

## My mother deserved to die with dignity

By Loren Stanford, Special to CNN

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**Editor's note:** Loren Stanford shared her personal story in response to [Brittany Maynard](#), a 29-year-old with an aggressive form of terminal brain cancer who took medication on Saturday to end her life. A version of this piece [first appeared on CNN iReport](#) before Maynard's death.

**(CNN)** -- As a woman whose parents had cancer, I have quite a few things to say about dying with dignity.

Faith Lillian Flannigan Faust is seen here in 1976 with her baby daughter Loren Stanford. Stanford penned an essay on CNN iReport about her mother's long battle with cancer.

In 1984, my mother was diagnosed with stage four cancer of the ovaries, uterus, ureters, small intestine, bladder and kidney. I was 8.



Maynard: I hope my family is proud of me



Brittany Maynard: I don't want to die

She was given six months to live. She refused to accept that and sought treatment in Tampa, Florida. Her condition improved until

two years later, when she was diagnosed with a brain tumor.

Her body was mangled from all the surgeries. She had to wear an ostomy bag, which I learned how to change because she was so weak. She had to give up her nursing career. She had to give up the fun things in life she enjoyed doing because her body couldn't take it. She no longer had the quality of life that she deserved.



'She wants to cheat her cancer'

My father, no longer physically attracted to her, satisfied his physical needs with other women. She was too sick to give him what he physically wanted. In 1988, when she was well enough to be at home full time, my parents separated and filed for divorce. Cancer broke their foundation of love and trust.

The pain didn't stop there. In 1992, she was diagnosed with stage four breast cancer and lost her breasts. The only part she felt that still identified her as a woman was taken away.

The same year my father was diagnosed with brain cancer. He died quickly, three weeks after his diagnosis. He simply collapsed and died.

[My right to death with dignity at 29](#)

For years, she suffered. It's hard watching your mother cry over the pain. It's hard watching your mother break down piece by piece. For years, she fought a pain pill addiction. She wanted to live so she could raise her children but in reality, she spent her time in the hospitals, operating rooms and doctor's offices. Her hopes took a horrible turn.

She suffered greatly for 17 years until 2001 when doctors found cancer on her spine. She killed herself three days later.

The person who died was not my mother. She was not the funny, intelligent, strong and fierce woman I knew. The person who died was sad and had lost all hope. My last memory of my mother is of this person. Lying on the bed with a bottle of pills next to her and her eyes half open. There is no justice in her lasting legacy. She deserved better. She deserved to go in a more dignified way.

Dying with dignity is more than just for the person who is dying. It's for their loved ones.

If it meant my mother leaving this world the way she was in 1984 and not in 2001, then I would have supported her decision to do so. My last memories of her should have been when she was still full of life on the outside, even though she was dying on the inside.

She chose to take her life anyway, except it was without her loved ones surrounding her saying their final words and making peace. She died alone. My sister found her. Her death was treated like a crime scene because she killed herself at home. There were no final words. No goodbyes. Nothing but the unimaginable guilt I carry with me every day because maybe I could have done something better for her.

### [The danger of assisted suicide laws](#)

It's not fair to throw stones at someone because they are through fighting. No one person or disease is the same, so it's unfair to judge and compare. Just because a person decides they are done does not make them weak or selfish.

Dying with dignity is a brave decision to make. It's a decision that involves everyone, and it's one of the greatest gifts of love that person can give to those left behind.

### [When assisted suicide is not the answer](#)

Some say she beat cancer. She was given six months to live but lived for 17 years. But what kind of life was it? Was it a life worth living? She had so much to live for, but at what cost?

What kind of life was it for her children? I can tell you it was hard. I was robbed of a childhood. It was years of struggles and tears. I would never wish what I had lived through on anyone. No child should have to see their parents suffer so much.

Today, I'm happily married and have a 4-year-old son. I would never want him to watch either one of his parents suffer. If a diagnosis is final and the options are there, I just may choose to die with dignity and end my life on my terms.

If you have to explain death, how hard is it to include dying before the suffering becomes too great? Sure, the experiences built me up to be strong and be able to handle some serious stress, and in part made me the person I am today, but I would gladly trade it back if my mother could have done things her way, when she really should have.

*What's your reaction? Stanford answered some of your questions in the comments below.*

The opinions expressed in this commentary are solely those of Loren Stanford.

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