
Lives in the Balance '96

A Letter to Members of Hemlock - Hawaii

Mikki Lawson

Aloha Dearest Hemlock Member,

First, as a fellow member of our Hemlock Society ohana here in Hawaii, I write to you with an update on some of the most recent developments within the US Court system regarding important *Right to Die* issues that are presently before the Courts.

Second, as an individual with an untreatable and 'terminal' neuromuscular illness—commonly known as *Lou Gehrig's Disease*—I'd like to personally encourage you to support our efforts across the Hawaiian Islands to create a heightened level of public awareness for the desperate plight of the terminally ill in gaining our freedom and civil rights.

Today, this struggle has now escalated into a war within the US legal system for our Constitutionally guaranteed rights to *Die with Dignity*, rights that have currently been abridged by *US Supreme Court Justice Sandra O'Connor's* injunction order of May 29th.

Background

March 6th, San Francisco, *US 9th Circuit Court of Appeals*—following years of contested legal wrangling throughout the courts of Washington and Oregon states, the 9th Circuit Court upheld the Constitutional Rights of the terminally ill, and ruled in favor of physician-assisted life termination for mentally competent, terminally ill persons. This ruling frees medical practitioners to legally prescribe and administer lethal drugs to terminal patients.

March 14th, New York, *US 2nd Circuit Court of Appeals*—following years of contested wrangling throughout the courts of New York and Vermont states, the 2nd Circuit Court upheld the Constitutional Rights of the terminally ill and ruled in favor of physician assisted life termination for mentally competent, terminally ill persons.

May 29th, Washington DC, *US Supreme Court*—The Hon. Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, the Supreme Court judge immediately responsible for the 9th Circuit issued a *stay* against the Circuit Court's rulings until she and her fellow Supremo's decide whether or not they might care to spare the time to *review* the 2nd and 9th decision. This *review* process will drag on into 1997 and possibly into the next century!

Meanwhile, the urgent and pain-filled agonized cries from hundreds of thousands of Americans who are forced to suffer the daily torture of terminal illness . . . goes totally unheeded by a legal/medical establishment more concerned with bureaucratic paper-shuffling and maintaining its power over the mass of society than clearly showing moral leadership or human compassion.

Lives in the Balance '96—I appeal to you, the members of my Hemlock ohana, to please contact your elected representatives both here in Hawaii and in Washington DC, together with all nine Supreme Court Justices, and beseech those in power to regard the *review* of the 2nd & 9th Court rulings to decriminalize physician-assisted euthanasia by order of the nation's highest legal body . . . as *an extremely urgent matter*. Mahalo a Nui. A hui hou, malama pono. Mikki Lawson, Hemlock Hawaii Member (July 15, 1996)

Editor's Note:

I met Mikki Lawson via the e-mail and the Hemlock Society. After his "Lives in the Balance '96," he then published his "Mikki's Miracle Missive," part of which is reproduced below.

Mikki's Miracle Missive on the World Wide Web (Mikki's Mini Bio)

Aloha, My name is M.J. 'Mikki' Lawson; at last count I was 46 years young. Before my illness, I worked as a graphic artist/designer and advertising art director, and I'm a 1970 graduate of Camberwell School of Art, London, England.

As an experienced design and communication arts professional, I possess over twenty years of advertising, publishing and pre-press experience. I've been fortunate to have worked, worldwide, on



Author, Mikki Lawson, who has amyotrophic lateral sclerosis ("Lou Gehrig's Disease") motor neuron disease, working at his computer station using DragonDictate, a voice-activated computer program. Courtesy: The Byling Edge, Honolulu.

many major international accounts - *Aloha Airlines; ARCO; Bayer Chemicals; California Federal Savings; Capital Investment; Chanel; Clairrol; Great Western Savings; Hilton Hotels International; Hughes Aircraft; Knapp Publications; Litton Industries; Lloyds Bank; Lockheed Avionics; Midland Bank; Mortenson Construction; Northrop Corp.; Pacific Resources Inc.; ITT Sheraton Hotels, Hawaii; Teledyne; and United California Bank* . . . to name only a few.

I'm ex-Anglo, now a US-citizen living in Honolulu, Hawaii/USA since 1972, where I currently live together with a member of my support group who is also my caregiver, and who was born in the same year, same month, and has the same last name as mine. Her name is Erin Lawson and she's from Baltimore, MD . . . and she's too, a wounded individual only with spinal cord injuries . . . but together, we help each other.

I was diagnosed with ALS/MND (Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis/Motor Neuron Disease) in May of 1985 at the age of 34. At that time, my physicians rendered the reasonably standard prognosis—along

with the, also standard, set of medical disclaimers—of between 3-5 years of degenerative life expectancy.

Today, almost eleven years later, apart from two brief periods of catastrophic muscular weakness and temporary confinement to a wheelchair for a few months . . . I have been able to overcome most of the challenges and have managed to regain some strength . . . but since July of '95 I've been mostly disabled and dependent. However, I remain confident at overcoming this neuromuscular killer and leading as near a "normal" life soon.

Like most people, I've made some serious mistakes in my life. However, I consider myself as relatively 'normal' and, because of my recent brushes with terminal neuromuscular illness, I know how important it is to enjoy whatever time is available.

Current Objectives: Since July of 1995, I've been severely disabled. During this time of declining health, I've been given the unique opportunity to reflect for long periods of time in a wheelchair and *insolitary confinement* on the Quality of my life . . . past, present and, perhaps, future?

I'm acutely aware of the grim and terminal prognosis for most ALS/MND victims. However, I do believe in miracles and the healing power of love to conquer all. It is my fervent wish to be happy until the end . . . and to die happily.

Activist: *Director*, Hawaii Macintosh & Apple Users' Society; *Member*, Hemlock Society; *Member*, ALS Association; *Member*, Hawaii Gay/Lesbian Coalition; *Member*, Hawaii Transgender Outreach Support; *Member*, MDA; *Supporter*, ERGO. *Sysop*: Surfboard BBS.

I'm active in ALS support and research activities as well as being and active and vocal proponent for the 'right-to-die' movement. I'm interested in any and all info/help on ALS/NMD that's out there. Still learning.

As yet, I can still use my PowerPC pretty good to do DTP and Pre-Press work and some WWW pages. I like to feel I can still make a positive contribution... I'd welcome any ideas, thoughts, advice, direction or morale support anyone can offer.

You can reach me directly at osiris@tapa.com or 808-922-1801. My personal struggles can be accessed at <http://www.tapa.com/ohana/MMM/purgatory.html>

Aloha a Nui, a hui hou, malama pono, Mikki

Editor's Note:

(Part II) — I then met Mikki in person at a Board meeting of Hemlock Hawaii. Mikki doesn't get out very much now, but the *Handi-Van* did bring him to the meeting at Straub. This man has an unbelievable amount of courage and drive — to keep busy and make the best of life — and he does keep busy at his computer using a mouth-held probe. Hopefully, a new voice-activated computer, "Dragon Dictate" will enable him to be even more productive and faster using voice commands. On September 27, 1996, I received the most exciting message ever transmitted via E-mail: Subj: Where's My Red Shoes?

"I did it!!!... For the first time in 15 months of being confined to a wheelchair ... I walked over a dozen paces without ANY assistance and without pain this morning... Well, so much for incurable 'terminal' neuromuscular illness.....and...moving right along...we'll be back after this.....never discount the existence of miracles or underestimate the healing power of prayer... Oh Tolo! Are we in Kansas yet?"



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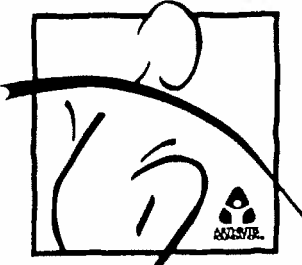
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The Arthritis Foundation Exercise Challenge

Become physically active. Join a local Arthritis Foundation program. Also remember that walking, bicycling, or even gardening for 30 minutes per day most days of the week is good for your health and your future.

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