

Tribute to Isabel Leonard

In the last two years, I lost nine people: family members and friends. All but one of them died a natural cause. My dear friend Isabel Leonard, a Rossmoor resident from 2013 to 2021, didn't wait for death to happen, but took her own life by physician-assisted suicide on October 25, 2021. At 11:30 am that day, at the moment she drank the doctor-provided medication, I lit a candle, together with her family and friends far and wide to pray for her peaceful departure from Planet Earth.

Isabel was a professional translator, who had been translating medical materials from French, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese into English since the 70s. She didn't stop working until May 24, 2021 when she was diagnosed with non-small-cell lung cancer that metastasized to her brain. She immediately went for radiation therapy for the brain tumor and immunotherapy for the lung cancer. However, after a few rounds of treatment, the results were insignificant. With the prospect of less than six months to live, she decided to take action. As she put it: "When the burdens of life exceed its joys and pleasures, off I go."

Isabel and I became good friends shortly after we both settled in Rossmoor. She was so talented with words that I asked her to edit the Tribute Book for my late husband. One of her friends said, "It would be nice if we could leave certain things when we go. I would ask for your brains, your way with words, your musical talent, and your knowledge of languages." The last contribution she made to our society was to bequeath her mortal remains to a Stanford medical facility. Now three of her friends are putting together a book by extracting and compiling emails between them from her diagnosis to her last days, which will become an ever-lasting inspiration to all of us.

All of her family and friends admired her strength, courage, and resolution in choosing a death on her own terms. In fact, believing as she does that there is a life after death, she came up with the following: D.E.A.T.H. stands for "Delightful Experience Awaits Tremulous Humans." We are fortunate to be Californians because the California End of Life Option Act (EOLOA) gives us the right and freedom to choose physician-assisted suicide when facing a terminal disease with a life expectancy of six months or less.

Finally, I want to include a well-known Chinese farewell lyric to bid farewell to Isabel Leonard:

李叔同《送别》

Farewell

By Li Shutong

长亭外，古道边，芳草碧连天。
晚风扶柳笛声残，夕阳山外山。
天之涯，海之角，知交半零落。
一壶浊酒尽余欢，今宵别梦寒。

On the side of the
road shelter, the grasses are green and wild;
Flute wails as the sun sinks in the western sky.
Friends of mine departed before me.
A cup of wine, with best wishes, bids you adieu.

长亭外，古道边，芳草碧连天。
问君此去几时还，来时莫徘徊。
天之涯，海之角，知交半零落。
人生难得是欢聚，唯有别离多。

On the side of the
road shelter, the grasses are green and wild.
Tell me when you will come back, come back any time you wish.
Friends of mine departed before me.
Life is short and full of farewells.