

HEMLOCK OF ILLINOIS

An affiliate of Final Exit Network -- Advancing the Right to Death With Dignity

March 2014

The World Federation is coming to Chicago! September 17 through 20, 2014

Mark your calendars for **September 17 through 20, 2014**, when the **World Federation of Right To Die Societies** comes to Chicago for its **Twentieth Biennial Conference**. The conference theme is "Dignity, Choice, Control...Around The World."

Come be inspired and learn how our vital movement is flourishing all over the world. Hear from activists from many countries, including Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Britain, Canada, China, Colombia, France, Ireland, Japan, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, South Africa and Switzerland.

The World Federation, founded in 1980, consists of 51 death-with-dignity organizations from 26 countries. The Federation provides an international link for organizations working to secure and protect the human right to self-determination at the end of life.

Final Exit Network is hosting the conference, and as the Illinois affiliate of FEN, Hemlock of Illinois will be in the thick of it. **It's a tremendous opportunity to publicize and build support for our movement.** We'll need many local volunteers to help make the conference a success.

The event starts with a reception on Wednesday evening, and continues all day Thursday through Saturday. There's a special gala dinner Friday evening. It's all at the beautiful Lakefront Embassy Suites Hotel in Chicago, at 511 N. Columbus Drive, in the fashionable Streeterville neighborhood. Just steps away from everything.

The conference website at **www.wfconf2014.com** has the tentative conference schedule and forms for registering online. The World Federation website is at **www.worldrtd.net**.

See you there – don't miss it !

The Exit Guide Program of Final Exit Network – What and Why

By Joan Sophie

"Until laws protect the right of every adult to a peaceful, dignified death, Final Exit Network will be there to support those who need relief from their suffering today!"

The purpose of the exit guide program is to provide this relief to members of Final Exit Network—FEN—who are suffering terribly from medical conditions that cannot be cured, for whom suffering and lost quality of life have become unbearable. Members requesting our services who meet the requirements for participation are given instruction in the helium method of self-deliverance. Here are answers to questions about the method and the program.

Why helium? Helium is a harmless inert gas that is lighter than air. It is commonly used to fill party balloons, and is therefore readily available to the public, as are all other materials needed to carry out this method of self-deliverance. Breathing only helium leads to a peaceful, rapid death, as the helium replaces oxygen in the air that the person exiting is breathing. Since carbon dioxide does not accumulate in the air you're breathing, there is no experience of suffocation.

What do exit guides do? Exit guides are trained volunteers who are members of FEN. Before describing what they do, I need to emphasize what they do *not* do. Guides do not aid, abet, assist, advise, or provide materials to anyone wishing to hasten death. Nor do they encourage or discourage anyone seeking a hastened death.

Then what do they do? The guides provide information, moral support, and peace of mind. If possible they will also provide a compassionate presence at the time of an exit for those who wish to have them there. Guides
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John Ashcroft Made An Activist Out of Me

By Ken Leonard

It was a flagrant abuse of power in 2003 by Attorney General John Ashcroft and President George W. Bush, when they tried to rewrite the constitution to prohibit the removal of a feeding tube from Terri Schiavo, a woman who had been diagnosed with massive brain damage thirteen years before. But were it not for this flagrant abuse, I would not have become an activist in the Death With Dignity movement.

A spurt of sudden and intense anger started me down this path. Before 2003 the only groups that I had invested my time, money, or effort into were trade associations and several Pro-Choice organizations. To find the connection that triggered my unusual outrage, I had to think back to 1995 and the circumstances surrounding the death of my wife Marcia. Let me share the evolution of this activist with you.

After 38 years of marriage to my high school sweetheart and living the life of a mid-level, much-transferred, retail executive, we had moved back to our Chicago roots to start our own consulting business and be closer to our grandchildren.

Unfortunately, in 1994 Marcia's annual breast exam interfered with our plans. It started when her doctor called to tell her "that her x-rays showed the possibility of a small irregularity which required her to come in again to be retested."

After the retest, our doctor still argued that it "was nothing." But his radiologist, who first discovered the spots, convinced Marcia to get a

second opinion. The highly respected specialist took one look at Marcia's x-rays and pronounced "surgery was needed."

Trying not to panic, we decided that the situation called for a third opinion. The news was not good. Our third doctor was adamant that Marcia's cancer be treated immediately.

Two days later, her surgery was a complete success, with clean margins all around. Her surgeon was so pleased with her work that she did not think any further chemotherapy or radiation was necessary.

Our hearts soared at the news, and within a few weeks Marcia was back exercising and enjoying her life. She passed her six-month check up with flying colors and our family breathed a huge sigh of relief.

A few months later, I started noticing her increasing inability to keep up with me on our evening walks. I insisted we see her doctor immediately. This time the news was terrible and her doctor had her admitted to the hospital. Her tests came back showing that a cell or two of this "innocent early stage cancer" had eluded the surgeon's knife and had aggressively metastasized throughout her body, including most of her bones and her brain.

Despite the seriousness of the diagnosis, we supported her in her decision to start chemotherapy. Unfortunately, within a day after her first treatment, she became so weak and sick that her pain could not be relieved. By the second day her suffering had increased, and she collapsed in my arms on the way to the bathroom. We called for an ambulance, and the family followed her to the hospital.

By the time she got to the hospital, she was in a coma and immediately sent to the ICU. We were lucky to find an unusually compassionate doctor on duty that night, and after our considerable prodding, he reluctantly gave us his prognosis. He predicted that she might be in and out of a coma for the next two or three weeks, but there was nothing more that could be done and death was inevitable.

We told the doctor that her wishes had been made clear to all of us. She wanted no

About Hemlock of Illinois

Founded in the 1980's, **Hemlock of Illinois** is the Illinois affiliate of **Final Exit Network**, one of three major national groups advancing the right to death with dignity. Please join us.

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Final Exit Network is at www.finalexitnetwork.org or 866-654-9156.

John Ashcroft Made An Activist Out of Me (continued)

resuscitation, no extreme measures. If there was no hope, she didn't want to suffer. With an understanding nod of his head, he walked to her bedside and increased the flow of morphine. Within the hour Marcia died peacefully.

Having seen my wife's suffering, something snapped in me on that day in 2003 when I read a New York Times editorial about the Terri Schiavo case. Attorney General John Ashcroft had brought the entire weight of his Justice Department down on the head of a Florida man named Michael Schiavo. And it was all because he had tried to allow his wife Terri to die a peaceful death. It struck me as horribly wrong for Mr. Ashcroft and his fellow "born-again" members of the Bush administration to try to impose their extremist beliefs on Michael's attempt to allow Terri to die with some dignity.

I was never a fan of the Bush administration, but this latest bit of news angered me deeply. Perhaps it was because the feelings I had about Marcia's death were still fresh. I could relate to how I would react if placed in Michael's position. I decided to look into the Schiavo matter further.

The facts in the matter were clear. In 1990 Terri had a heart attack which left her in a coma. For the next eight years Michael and Terri's family, the Schindlers, had taken Terri to medical specialists to try to find some hope for a recovery or spark of mental activity. But every diagnosis was the same: Terri was in a Persistent Vegetative State, or PVS.

By 1998 Michael had given up hope of any kind of recovery and decided to honor his wife's oft-repeated wishes. Terri had expressed a desire not to remain alive if there was no longer any quality of life or hope for recovery. He began to arrange for removal of her feeding tube so she could die in accordance with her wishes.

However, since Terri's heart attack, her mother had become involved with several fundamentalist groups, and filed a lawsuit to prevent the removal of the feeding tube. Her actions started a series of fourteen lawsuits over the next five years. Although she and her sponsoring groups lost each one, she appealed to Florida's Governor Jeb Bush to help.

Governor Bush attempted to invalidate the court's rulings by passing a new state law

specifically designed to prevent Terri's tube removal. When that law was ruled invalid, he contacted his brother, President George W. Bush and Attorney General Ashcroft. Ashcroft wrote a new Federal law to invalidate the court's rulings, and President Bush signed the act into law. However, two years later the Supreme Court overruled the Bush/ Ashcroft law.

I learned also that during the public debate in 2003, Tom DeLay, the House majority leader, said that "Terri had been brought to us by God to elevate the visibility of what's going on in America." Dr. Bill Frist, the Senate majority leader, viewed three minutes of a heavily edited six hour tape showing Terri's random movements while lying in her hospital bed and declared that she was "lucid" and "seemed responsive to visual stimuli". I also read about the leak of a Republican memo calling Terri "a great political issue for the Conservative base."

I decided to become more knowledgeable about the circumstances surrounding an individual's right to die. I learned that there were several local, national, and international groups dedicated to helping people die a dignified death and working to change archaic state laws.

The only organization I could find within a hundred miles of my home was Hemlock of Illinois, a local affiliate of the national group Final Exit Network. I joined it, anxious to get started challenging the stranglehold that extremists have on what I consider to be a basic civil right. My main interest was to join a crusade for Illinois residents to have the same civil rights to choose a "good death" as did residents of Washington and Oregon.

After joining all three of the major organizations involved in the movement, I started receiving stories about the many families facing terrible choices similar to Michael Schiavo's. My frustration grew as I read the horror stories that were sent to my computer from clipping services around the world.

Since 2011, I have spoken with many of the national leaders of our movement and have learned that it won't be easy or cheap to run an Illinois campaign to change the law. But with help from other pro-choice organizations like humanist and women's rights groups, I am confident that we will eventually be successful.

The Exit Guide Program (continued from page 1)

use their knowledge and experience to help the person seeking self-deliverance avoid mistakes, so that they can carry out their exit in an effective, peaceful way.

What is the process to receive these services? The first step is for the member to call FEN's toll-free number—**866-654-9156**. A case coordinator will return the member's call and explain the process. The applicant will need to obtain medical records from their doctor and to write a letter explaining their situation and why they are contemplating hastening death. A volunteer then interviews the applicant by phone.

The medical committee then reviews the application to assess the appropriateness of the request. If they decide to grant provisional approval to the applicant, two exit guides will be assigned to work with the applicant from then on. Guides speak to the applicant by phone, visit the applicant at home, explain the helium method and answer the applicant's questions.

Guides also explain—repeatedly—that the applicant is in control of the process right up to the final moment. The decision of whether to proceed with the exit is totally up to the member who is contemplating self-deliverance.

Why do I need an exit guide? Couldn't I do all this on my own? Perhaps. But trying to exit and making a mistake could leave the member more impaired and suffering more than he/she was before. And that would be a tragedy!

This sounds expensive! What does this cost? Nothing. Exit guide services are provided free of charge to members. That's why everybody should join and support Final Exit Network. Membership dues are \$50 per year and should be mailed to **Final Exit Network**, at **PO Box 10071, Tallahassee FL 32302**. Or contribute online at **www.finalexitnetwork.org**.

To sum up: To reach the Exit Guide Program, call Final Exit Network at **866-654-9156** and leave your number. They'll call you back.

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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

Mark your calendars and register today!
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Wednesday-Saturday. September 17-20, 2014, Chicago
Info at www.wfconf2014.com and www.worldrtd.net