

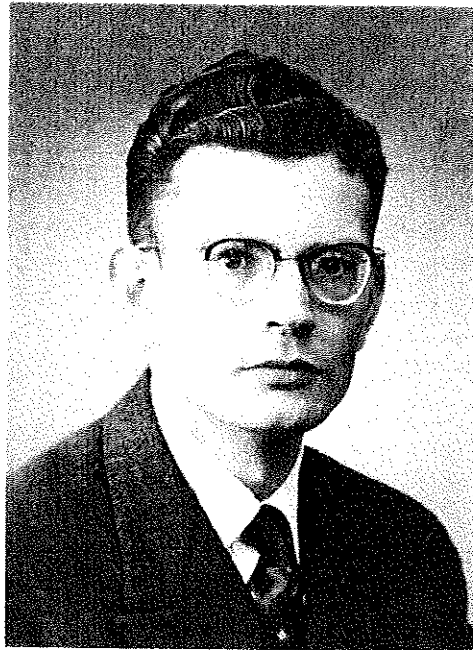
Reflections.

Since I am writing my life story, you must also know some of my thoughts.

Euthanasia:

Here is a part of my life that is very precious to me. It is about my brother Sjoerd.

Sjoerd



The best of Euthanasia

In February 1995 I received a letter from my niece in Holland that her 74 year old father (my brother) was very sick with incurable throat cancer. He was requesting euthanasia and had already been seen by two doctors as stipulated by government guidelines.

Euthanasia in Holland is illegal, but government guidelines allow it to be performed on people in certain circumstances including: hopeless suffering. No prospect of a cure. Repeated requests for euthanasia, and when one feels life is unacceptable.

After a few phone calls and several more letters I decided to go to Holland hoping to be a bit of a support for my brother. I actually arrived in Holland before my last farewell letter reached him. On my first visit to him he was very pleased to see me and we talked openly about euthanasia. It was very difficult to hold back the tears. Sjoerd was so brave talking about his forthcoming death. It was not easy for me.

Sjoerd and I had faced death together before during the war. As teenagers we had both been taken from Holland by the Germans to work on the railways in Germany. Together we had stared death in the face at that time. And he was always pretty calm about it ... just as he was on my first visit to him.

Sjoerd 's reasons for euthanasia were based on a selfless desire to avoid becoming dependant on his family in his final days. He wished to die at home in known and comfort-

This extract from my life story can be used to assist with any legislative change that is necessary to allow Australia to legalise euthanasia so all have a choice

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able surroundings. He sought to avoid further unnecessary pain and disability. He had made an informed decision and had not been coerced or condemned by anyone. Sjoerd was still strong enough to walk around and care for himself, but it was painful. He never complained about anything at all. As a result of throat operations his speech was hampered - just a whisper and you had to listen to him carefully. It was a very emotional time for me, I was relieved when his daughters and their husbands were there, joking and laughing about ordinary things in life. Sjoerd calmly supported all of us, his family and friends. As we struggled to accept the inevitable, he took the lead in the whole process of his dying and remained in control until his end.

A week after my arrival Sjoerd finally received permission for euthanasia and it was up to Sjoerd to choose the date - which he did - 24 March 1995.

On his day the doctor was expected at 2 pm. In the morning Sjoerd's family (3 married daughters, their husbands and children) and his girlfriend and I arrived for the last few hours with Sjoerd. The talk flowed okay and Sjoerd seemed to be his normal self. At 4 minutes past 2 Sjoerd commented that the doctor was late. His daughter said, "as usual he is impatient". We all laughed a bit but we were all getting a bit tense. A few minutes later the bell rang: it was the doctor. Sjoerd stood up, straight as a candle and welcomed the doctor. He then said farewell to everyone one by one. It was a very emotional time and we were all crying. It was all very intense but Sjoerd stayed calm and strong. I am sure he must have also felt very emotional- it must be difficult to say goodbye to all your family too, but he remained in control. It was unbelievable. After the farewell's he went into the bedroom and laid on the bed. All the family gathered around him in the bedroom. While the doctor prepared the injections in the lounge (they give two injections - one to induce sleep and then the fatal one). Everyone was still crying but Sjoerd was in total control - only one tear when he said his final farewell.

The doctor took quite a while to prepare the drugs. We were all looking for support from each other... but most of it came from Sjoerd. We all held on to each other and some laid their hands on Sjoerd. He was so brave: fragile in body. But strong in emotion. He knew we supported him.

At last the doctor came in to administer the first injection. The vein collapsed and Sjoerd said, "it does not work, try the other arm". This worked and the needle was left in for the next injection. After the first injection, Sjoerd became unconscious; his face relaxed, and his mouth and eyes were slightly opened. He looked so peaceful now that he was no longer in pain. The second and fatal injection was given 10 -15 minutes later - as he was so peaceful already it did not affect me. It took quite a while before his heart stopped and the doctor pronounced him dead.

The atmosphere in the room was calm - there came a certain peace and rest from Sjoerd. It was over and we all knew it had been the right decision.

As Sjoerd had not died a 'natural' death, the police doctor had to be notified. When he arrived he spoke with Sjoerd's doctor, examined Sjoerd, and then talked with Sjoerd's eldest daughter about Sjoerd's reasons for euthanasia. He then gave permission for the funeral director to take the body. I had a brief discussion with Sjoerd's doctor about how he felt about euthanasia. The doctor said he was not too keen on performing eu-

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thanasia but felt it was his role to support the decision of his patients. He commented that in his experience about 90% of people who apply for euthanasia do not continue with it.

Sjoerd's death notice:

"Full admiration for the way he accepted the inevitable and made the farewell easier for us. We inform you that our dear father, father in law, grandfather, brother, brother in law, uncle and friend has left".

Politics:

We have a capitalist system...