



End-of-Life Choice

December/January 2013-2014

Voluntary Euthanasia Society of New Zealand, Inc.

Issue 33

Dying Your Way: A Step-by-Step Guide to Creating Your Advance Directive

Don Grant, President

Last year 29,811 deaths were recorded in New Zealand. That equates to 81 deaths every day of the year. While some of those deaths were instant or unexpected, a great many followed a long and painful illness.

No one wants to end up sitting in a rest home or a dementia unit, with Alzheimer's or suffering from agonizing diseases with bone pain, nerve pain or psychological pain that drugs cannot alleviate. If you're upset by that please don't stop reading. We can help. Even though The Hon. Maryan Street's End-of-Life Choice Bill is currently off the political agenda, you can still choose whether to have a "good" death or not.

We are all going to die. Why do so many of us bury our head in the sand on the one true certainty in life? But for many there will be pain, suffering, and indignities unless they plan ahead. End-of-Life Choice can help. We've built a comprehensive guide and Advance Directive (AD), a tool that can give you peace of mind about preparing for a good death, whether it is your own, your parents',

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siblings', friends' or partner's. You can purchase and download the new AD and a comprehensive plain-language instruction manual on how to ensure you choose a good death before the need arises. It is available from our website: www.ves.org.nz. (See p.4 for details.)

I often hear adverts on the radio or television for prepaid funeral services. Planning your funeral is a great idea. But it's just a start. Please, do yourself a big favour and think ahead about the actual dying part. You can choose whether you want a good death or let fate decide.

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Your Final Wish: Making a Bequest

Bequests are vital to the survival of any non-profit. Bequests provide ongoing funding streams. They make it possible to create long-term plans. They are the cornerstones of non-profits like EOLC because they provide stability.

If you can see yourself saying, "This is what I support, and I want this issue to be important, even after I'm gone," then please consider making EOLC a beneficiary of your will by creating a bequest. Ours is a unique issue; one in which our most ardent supporters might not be with us for long. And our fiercest opponents might later turn to us for help. Please take the step to support end-of-life rights in your will.

Death Without Dignity: My Sister and Mother's Stories

June Ward

My Sister My first experience with undignified dying was the month-long slow death of my sister Ruth in 1984. Ruth contracted Still's disease in England when she was 13 years old, just prior to our hurried exit to New Zealand in 1939. She was given injections in Oamaru over some months, but the cruel rheumatoid arthritis ravaged her joints. At 17 all her toes were amputated. Then her ankles, hands and elbows became useless. She never complained, adapting to and coping with each additional handicap.

In 1961 she married and life was to hurl more horror on her: two stillbirths and an ectopic pregnancy. Finally she gave birth to two beautiful children. When the children were very young her Jamaican-born husband planned a trip to the islands to visit the grandparents. He arranged accommodation, and Ruth was forbidden to return to New Zealand. She became very ill. I finally extricated Ruth and the children with the false report that our mother was dying. Her husband then burnt all of Ruth's possessions, clothes, and photos. Fortunately my mother could accommodate Ruth and her children, but it was a difficult situation indeed.

Ruth's health continued to deteriorate and in 1978 headaches and blurred vision led to the detection of a tumour on the pituitary gland. The "straightforward" operation became a nightmare. Ruth had a stroke and languished crippled in hospital. Finally, with no contact with her children, she resigned herself to die. She refused nourishment. I sat by her bedside for 28 hideous days and watched her lose consciousness and rot in her bed. I watched nurses remove pus from her mouth as she slowly, painfully died. She was 57.

My mother As a young woman, my mother had nursed servicemen in WWI. Later, as a midwife, she helped bring babies into the world. In 1939 she and my father escaped England with their two daughters. Later she housed her disabled daughter and grandchildren, and nursed her ailing husband at home until his death. Life for her was hard.

At age 91, my mother grieved deeply over Ruth's death. She seemed to lose all purpose in living. I flew down from Auckland every six weeks to see her but eventually she seemed not to recognize me. She had several small strokes, lost mobility and then speech. Finally she refused nourishment.

I was called two weeks before her death and was shocked to see her blackened legs. All she could manage was to open her eyes momentarily before lapsing into unconsciousness. I asked if she was getting morphine to ease her pain. "Oh she's not in pain. She's kept quite comfortable," I was told. Neither matron nor doctor would administer morphine. Again I felt helpless as she wasted away. Why couldn't my mother and sister be allowed to die with dignity? Where is the compassion?

Mystery Break Raffle Results

On 25 November, five winners—all EOLC members—were drawn for the Air New Zealand Mystery Break Raffle. The winners are:

M Hannigan, Nelson
J Harris, Auckland
R Lorimer, Warkworth
S Waters, Blenheim
M Williams, Auckland

The raffle raised \$12,537.84 after expenses for our important cause.



Thanks to all the members who participated and sold tickets, and a special thank-you to the six members who each sold more than five books. Some members made a donation with, or instead of, selling their tickets.

This was a great opportunity to talk to people about the aims of End-Of-Life Choice as well as to raise funds. The support of all of you is very much appreciated.

National Secretary Opportunity

Due to a resignation, EOLC is seeking expressions of interest for the National Secretary role. The position entails serving on the National Committee, which meets by phone once a month; taking accurate minutes of the meeting, and distributing meeting minutes to NC members. A sound understanding of meeting protocol is desirable, as well as a willingness and passion to further the goals of the Society. For more information, or to indicate your interest, please contact Don Grant, care of the EOLC Central Office.

Branch Events

Most branches resume events in February/March 2014. Please check website for updates. Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukah and a very Happy New Year to all!

Waikato

Feb. 23 Branch Meeting, 2pm.
CCS Building, 17 Claudelands Rd., Hamilton. Program will include a talk on the Liverpool Care Pathway by an experienced geriatric-care nurse. Public welcome.

Wellington

March 22 Branch Meeting, 2pm.
(Venue to be confirmed.) Two speakers: Lloyd Geering and Rev. Sande Ramage.

Advertisement

Cara Mia holiday home, ten minutes from Raglan's popular beaches, cafes, and surf beaches, is available for homestays. Situated high above the river, overlooking harbour, river, and estuary, Cara Mia is the perfect location to relax and enjoy the breathtaking 360-degree views and all-day sun. This comfortable, clean, well-appointed two-bedroom cottage sleeps up to five.

The owners will donate 15% of member bookings, or bookings referred by members, to End-of-Life Choice. *When booking, please be sure to mention EOLC.*

Contact details:

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Email: vera.raglan@xtra.co.nz

www.bookabach.co.nz/9649



Speaking with George Eighmey: End-of-Life Choice Pioneer

Yvonne Shaw

Following is an interview with George Eighmey, board member of Death with Dignity National Centre in Oregon, USA; former Oregon legislator and former Executive Director for 12 years of the non-profit group that implemented Oregon's Death with Dignity Act.

What is Death with Dignity National Centre and what does DDNC do?

Death with Dignity National Centre's mission is to promote laws based on Oregon's Death with Dignity Act, both to provide an option for dying individuals and to stimulate nationwide improvements in end-of-life care.

What is your role in DDNC?

As a Board member of DDNC it is my responsibility, together with other board members, to provide leadership to advance social justice for terminally ill individuals. To honour that role I travel throughout the US speaking to groups about Oregon's experience with its Death with Dignity Act and encourage others to consider passing a similar law.

How did you become involved with this issue? What is your personal story behind this movement?

At an early age I witnessed my aunt's agonizing dying process and as a teenage nursing home orderly I saw far too many elderly patients endure excruciating pain and suffering during their final days. These and other experiences left an indelible impression on me that in many ways led me to my profession. As an attorney, practicing in the areas of estate and family law thus working for people facing day to day problems and end-of-life issues, I formed a belief that people who planned for the future, including their inevitable demise, would be able to live life to its fullest.

What advice would you give to other countries attempting similar legislation?

Perseverance! Public opinion is on the side of choice at the end of life. It takes the efforts of a handful of highly dedicated individuals to persistently get the stories out and to disprove all the untruths about Oregon's experience. Patience and consistency are the key words in winning over the hearts and minds of those who will finally pass choice at the end of life.

What is the importance of language in this kind of campaign?

Words can and do make a huge difference in our campaign to convince the elected officials that the public deserves to have this option. Therefore, whenever the negative terms, such as suicide, euthanasia, killing, etc., are used it is necessary to counter with the facts that it is self-determination, self-administration.

What strategies do you use to engage the medical/political communities in this discussion?

It is imperative to reach out to the medical and political leaders via seminars, mailings, one-on-one meetings, and public forums.

What role did volunteers play in passing the legislation?

The importance of volunteers cannot be over emphasized when it comes to passing end of life legislation. They carry out the day to day duties of organizations formed to educate the public. They raise the money necessary to get the message out. They tell the stories that are crucial to personalize this issue and they are, in effect, the backbone of getting the legislation passed.

Show your support for End-of-life choice by writing to your MP and sharing your story.

Contact Us

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Guide to Dying—Your Way

End-of-Life Choice has teamed with medical and legal experts to assemble a comprehensive new step-by-step guide to help you create an Advance Directive that reflects *your* wishes. It also contains crucial information on choosing an agent, someone you entrust to ensure your wishes are being carried out. It answers important questions you may have about writing an Advance Directive that meets your personal wishes, tips for relief of pain and suffering, the legality of an Advance Directive in New Zealand, and keeping your Advance Directive up-to-date.

Order your guide and Advance Directive today as an instantly downloadable PDF for \$39.95 (credit card), or hard copy for \$45.20 (personal cheque or direct debit).

Member Special: \$10 discount through Dec. 31, 2013 (\$29.95)

New members: Join EOLC today and **save \$10** on your *Guide to Dying* order through March 31, 2014

For details, and to order: www.ves.org.nz

