



HEMLOCK SOCIETY *of San Diego*

A TRIBUTE TO OUR FOUNDER DEREK HUMPHRY

Faye Girsh, President, Hemlock Society of San Diego

Derek Humphry, founder of the National Hemlock Society in 1980, died January 2, 2025, at age 94.

Without Derek's publications, his attempts to change the law to allow aid in dying, and without the powerful national Hemlock Society, there arguably would be no right to die movement in the US.



Derek Humphry

April 29, 1930 — January 2, 2025

Hemlock Society of San Diego began as a local chapter, started in 1987 and became an autonomous 501c3 organization in 2005. To this day, it is the only remaining Hemlock vestige.

I was close to Derek and feel this tremendous loss to our movement. I first met him when I invited him to speak at a conference I held here in 1986 where the two of us, over lunch, agreed to make San Diego a Hemlock Society chapter. I headed the chapter — with an enthusiastic team, until I moved to Denver in 1996 to head Hemlock USA, a position Derek resigned in 1991.



Final Exit Network (FEN), which many of you of know, was co-founded by me and supported by Derek in 2005. It is based on many of the ideas in Derek's best seller, Final Exit, and modeled after the Caring Friends program which we started in the national Hemlock Society five years before it dissolved. FEN is in its 20th year and prospering. Derek allowed the then new organization to use the well-publicized name of his famous book.



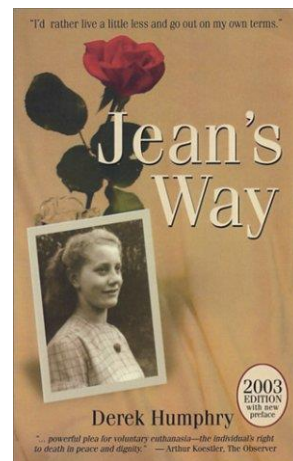
Derek visited us many times in San Diego and spoke about his book, Final Exit, demonstrating the inert gas method at UCSD. He entrusted us with the task of getting enough signatures to get the first ever proposal for an assisted dying law on the ballot in California. We worked hard here but succeeded only on the second attempt and then lost the vote by only a few points. HSSD did make a \$35,000 contribution to Washington state when its ballot initiative succeeded. Derek, from national Hemlock's funds (supported largely the sale of his many books) also paid the salary of the director of Oregon Death with Dignity for three

years before they unsuccessfully lost their ballot initiative the first time. It took tremendous perseverance, vision, and fund-raising ability to fight for legalization of assisted dying – and still does, which will be harder without Derek.

Always looking for alternatives if there is no law to help people, Derek founded NuTech, an informal organization of scientists, engineers, divers, and others to develop new methods of self deliverance. We arranged NuTech meetings in conjunction with the World Federation of Right to Die Societies, which Derek also co-founded with the Japanese Right to Die organization in 1980 and was President of.

The Hemlock Society USA survived until 2005, when it merged with another organization to become Compassion & Choices. When Derek resigned as head of Hemlock in 1991, he founded ERGO, the Euthanasia Research and Guidance Organization, which he shut down recently as his health declined but where his books and video were available and which sent out a daily email about the news of assisted dying around the world.

Derek was a British journalist and author who wrote several books on race relations before ever being involved in the right to die movement. In 1975 his wife Jean developed terminal breast cancer and asked him to help her die. He did, and later, wrote his first book on dying, where he bravely described her illness and his role in helping her die.



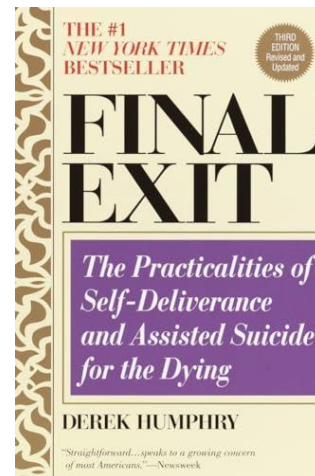
The success of this book, Jean's Way, spurred Derek and his second wife Anne to establish the Hemlock Society — out of their garage in Santa Monica — named after the poison Socrates chose to drink for his crime of corrupting the youth of Athens, rather than choosing exile.



When Derek and I started our local Hemlock chapter, he initiated a move to pass a law for physician aid in dying in California by securing several thousand signatures for a ballot initiative.

Derek chose our group to collect the signatures. This rag-tag effort attracted international attention since it was the first such attempt of its kind. We didn't succeed in getting a legal initiative on the ballot until years later, but Derek, through Hemlock, supported Oregon and Washington's successful efforts to legalize aid in dying in those key states.

In 1991, Derek published *Final Exit: A Guide to Self-Deliverance for the Terminally Ill*. It became a New York Times best seller, and made it possible for many desperate people to achieve a peaceful death when they were not eligible for assisted dying under laws that were finally passed, or they didn't live in the 10 states where laws, though restrictive, were available.



The method of hastened dying he described, and demonstrated in the *Final Exit* Video, involved the inhalation of an inert gas. Derek preferred a legal remedy with a lethal injection by a doctor, but understood that many would need a simple do-it-yourself method. The *Final Exit* Network, 20 years ago, adopted this inert gas method, first used by Hemlock's Caring Friends program.



We honor our founder whose leadership inspired the formation of organizations, legislation, and helped many to achieve choice, dignity, and control at the end of their lives. There is much more to be done. Let's honor Derek's legacy by helping people die better, learn about their choices, and expand our laws. In honor of his deep compassion, tenacity, and courage we will move forward together toward a good life and a good death.