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Dying People Should Not Be Tortured

My wife, Marjorie Haw Russell, died from ovarian cancer on the 27th of May, 2007 at 9:30 P.M. She was buried at 8 o'clock the next morning in the family's Green Cemetery.

A few memories of her final days are vivid. After she had seen her 19th great grand child on May 18 she told most of her visitors that she was now ready to go.

I could have held her hand while she pushed a button to take her on her way to the promised land. God was calling her home and a misguided Texas government denied her this right. If I had granted her wish I could have ended up in jail like Dr. Kevorkian. Sad!

My serious question is "If Heaven is such a great place, why do we torture old people when God is calling by doing everything possible to keep them alive?"

To those who say "God knows best," I say "God never acts alone." When you do not help God, then God will not help you. It is teamwork between you and God. Otherwise the Devil takes over.

For three or four days before she died, Marjorie lost control of her functions. Why should she have been put through this embarrassment and loss of dignity when she was so ready to go on this mysterious adventure into the unknown?

Her diary tells a beautiful story about her discomfort but she apparently never experienced excruciating pain, or she was very clever in hiding. She wrote in her diary in a shaky handwriting until the 5th of May. She placed only a check mark on the 6th and 7th. On the 8th, 9th, and 10th, she wrote the names of the caretakers who came from the "Consider the Lilies" agency. May 11 through 15 the pages are blank. Then on the 16th through the morning of the 27th, she asked visitors to write in her diary.

On the 27th her hands and feet became cold early in the evening and then she took her last breath in the arms of her granddaughters at 9:30 while I held her hand. She died with her eyes slightly open with a smile on her face. I sat with her alone in the early morning of the 28th. I took her picture. She was as beautiful in death as she was in life.

Had we lived in Oregon she would have had the freedom to have a physician help her go peacefully. It is possible she would have declined the help, but at least she would have had control. And merely having this power could have given her a measure of comfort.

Kevorkian attempted to restore the right to self-determination that every state government with the exception of Oregon takes from its citizens.

Many Americans are blind to the suffering and are confused regarding what it means to do right by the dying.

Despite advances in pain management, many people will leave this world in horrible pain and suffering because certain people have decided that in our final stage of life, you and I should no longer be allowed to manage our own affairs. In the time of greatest need, the liberties which we have had all our lives will be taken away by the government and we will be left at the mercy of a killer disease.

There would seem to be added dignity in being able to take freedom all the way to the grave. People who oppose this freedom to ease our passing worry about the control issue. Some fear that terminally ill people will be talked into an early death.

Others worry about “playing God.” To me this is not a valid concern. I think that those who worry about playing God do not understand that God is a loving God and abhors causing pain in his children. Human beings are often responsible for each other. Every day of our lives we “play God” especially to our family and friends. Playing God is only human.

Some people oppose assisted death on the grounds that God’s will must prevail until some sort of “natural death” occurs. These same people have no problem with medicines, tests, and techniques used to prolong the lives of people with a terminal disease.

Many religious people sincerely ask, “What would God do?” I believe that God would give the suffering their freedom to choose how to take care of themselves in their final days. He would let them decide how to best satisfy their needs with those they love.

To do anything else would seem to be an evil kind of god-playing, one that says, “We will control you and your loved ones in life and in death.”

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Kenneth L. Russell, Professor of Education, Emeritus, Sam Houston State University Huntsville, Texas; was born on a farm near Chilhowee, Missouri on Easter Sunday, April 16, 1911.

He is founder of The Educational Video Network, Inc, also known as Educational Filmstrips, and producer of best selling titles such as “Understanding Money and Inflation” and “Parliamentary Procedure in Action” used in classrooms across the US and around the world.

Russell, 96, is a member of Kappa Delta Pi, Phi Delta Kappa, American Association of University Professors, Who’s Who in American Education, President of Alpha Gamma Sigma, University of Missouri, 1933-34. Famous the world over for his publications on Economics, Government, and Parliamentary Procedure, and showing no signs of slowing down, it is obvious that Russell has no intentions of “retiring”.

Russell and his lovely bride of 72 years, Marjorie, have three children. Together Kenneth and Marjorie co-founded the Universal Ethician Church and the Ethician Family Cemetery with their son George and his wife Sue.