clear-headed reality as "negativity," from which the dying person could be distracted and should be gently chided if she persisted. Such ostensibly "positive" reactions trivialize the dying one's pressing need for honest, heartfelt discussion, leaving her stranded, misunderstood, and more alone than ever at a time when empathy and acceptance were critical.

Overcoming A Profound Loneliness

As an atheist, I encountered that profound loneliness surrounding the act of dying as I began to explore the new territory of deliberate demise. Even most nonreligious people had trouble talking about the topic in a neutral,

practical way. Most listeners would change the subject or limit the discussion to the shallow end of the pool. I ended up, ironically, feeling that I needed to comfort them, that I had made them sad and ruined their day. I needed the strength to withstand the crushing solitude I felt amid all those saddened friends reluctant to admit the reality of my mortality and, thus, their own. Even the secular view of death had hints of insidious religious precepts and moral judgments, like an inherent value in suffering, and the denial of adequate pain medication in case terminal patients - Get this! - become addicts! And the prevalence of a primary, religion-based idea that some higher authority- god or mortal- possessed the decision-making power over the quality of my life and death that overrode my own.

I decided I had to create my own useful diversion: to capture in writing the highlights (and the lowlights) of a non-believer's approach to death, and in that way I could create a circle of true peers.

Five Minutes For The Five Stages Of Grief

Elizabeth Kübler-Ross's iconic 1969 book, On Death and Dying, listing its five universal stages of grief, was my starting place. Compassionate and clear-headed, Dr. Kübler-Ross took no specific religious position herself. But "universal," I learned, as far as this widely respected cultural norm was concerned, didn't apply to my universe.

STAGE ONE: Denial and Isolation.

Denial: Did I deny that, like every other life form, I was going to die? Did I deny concrete evidence of the need to plan for that event? No. I had urgently sought accurate information about my

declining eyesight and the dying process.

Isolation: I chose a time for being solitary not to separate myself from the concerns of humanity but to think about the options I could maintain in the face of advancing reality.

STAGE 2: Anger: I would not indulge in the "why me?" angst of the religious-minded, implying that some power had singled me out, like a border collie splitting one sheep from the flock and driving it up the ramp into death's pickup truck. I had no entity to blame.

STAGE 3: Bargaining: With a god?! What is there to offer an omnipotent god? How silly I would have felt bartering my petty offerings with an entity that could extort from earthlings anything that he damn well pleased, but in my worldview didn't even exist!

STAGE 4: Depression: I felt hopelessness, dread and despair for the children inheriting a murderously overcrowded, resource-stripped, poisoned Earth, but also felt a giddy sense of relief that I would have no further awareness of it.

STAGE 5: Acceptance. I was already there.

Because the 5 Stages didn't resonate with me, I came up with my own five necessary attributes for a good, self-directed death: quick, cheap, painless, considerate, and emblematic of my atheist-humanist ideals.

The most important consideration would be the quality of my life. My own wishes would be honored. I would not allow decisions to be imposed on me by other people or by default as a result of my own inaction. I was determined to make the adventure as fulfilling and enlightening as possible.

Recycling By Downsizing

It's never too early to realize it's later than you think. In summer, '06, I became too tired to handle all the tasks of home ownership, including caring for the large garden I loved. I could no longer mow my whole lawn in one afternoon with my non-motorized reel push mower. It was time to give up the house. I always thought I'd be one of those tough old ladies who kept their houses until they keeled over while cleaning the gutters.

While not a large house, it was shockingly full of stuff: things that had outstayed their usefulness, had been gifted to me by friends who would look for them when they visited, or had been left for me for safekeeping by itinerant pals. I gave everyone notice that I was selling my house and they had until a certain date to pick up their things.

Next, I shed items usable by people I knew, or valuable to a school (art supplies, wood-burning kit, children's books), or a senior community center (board games, puzzles, books, music CDs), and a youth recreation center (baseball gloves and bats, Frisbees, hockey equipment.) The eagerness of recipients made me happy that my objects had found good, loving homes. I had resurrected "dead" things back to life!

I found a way to overcome the heartache of losing my beloved garden (and of the admission, sad to any gardener, that the joy of years had morphed into sore knees, stiff hips, tendonitis, and ground steadily lost to more potent weeds). The medicine for my heart was the stunned, Publishers'-Clearing-House-Prize-Patrol-Greeting look of joy, disbelief, and gratitude on my young neighbors' faces when I informed them that all gardening tools and supplies for snow-and-ice-clearing and lawn care now had their names on them and should be taken to their new home ASAP.

I gave my lovely harpsichord, no longer playable without my eyesight, to a university that had just built a new music hall and had always had to borrow a harpsichord for their Baroque concerts. I was thrilled that it would be fussed over, kept in perfect tune, and held in just the right humidity and temperature. And it would reach a whole new generation of young people who cared about the music I loved.

Reducing my stuff got me in motion and made the reality real. Those who feel reluctant to start end-of-life conversations with an older relative might begin with a talk about de-cluttering as a gentle lead-in.

My Last Trip Around The Sun Begins

I moved into my nice little apartment with a balcony for plants. It was the first time in my life I got to see hummingbirds two feet from my face. I had woods nearby. It was a peaceful time and keenly appreciated because my mortality began to hit me by this move.

Each step I took to simplify and unburden myself of possessions and responsibilities brought me a little closer to that place where I would come down, very peacefully, to nothing. My declining eyesight would be the ultimate clue for my timing. So in May of 2009, when I was clearly losing my sight, I decided it was time to give myself a last-trip-around-the-sun ticket.

As I peeled away the layers of possessions and the stages of my life they represented, I also simplified my finances. I pretty much liquidated everything.

The Thrill Of Being Suddenly Rich

My property and investments turned magically into a clump of cash so I could quantify and calculate how much I needed to live on. Wow! I was rich! (Feeling rich didn't have anything to do with how much money I counted; it was the ease and freedom of having way more than I needed.) However, I didn't have enough to manage a debilitating illness, nor to hire a personal attendant and a driving service when I went blind. What I had enough for were projects that would help people I cared about and wanted to support. I would put my money directly into the hands of those to whom it would really matter.

Young people need our resources. People have said it's immoral to discuss the financial costs of health care, but I disagree. Pouring money into the black hole of my decline seemed like a poor use of resources. I knew too many people who needed it for living for me to spend it on dying. Besides, helping others turned out to be a hoot! What freedom! To be able to say to a friend, "Hey, I noticed your car has bald tires. I hate to see the risk you're taking and the risk you're putting other people in. Let's get you some tires!"

All my recipients had needed my intervention but were suspicious of why I was giving my resources away! Not wanting them to realize my intentions, I became creative: "I'm simplifying. I'm downsizing. I don't need this thingamajig anymore, and you could use it. How about, if I ever need it, I'll borrow it back from you?" I asked some of them to help me free up space by taking something out of my house that I knew they would like. If they said they couldn't possibly take it without paying for it, I'd say, "Oh, just take it out as an indefinite loan; then. If I ever need it, I'll get it back from you."

It all worked out beautifully: the freedom of clearing out clutter, from my house and my brain!

Don't think for a minute that I didn't indulge myself very well too. I could be newly extravagant. I went to concerts and plays and dance performances and Cirque du Soleil and wonderful restaurants. Of course I needed companions for those events, so I took friends to see things and have experiences they also wouldn't normally have had access to. Playing Fairy Godmother turned out to be delightful for me.

I took a flying leap at reducible complexities. I owned nine bath towels; I really needed only four. I didn't need more than one set of bed sheets. I took them off, washed and dried them and put them back on. Now that I was down to my most cherished possessions, I could enjoy them more because they weren't hidden by clutter.

I revisited my book of Dylan Thomas poems, the first hardcover book I ever bought with my baby-sitting money when I was 14. I still found passages in there that told me what formed the framework of my life and my world view. I noticed all the seasonal joys I was experiencing for the last time: the last time I would ride one of the best roller coasters at Valley Fair. The last time I would see the fall leaves change color. The last time I would eat a Colorado peach. It was a wonderful time of becoming very mindful, of living extremely in the moment.

Underwear, Cashmere, And Chocolate

When I started on that last journey of a thousand steps that starts with just one, I knew it would end with my turning out the lights on my existence. I needed to enlist my will. I couldn't do that "maybe-it-will-be-OK thing," or "maybe some miracle will fall down out of the blue." That's proven to be not a very productive position most of the time.

Since the “maybe” views were out, I realized I had to remind myself to say OK, Annie, this is it. Now you really are going to do this. Some humorous little reminders alerted me that I needed to stay on task. A department store had piles of cotton underwear I really liked. I started rifling through them and suddenly thought, “Wait a minute! I’m through buying underwear! I have several pairs still in the wrappers at home, and here I am still in acquiring –and-hoarding mode!”

My parents, raised during the Great Depression, taught me that you use your present things till they wear out, saving the best and newest for later. After my latest insight, I pulled all of the new items out of my trunk and unwrapped them. My theory now is always to use my best stuff first and save the worn things for back-up! I could’ve used that philosophy a lot earlier.

A friend had gone to Scotland about six years ago and brought me back an exquisitely beautiful cashmere scarf. I was terrified to wear it; it was so fine. Suppose I lost it or soiled it? Cleaning out my trunk, I found it six years later, still in paper, being protected against moths. I had no use for it now. But I did enjoy giving it to a friend who appreciated its beauty and began wearing it right away. Lesson: Wear your beautiful things now. Life is short. And buy only the very best chocolate. Anything less isn’t worth the calories.

Suffering To Earn The Right To Die

There were some items on my list that were absolutely not negotiable: loss of autonomy, intractable pain, and such debilitating loss of physical ability that I would be completely dependent on others to give up their time to tend me, care for me, and run errands for me. If I had been diagnosed with Alzheimer’s, at the

earliest opportunity, I would have made that final exit. Moral considerations about bankrupting our children certainly entered in, but the evil of suffering was another. Abhorrent. Unacceptable. Some pain is a necessary evil, to be endured on the road to improvement, but intractable pain? Never.

Even most of the right-to-die books assume the patient to be in terrible, physical pain. The presence of intractable pain justifies the person’s need to end it all. I found little in the literature of the Movement that addressed the possible social dilemma of a person who wanted no suffering. I didn’t think suffering served any purpose. It was obscene, to be avoided if at all possible. And that was what I was planning to do.

If some people chose to suffer, they probably envisioned some benefit in doing so. (Maybe a sense of atonement?) When listing the factors behind my decision not to be anymore, foremost was that I have the right, no matter who I am, to say no to any kind of permanent and irremediable suffering, physical or mental.

I was surprised to find how religion had pervaded the culture so that people expected to see suffering. It was as if most people thought it not OK for others to make a personal decision to die. However, an exception could be made for them, but only if several disinterested busybodies deigned to allow the patient to decide.

And then there was an attitude that people didn’t deserve a too easy way out unless it was totally beyond their control and they got mowed down by a truck or struck by lightning on the golf course. That was OK, because they didn’t wish for it and didn’t want it. Such a death could still be seen as being imposed upon them by some outside force and not of their own volition.

We didn't want people thinking they could just opt out of pain by peacefully going dark on the whole thing! We wanted them to suffer to earn the right to die. I got tons of lectures and accusations about being a hypochondriac because I was talking about ending my life. They said going blind was not life-threatening. I replied that it threatened everything that mattered to me.

I was a little insulted by them. The right to die: how could that not be a basic human right? Yet there was huge opposition: that dying was "God's" decision, not ours. That made me more and more angry. It was my decision. I knew what my pain threshold was. I knew what resources were available to me. I knew how much I could tolerate. I knew the despair I would feel if I couldn't see a ray of light or have any of the other blessings my eyesight afforded me. Yes, yes, I knew there were a lot of sightless people who had lost their vision and had adjusted well, and I was filled with admiration for them. I often heard, "So-and-so did it; why can't you??" I said: "You don't know. You don't know what emotional resources they had, what their life was like, how much they could stand." I found it extremely presumptuous for anyone to think they knew someone else so well that they could judge whether a decision to die was "valid."

We were all programmed to think that death is horrible, that it could never be the better alternative. I watched things happen to people that I thought were much worse than death, but if they wanted to endure it, whatever gain they thought they'd get in doing so, that was none of my business. Likewise it was none of their business if I chose not to endure. To think that people could tell another person how much suffering was required before they died! I concluded that the only way anyone would take away my right to the manner and time of my demise was to pry it out of my cold, dead hands!

Lessons From A Dying Cat

Dilemma: Whom to trust enough to tell about my plans? There were only a few; I wasn't such hot stuff that flags would go half-staff about me. I eliminated too-religious folks; they could lead to complications and maybe legal obstructions. I eliminated some people I was very close to; I didn't want their painful reactions to impact our current relationship. I nixed those who would treat me as sick, would try to take over and do what was "best" regardless of my wishes. Those I did tell had a wide range of responses: disbelieving, distraught, ridiculing, determinedly helpful- but at least not obstructive.

One person I deliberated about was my 15-year-old grandson Griffin, a favorite since his birth. He had a memory of a depression-related suicide in his family, and I didn't want him or anyone I loved thinking I had been depressed and therefore he should feel guilty for not having stepped in.

So I said, "You know how, when my cat was getting old, and she wasn't seeing very well and she started peeing outside the litter box and she was completely embarrassed about it because she had always been fastidious?" And he said, "Yeah." I said, "Well, you know I loved that cat and remember when I thought, oh, no, this is the beginning of the end. And soon after I thought I am not going to let this cat suffer the indignity and, also, I'm not going to suffer the indignity of cat pee all over rugs and furniture either. But this cat is not going to get better. And it would become an intolerable, literally bloody-tooth-and-claws battle, for me to attempt to daily medicate her for bladder problems. They're saying she has a possible tumor and she might not make it through surgery. It's time to let her go." Griffin said, "Yeah, I remember that." I said, "Well, that was the right thing to do and it

honored her dignity and gave her a peaceful end. And it prevented her from getting to where she would have been in terrible pain and I wouldn't have been able to stand seeing that. He said, "Yeah."

I said, "I hope you wouldn't be able to stand seeing me that way. I've seen it, and it's horrible, and I believe it's the right thing to do when you know you're not going to get better, that you're going to use up a lot of resources, and the fun in your life is over, that your time will be centered around a disease and doctors' offices and old magazines, and people coughing all over you. That life isn't what I would take for myself, and I hope nobody would expect me to do that."

He said, "No, I wouldn't." I continued, "What I am trying to say to you, Griffin, is that my eyes are going bad and that I won't be able to function without your family to help me. I think that's hugely immoral to do..." And he said, "I'm really glad you're saying that, Grandma. We've been discussing things like that in our social studies class."

I learned that even with some pragmatic teens, you can sneak this concept into some of their brains and they can get it. I felt good that I had told him

I also felt I wanted my son Jesse to know. An atheist, he didn't have any stuff about souls or an afterlife or heaven and hell or anything being a sin that concerns a personal decision and isn't hurting anyone else. He had, it turned out, a growing amount of secret distress that he had kept from me, along with some anger. But I needed him to know it and deal with the reality of it. Only in the last week of my life, with a lot of difficult discussion and much persistence on my part, did he show me that he really had gotten it and was going to be OK with it.

To make people more comfortable with the idea of death, I envisioned a little book called Everybody Croaks, to be delivered to senior centers and nursing homes. It could have pictures of roadkill and cockroaches with their feet up in the air, kind of a light-hearted exposure to a serious topic. Everybody Croaks. Think about it. Could be a best seller! Certainly has a large target audience.

Parting With Memories

By consciously dying slowly, I had a chance to examine my life from a detached perspective. There was so much to laugh and cry over, consider and remember (sometimes ruefully). My life had been spent mostly fighting for causes, some lost, some not yet won: civil rights, gender equality, basic human dignity, and justice. I had to agree with Kurt Vonnegut when he looked back on all those years, effort and passion spent in trying to stop the disastrous Vietnam War. After it was over, he said, "For all the effect that the voices of the citizens on the actions and decisions of what supposedly had been our government, we might as well have been throwing cream pies."

I couldn't help looking on the dark side. It was kind of a relief at that point to know that I would not have to see a single campaign advertisement for the 2012 presidential election.

I was despairing for the human condition and had whittled down to my last most-cherished possessions and books and music. Kübler-Ross's book described my "detaching and disengaging" stage. I was disengaging as I reluctantly gave up my most cherished possessions. But that slight feeling was mitigated by the genuine happiness of seeing how my items delighted their recipients. My treasures seemed to be relinquishing me, falling into line with my planned end.

I had a sense of urgency: Would my eyes make it to the next spring? It started to hit me in a new way: I really was going to die.

Riding Out The Storm

I actually had one breakdown that combined grief about my grandson's future with grief about my own lack of a future. I was wailing and keening to such an extent that I decided to go down to the parking garage. I sat in my locked car and wept and pounded on the steering wheel and screamed and howled and got it all out. Maybe it was the buildup of all the grief. Maybe I had been acting a little bit tougher than I really was. But after that storm swept through me I had a renewed sense of calm and peaceful purpose. Any doubts I had had disappeared. I was doing the right thing. I settled into a certain joy, a peaceful coming to a close. The storm was over.

Atheists have their mystical side too. I felt a connection with everything that had ever lived on Earth. Birth and death were the things I shared with every being that had ever come into existence, flourished, decayed, and had gone out of existence in that magical interchange of our energies, of things coming alive and going quiet again. What a thrill to know that I was sharing a deep, transcendent, timeless experience with every plant or creature that had ever known life! How lovely!

The Plan Takes On Momentum

I had my sense of humor back. Seeing death as a good thing helped me. I did some fun things, like taking a friend to a concert. I had been through the worst, like labor pains, and now could psych myself into focusing and getting the job done: making the plan, gathering materials, testing my technique, guaranteeing that I wouldn't be

disturbed, and insuring that no one would try to intervene or resuscitate me. A note on the fridge door threatened to sue people if they imposed unrequested medical attention on me.

A New Look At Carcass Maintenance

I had clear countdown thoughts that accompanied the little niceties of carcass maintenance. My hair would only be washed two more times. I wasn't sad, just marking those little routine events. I considered each tiny action versus a possible long-range merit, like using my hair conditioner money to help low-income women get access to family-planning services. That luxury of simplicity for myself and generosity toward others created a period of utmost happiness for me. I was grateful that I had had enough time to come to that realization and act on it.

The Last Two Weeks

February was going to be my last month, and it was time to tell more people. Some misconstrued what I was doing. Many assumed I was terribly depressed. Others took on guilt for "having failed me." People who I had no idea ever looked at a Bible were calling me with quotes. When they cried I joined in, ironically crying for them! Each encounter further released me. I had no future to worry about. I was accepting what was true: Everybody who is born will die.

I needed to complete a dialogue with my son. He had been resistant to my plans, but I wanted our last time together to be meaningful and conscious. He ultimately knew everything but the timing. He spent the overnight before my "due date" unknowingly. By then he had accepted the reality of my plan, and, though not convinced it was necessary, was OK with it. We awoke on the morning of my last day; then I in my knowledge

and he in his innocence
hugged for the last time.

On that final day I reviewed
directions in Final Exit, ate a light
breakfast, and prepared myself.

Love To You All

Now I'm dropping my disembodied
state. This is me, Annie Chase, on my last
day of life, at a quarter to five, P.M. I will
be writing to my grandson telling him
what a bright light he has been for me
and hoping that he's not angry with me
for not revealing this final date.

Only a few hours remain for me here. I
have a certain anticipation, a little bit of
apprehension, kind of a fluttery feeling
in my stomach. It's a little bit like the time
my sister kept barring me with her arm
from getting on the roller coaster until we
could be in the very front seat.

That's where I am. The coaster hesitates
at the top of the hill so I can have a last
look out over the whole sun -drenched,
shimmering world of this amusement park.
I see the Laugh in the Dark ride, where
I've already been. Likewise the Fun House,
where I looked at myself in a whole bunch of-I
hope!-distorted mirrors. I've been scrambled on
the Scrambler and imprisoned in the grip of the
Octopus.

I saved the roller coaster for last. The biggest thrill!
Its wheels in front are just about to go over the
ominous little bump at the very top of the hill. As
it starts its downward plunge and gathers speed,
I will surrender to it, to the free fall. At the end of
that fall will be-nothing. Nothing.



David Byrne's song about heaven says, "Heaven is
a place where nothing happens."

I'm not scared. I know that nothing really is not
something.

Love to you all.



FINAL EXIT NETWORK

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Our Guiding Principle

Mentally competent adults have a basic human right to end their lives when they suffer from a fatal or irreversible illness or intractable pain, when their quality of life is personally unacceptable, and the future holds only hopelessness and misery. Such a right shall be an individual choice, including the timing and companion, free of any restrictions by the law, clergy, medical profession, even friends and relatives no matter how well-intentioned. We do not encourage anyone to end their life, do not provide the means to do so, and do not actively assist in a person's death. We do, however, support them when medical circumstances warrant their decision.

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Help Us Help You!

If you have experience in any of the following areas and are able to contribute a few hours a week to our volunteer organization, it would help relieve some of the load on our overworked Board. Please send a short note outlining your expertise to Jerry Dincin, jerry1628@comcast.net or Bob Levine, rjl@gurus.org.

- Non-profit investment strategy and planned giving for occasional, on-call advice to our treasurer
- Management and operation of a small to medium-sized non-profit or company
- Grant writing, fund raising, or development director
- Press release or copy writing and editing
- Print production to help with our printing, ordering, and scheduling
- Radio or TV scheduling or programming
- Desktop computer database