

CALIFORNIA RIGHT TO LIFE

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Established 1981

October 2003

COURT-ORDERED STARVATION FOR DISABLED FLORIDA WOMAN

by Cecilia H. Martin and Jackie Doucette

The current struggle to save the life of Terri Schiavo is of great importance nationwide because of the deadly precedent that could be set allowing euthanasia for disabled people. Here is an eyewitness account of the courtroom proceedings.

September 11 opened ominously for Robert Schindler. This was the long awaited day, the day of the “death hearing,” the day he would hear Florida probate Judge George W. Greer issue a starvation order for his 39-year-old daughter, Theresa Schindler Schiavo. Bob Schindler and his wife, Mary, have been battling with Terri’s husband, Michael Schiavo, her court appointed guardian, ever since she mysteriously collapsed thirteen years ago. The last five years have been spent trying to prevent the Florida courts from granting Michael’s petition to remove her feeding tube through which she receives food and water.

Although brain damaged, Terri smiles at her mother and is capable of a limited range of actions. A number of medical experts believe Terri can learn to eat and drink on her own, but the courts denied a swallowing test. Thirteen doctors have testified that she is not in a persistent, vegetative state (PVS). Nevertheless, the courts have consistently ruled in favor of Michael Schiavo in his pursuit of Terri’s death. After Michael was awarded in excess of a million dollars from a malpractice suit, he remembered that Terri once said she never wanted to live on life support systems and began preparing for her funeral.

As Bob Schindler apprehensively approached the courthouse, he saw a number of supporters holding signs, “Let Terri Live.” When Schindler entered Judge Greer’s courtroom accompanied by his son and daughter, he quickly realized that most, if not all of the occupants were either supporters of Terri or members of the media. Nearly everyone was dressed in black. Meanwhile, Terri’s mother was at the St. Petersburg Hospice at her daughter’s bedside.

A hearing planned for thirty minutes at most, turned into a three-hour struggle between the Schindler’s two female lawyers, Pat Anderson and co-counsel Celia Bachman and Schiavo’s right-to-die advocate, George Felos. Anderson and Bachman were outstanding in their defense of Terri’s constitutional rights. Anderson read into the record the statements of two speech-language pathologists who claim Terri is an excellent candidate for rehabilitation.

Bachman presented new insights on Florida’s guardianship laws, laws that apparently have been ignored by Schiavo and the administrative system. She forcefully demanded the court do its duty to see that Terri’s welfare and rights are secured.

When a soft-spoken Greer asked shouldn’t he schedule a date to remove the feeding tube, Bachman fired back, “...fine, go ahead. But your obligation is to give her a transition into being able to eat naturally, by herself, because doing anything else is against the law, against Florida statutes, and it is state-assisted homicide.” Anderson came in with a thrusting challenge, “...guess what – Terri never said she didn’t want to eat.”

Felos went pale. “Terri wants to die,” he said. He said she *must* die, because this is what she wanted. “We owe it to Terri.” The previously solemn crowd yelled “NO.” Felos consistently referred to Terri as PVS and a “lifeless human.” He characterized the Schindlers’ efforts in trying to save their daughter’s life

as “ludicrous” and a “waste of the court’s time.” He accused Terri’s parents of “creating confusion” with their desperation tactics. Lastly, Felos played the religion card.

Felos claimed that Father Gerard Murphy, a former St. Petersburg priest who gave inaccurate and muddled testimony regarding euthanasia in Terri’s case several years ago, was the “end-of-life” spokesman for the St. Petersburg diocese. Felos attempted to use the priest’s statement to prove that the Catholic diocese was in favor of euthanasia. Anderson countered Felos’ statement regarding Fr. Murphy’s testimony saying the priest was not speaking on behalf of the diocese but was expressing his personal views. It is well recognized that the Catholic Church opposes euthanasia.

As the noon hour approached, Judge Greer’s announcement to postpone scheduling until the next week so that he may study the latest presentations came as a much-welcomed surprise to all. For the time being, prayer trumped politics and evil in a Florida courtroom.

Update: Sept. 18, 2003

Order for Starvation Death Goes Forward

Pinellas county Judge George Greer set the date for Theresa Schindler Schiavo's feeding tube to be removed on October 15, 2003 at 2:00 p.m. He denied a request made by Terri's parents, Bob and Mary Schindler, for Terri to be given an eight week period of rehabilitative therapy as well as a motion that their daughter be taught to swallow food so that she may be spoon-fed once the abdominal tube is removed.

The Schindlers have now filed a federal law claiming that Theresa Schiavo's constitutional rights as well as those guaranteed under the Persons with Disabilities Act have been violated. The next hearing is set for October 10.

Please keep Terri and her family in your prayers! For more details, visit www.terrisfight.org.

(Abridged, reprinted with permission)

UPCOMING EVENTS

CALIFORNIA RIGHT TO LIFE IS PLEASED TO PRESENT

Eric J. Scheidler

**Communications Director
of the Pro-Life Action League**

Friday, October 24, 2003 6:00PM

Walnut Creek Civic Arts Building

111 Ygnacio Valley Road

Walnut Creek, CA

Reserve your spot by calling us now!

A Feminist View on Life Issues

Serrin Foster, President, Feminists for Life

Monday, October 27 @ 7:30 PM

St. Vincent de Paul Young Adult Group

2320 Green Street (at Steiner St.) San Francisco

Contact: Thomas Jarocki StVincent'sYAG@aol.com

Tuesday, October 28, 2003

Pyramid Alehouse

901 Gilman St. Berkeley 7:30 PM

Wednesday, October 29

St. Isidore Parish,

440 La Gonda Way, Danville CA 7:30 PM

\$5 suggested donation

Contact *Jennette Cabot* 838-2182 or *Shelley Britanik* at 964-1375 Tbritanik@aol.com

Feminists for Life is a grassroots, non-sectarian organization that opposes all forms of violence including abortion, infanticide, assisted suicide, child abuse, and exploitation of women and children.

Oakland, Saturday November 8 – Life Legal Defense Foundation’s annual banquet at the Bellevue Club on Lake Merritt in Oakland, featuring Grover G. Norquist, President of Americans for Tax Reform. Contact Mary Riley at 707-224-6675 for further information.

Marin County, Saturday November 15th -- The Marin County Respect Life Committee presents Wesley J. Smith, attorney for the International Task Force on Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide, author of Forced Exit, Culture of Death and numerous articles speaking on the important issues of euthanasia and physician assisted suicide. Potluck dinner starts at 5:45 PM at St. Sebastian Church hall. For details and reservations, call Vicki Evans at 415-945-0180.

AROUND THE OFFICE

The month of September brought the beginning of the school year, and several student requests. A group of pro-life students in a speech class at Cal State Fullerton featured us in their first speech of the year. We also had the opportunity to assist several other students in obtaining pro-life and abstinence materials for papers. From “early indications” it looks to be a busy and exciting year, as so many students are expressing an interest in pro-life and abstinence topics. The tide is turning and our youth are seeing the dignity and value in every human life from the single-cell stage to natural death.

With the autumn of the year comes the annual payroll deduction charitable fund drives. Local Independent Charities, our major organizer of events, offered us several opportunities to come and speak to employee groups about our organization in order to gain payroll deduction contributions. We were well received at all of the events. A BIG “Thank You” to the volunteers who joined Cecelia at these events. Please consider designating CALIFORNIA RIGHT TO LIFE EDUCATION FUND as a designated agency on your charitable giving payroll deduction form. If you need any assistance in filling out the form, contact this office. We are a 501(c)(3) non-profit eligible for United Way, Combined Federal Campaign and other workplace charitable giving campaigns.

A special thank you to all our monthly and quarterly supporters. Your generous and continued support of California Right to Life Education Fund allowed us to purchase a lot of new materials in the past month including several items for our Abstinence Program and Pro-Life supplies for our Mall Tables.

A display of many of our materials will be featured at the Eric Scheidler Banquet, allowing you to see what your donations provide.

If we may be of any assistance to you in your pro-life efforts, by providing pamphlets, speakers, etc., please feel free to contact our office. Normal office hours are 9-12 Monday through Friday.

Two Mothers

- By Donna Saunders

They were both in their twenties.
Both Beautiful and young.
And God created life within them.

They each conceived because God designed it so.
Yet neither one was planned.
One child however was conceived in love,
within a marriage
And realizing that new life was forming – they rejoiced.
The other child was conceived from violence – a rape.
At a party and drugged,
She awoke to this trauma, this violation. She grieved.
When she discovered a life growing within her,
She rejected any loving thoughts toward it.
She denied it.

Each child grew.
A doctor monitored one –
watching and measuring the growth
God watched and formed each of them in secret,
One Mom wore her new clothes with pride,
Tenderly touching her womb
Just as “Expectant Moms” do.
The other hid her growing womb,
Wearing tight clothing to minimize,
And large tops to hide.

Family anticipated and rejoiced with one
Family didn't even know with the other.

Their time approached.
One anticipated with joy.
One with fear and dread.

And God's plans prevailed.
His purpose for each one.

One born into the family he will be raised with,
The other relinquished,
IN LOVE – in adoption
To a family of God's choosing.

Two mothers – no three.
Two go home with babes in arm.
The other alone.
Alone in her pain.
Alone in her secret.

Lord let her glimpse the plan you have for her
and for her child.
Meet her in her need and heal her.
Oh great Physician – Creator of Life
Reach down and rescue this lost young woman
Loving her through me.

Counseling for Abortion Alternatives

October is Respect Life month – time for our annual listing of pro-life pregnancy help resources; you might want to keep this handy for future reference!

Birthright (800) 550-4900

www.birthright.org

Free pregnancy testing, support services, community resource information on housing, medical care referrals, infant & maternity clothes, and adoption referrals.

Nurturing Network (800) TNN-4-MOM (-4666)

www.nurturingnetwork.org

Support network for pregnant women. Educational, and employment assistance, as well as medical, residential and counseling services.

Gabriel Project (800) 910-0191

www.gabrielproject.com

Church based support system and pregnancy help hotline to assist anyone in need due to a pregnancy related crisis.

Pregnancy Centers (800) 395-HELP

www.optionline.org

Free pregnancy testing and counseling; information on abortion and other alternatives; medical, legal & community resource referrals; childbirth & parenting classes, maternal and infant clothing, baby furniture, adoption referrals.

Crisis Pregnancy Hotline 800-848-LOVE (5683)

<http://www.pregnancycenters.org/batesville>

The Crisis Pregnancy Hotline is committed to helping to provide pregnant women a place to call where they can anonymously receive counseling and support to allow them to make an informed decision about their pregnancy. referrals to agencies where she can receive financial and medical aid, clothes, and shelter.

America's Crisis Pregnancy Helpline

(800) 67-BABY-6 /(800-672-2296)

www.thehelpline.org

Provide education and information concerning prenatal care, nutrition, fetal development, or possible complications during your pregnancy, your options including abortion and adoption questions.

Project Rachel / After the Choice 1-877-HOPE-4-ME.

www.rachelsvineyard.org

A retreat program that helps those suffering after abortion in a group setting, usually over a weekend, or several evenings.

Life-Saving Baby Doctors

The Story of My TTTS Twin Girls

By Katie Fast

Medical professionals routinely recommend abortion for pre-natal complications, often because they do not know of alternative treatments such as this in-utero surgery. If you or someone you know are diagnosed with serious complications of pregnancy, seek the advice of a pro-life physician. Call our office for a referral: (925) 944-5351.

On a sunny morning in late July last year, I stopped by the perinatologist's office at California Pacific Medical Center in San Francisco for what I thought would be a routine ultrasound. I was 16 ½ weeks pregnant with our identical twins and was just thrilled at being pregnant. At my appointment, the ultrasound technician very professionally went about the business of scanning and measuring our babies. Our perinatologist, Dr. Carl Otto, then came in after reviewing the ultrasound pictures with a grim, drawn look. "I'm so sorry to tell you, but your babies are suffering from Twin-to-Twin Transfusion Syndrome," he said. I sat, stunned, not knowing what it was, but presumed it was serious. He provided me with devastating information and statistics that confirmed my fears.

Twin-to-Twin Transfusion Syndrome (TTTS) is a disease that strikes about 10% of all identical twin pregnancies. In the US, it affects over 7,500 babies—or 3,800 pregnancies—each year. This serious condition occurs when twins share a single placenta, which contains blood vessels connecting the twins' blood streams. In a sense they are like conjoined (or Siamese) twins, but are connected in the placenta instead of their bodies. One baby (the recipient) may get too much blood, while the other (the donor) is losing blood through the abnormal connections. The recipient may die in heart failure from a cardiovascular system overload, and subsequent over-production of quarts of amniotic fluid. The donor may die from the loss of blood, and tends to have very little amniotic fluid. The loss rate may be as high as 80 to 100 percent for twins who develop TTTS in the second trimester. TTTS babies may die in the uterus or at birth from prematurity. More than half those who survive suffer from many serious birth defects including cerebral palsy.

There were several courses of treatment that Dr. Otto discussed with me that day. One was reducing the excess amniotic fluid that developed around the recipient baby, done via amniocenteses. At a 50% chance of surviving twins, this procedure might balance the amount of amniotic fluid surrounding each baby and hopefully spur the placenta into regularity once again. Another was an in-utero surgery called fetoscopic laser occlusion of the connecting vessels, pioneered by obstetrician Dr. Julian E. De Lia. Because of the situation's urgency, Dr. Otto recommended an amniocentesis within the next hour, and that I call Dr. De Lia later to learn more about his surgery.

Terrified and panicked, I called my husband from the doctor's office. We agreed to do the amnioreduction right away. I sat in the doctor's office lobby by myself and cried openly. I felt hopeless and helpless, wanting to save the babies who were struggling for life inside of me but not knowing how. Dr. Otto took 2 liters of fluid from my uterus that day, and ordered me to remain on bed rest until my appointment 4 days later.

I left a message that very day for Dr. De Lia. He called me from his home in Milwaukee late that same night, and spoke to my husband and me for nearly an hour about TTTS and its treatment. He then told us more about the placental laser procedure.

The technique uses a small 3.5millimeter scope to identify, and then use the laser to coagulate the connecting vessels between the twins. The twins become separate and the passage of blood from one to the other stops. The surgery is performed in "pre-viable" pregnancies (less than 25 weeks), where delivery of the TTTS twins is not an option. Dr. De Lia told us that for now, my best bet was to stay on bed rest and continue the amniocenteses if necessary.

One agonizing week later, and after a second amnioreduction of 1 more liter of fluid, the TTTS appeared to be getting worse. The twins' size difference was greater, our recipient's heart was starting to thicken, and Dr. Otto felt the future bleak for the twins without Dr. De Lia's laser surgery. Mary and the TTTS Foundation arranged for us to fly complementary on Milwaukee's Midwest Airlines. They have a program called 'Miracle Miles,' where frequent fliers donate mileage so that families with sick children can fly to

leading medical centers for treatment.

I underwent the laser surgery on August 14th, 2002, at only 18 1/2 weeks of pregnancy. The surgery, which Dr. De Lia pioneered, is a miracle to thousands of otherwise hopeless expectant parents. In 90% of the cases where the operation is performed, at least one twin survives, and in 68% both twins live. Less than two percent of the survivors have any disabilities or birth defects, compared to up to 30% with some other treatments. Dr. De Lia began his TTTS research in 1983, and five years later the first placental laser surgery was performed October 3, 1988.

I sat waiting, following the surgery, hoping of course for the best outcome but still preparing for the worst. I was ordered to strict bed rest for the remainder of my pregnancy, which hopefully would last another 10 weeks, when they would be at 28 weeks' gestational age, a big milestone in the eyes of medical professionals.

On December 15th, 2002, over eighteen weeks after their in-utero surgery, our beautiful little angels Sophie and Sara were born.... small of course, but otherwise healthy and perfect. As I rub noses with these two tiny and delightful faces and hear their squeaks and babble, I am again overwhelmed with appreciation of what we have almost lost. Every August 14th on the anniversary of our babies' life-saving surgery, we will celebrate a little mini-milestone for the girls- the day they were given a second chance at living and thriving as they do today.

For further information, visit: www.TTTSfoundation.org or http://www.covhealth.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/www/cov_014262.hcsp