
6/7/94 DAILY NEWS PUBLIC FORUM

Saunders' attack on assisted suicide 'raves on'

I continually vacillate between hoping the Daily News will stop printing Debra Saunders' venomous columns, and being grateful for her clear examples of spleen-driven intellectual dishonesty. Her latest diatribe opposing assisted suicide (Daily News Opinions, May 31) does not make her point even on its own terms, to say nothing of her unfair and distorted images of those who favor assisted suicide.

Most puzzling is her attack on "America's middle and upper classes" for promoting assisted suicide. First, it is just these classes that Saunders regularly lauds as America's bedrock — the average Jane and Joe working with their well-off and creative compatriots to recover America's greatness and competitive edge. Now, oddly, they are treated to the same viciousness that Saunders reserves for the liberals, against whom they have always defended America. Second, it is well-understood that the overwhelming majority of poor people are politically inactive because they feel powerless and uninformed. Thus Saunders stretches beyond reason in hinting that the poor are not lobbying for assisted suicide because they recognize a danger to their own existence in a "cost-conscious health-care era."

Waxing more wroth, Saunders then conjures up an all-pervasive decadence. We have gone soft because "other people" pick our fruit, collect our trash and provide a host of other goods and services for us (including washing machines). But this is simply the economy. To suggest that wedding caterers and appliance stores produced the assisted-suicide movement borders on dementia.

Those who cannot grant their opponents a measure of decency and humanity usually lack those qualities themselves, and Saunders' insistence on messy, violent and perhaps unsuccessful suicide betrays a cruel streak that belies her purported concern about the potential abuse of legal assisted suicide.

In fact, the assisted-suicide movement will succeed because the number of people who do not want to live beyond a capacity to enjoy life or to be a burden to their families, is growing rapidly. Rave on, Debra.

— **Bill Becker**
Woodland Hills

Ms. Debra J. Saunders
San Francisco Chronicle
901 Mission Street
San Francisco, CA 94103

June 4, 1994

Dear Ms. Saunders,

I wager that you positively relish getting mail criticizing your point-of-view, so I hope you'll enjoy this letter I sent to the Daily News in response to your recent column lamenting the nation's current flirtation with assisted suicide. It was not printed. *(It was printed on June 7th)*

How does the following scenario sound to you? You invite me to appear opposite you on one of your numerous talk show appearances. I will discuss my year+ visitation with an old, bedridden friend who was afraid she might end up as a basket case in great pain for a long period of time. I joined the Hemlock Society so as to learn more about assisted suicide, and my old friend and I began to hatch a plot whereby I would help her end her life if it became necessary. We actually had some fun with this idea, which, as it happens, never needed to be carried out because my friend just withered away without great discomfort. She was lucky, of course. Naturally, I cannot be sure that I would have had the courage to go through with it, but it was a serious issue at the time nonetheless.

I will accept this offer if the conditions are right. By this I mean that you must promise to call my old friend a self-centered coward on the air, as you imply such folks are in your columns. You also must call me a swine on the air because I was willing to help her. (You must remember the column on this subject that you ended with "Pearls before swine," *n'cest pas?*) I was told once, by someone who followed you closely, that your print and television personas are quite different, and I would feel cheated if you feigned niceness to me in public, and then called my friend and I names in a column. I'm sure you understand. Also, I would insist on anonymity for my friend.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Bill Becker