

To: Victorian Legislative Council

Legal & Social Issues Committee

Date: 15 June 2015

Enquiry into the End of Life Choices

Dear committee.

I would like to make the following submission to this enquiry. This is my first ever submission to any organization, so please forgive any procedural errors.

I am a 61 year old Australian male, and other than a cancer scare 3 years ago, I am in very good health.

I have always had an interest in this subject through my following life experiences.

If you asked me what is my earliest memory where I can remember my age, it was when I was 4 years old. Our family would always have Christmas dinner at Uncle Newt, and Aunty Thelma's house. This year I noticed that Aunty Thelma wasn't at the table. We were told she was not well. Later that day, all the children were sent into her bedroom to wish her a merry Christmas. I can still see the skeleton that was in the bed. I cannot remember what I thought, but that vision is still in my head.

My father died when I was 15 years old, and my mother brought up my sisters and I. She was not interested in meeting any other men, as she would say, she was looking forward to joining our father. 21 years after my father died, she had a stroke whilst hanging out the washing, and was lying on the ground for 36 hours, before someone found her.

She was taken to hospital, where it was determined that she had extreme hypothermia, and was paralysed. All she could muster the strength to say was "let me go and join your father". The doctors were saying they could keep her alive, but she would never recover, and no improvement was possible. We decided to follow mum's wishes and thankfully she only lasted four days. We were torn with our wish to keep our mother alive, and to know that she would be with dad soon.

From my mid teens, my best friend was Larry Way. We did the second half of secondary school together. In our twenties, we went to the cricket and football together. We married around the same time, and our children grew up together. Larry was divorced when he was about 40 years old. Larry was 49 years old when he was diagnosed with advanced bowel cancer. Larry lasted about another 18 months. We spoke about death, as nothing was taboo between us. He wasn't afraid of dying, because he saw it as inevitable to us all. He was concerned about his two children, and them having to watch him slowly die, in front of their eyes. He ended up in palliative care. He became more sedated, and less and less conscious. It was at his bedside with his early 20's children that I learn't that under medication, there are 9 seconds between breaths. Can you imagine sitting at the bedside of a loved one, or dear friend and counting to 9 to see if they were still with us? Only to

start the count again after a breath. I don't know how the kid's felt, but I struggled to sleep the nights I visited him, and I only visited him 3 or four times a week. Larry's children were there every night.

However, this is not about his children, or my sleepless nights. It is about Larry. He knew death was imminent, and he knew what his children were going to go through. He spoke to me about their grieving process, and when would it start. He wanted them to have a normal grieving process, starting from his actual death, but it would probably start earlier when he was unconscious

Larry's last words to his children was 7 days before his passing away.

I consider myself a good Christian and was brought up going to a Methodist/Uniting church. I believe all God's creatures were created equal.

What I have never been able to understand is that no one disputes when we euthanize an injured animal, yet when it comes to a person with an incurable disease, who will die in the near future, we cannot (under very strict requirements), do the same for them.

Larry should have been able to apply for voluntary euthanasia. Obviously this would be under strict requirements. I believe this would include two doctors, a Psychologist, and a lawyer.

For those with a religious belief that voluntary euthanasia is against God's will, let me remind them that God loves all his creatures equally. If possible he wants them to be healed. Do you seriously think God wants people to suffer. Those last 7 days of Larry's life, everyone involved suffered, including Larry. He, in fact, suffered from the day he went into palliative care. Just knowing his children were just watching his chest to see if it was his last breathe. No one wants to see their family suffer, and I know for a fact Larry didn't. Does anyone on this committee want to die like Larry died?

In conclusion, I would like to say that I do not believe that there is any logical reason why a person with an incurable disease, with maybe weeks to live, cannot choose to take something to end it peacefully. I believe it is the most basic of human rights.

I sincerely ask the committee to recommend a Bill be written to allow voluntary euthanasia under strict controls.

If appropriate, I would also like to appear in front of the committee.

Thanks for the opportunity to put my point of view to the committee. I will be overseas from 28th July to 17th August.

Robert Peters

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