

THEIR CHOICE, OUR RESPONSIBILITY

An Excerpt

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NOW

The only way you are going to give the right answer then is to spend some time now, right now, finding out what it is. You see, it is not YOUR answer that you must give.

There are lots of books and essays and columns and articles that will give you all the reasons why your answer should be one way or the other. The correct answer is the one your loved one has decided he or she wants you to give. At that moment, your answer can and only should be, their answer.

Start with how we got to that point that day.

We left on July 19th and drove down to my parents in Chicago. We left such a mess in Madison. Victoria had a bladder infection, and we had to stop often and her mobility, an issue for the past couple years, started to haunt us. CJ and I had to empty the moving trailer and completely repack it at my parent's house to get a better weight distribution. We left in the afternoon of the 20th but only averaged 90 minutes of driving before Victoria had to have a restroom break. That went on for the next 4 days as we traveled, every 90 minutes or so a bathroom break and every other stop we got gas. Fortunately, the AC worked as it was close to 100 degrees most days.

We arrived on Monday very early (July 26th) and slept until mid-day. We started looking for a place to live that afternoon. On Tuesday Victoria did not feel well and on Wednesday she didn't want to go out and slept most of the day. [NOW, I know she had a stroke.] And by Sunday, August 1, she was in the hospital.

Victoria was diabetic and had high blood pressure. For almost thirty years she took medicine, saw doctors and cheated on both. That is not an indictment, it is life with chronic illness. The only way to keep ahead of the problems is to keep doing what you are supposed to do even when you

feel fine and everything seems ok. It is one of the reasons almost every household in America has a medicine bottle with two or three antibiotics left in it.

Victoria's health had been slowly declining for several years and she was reaching a point where the complications were piling onto each other. It was not a matter of what next but of, what now.

Victoria was an attorney and in early 2005 she was interviewed on local TV concerning the Terri Schiavo case. Victoria spoke about the importance of living wills and health care powers of attorney but the most important thing she said was for people to make sure their friends and family knew, preferably in writing, what they wanted in the event of something like Terri Schiavo's situation.

Terri Schiavo had a heart attack and suffered severe brain damage as a result of lack of oxygen. For years she was maintained on life support and when her husband sought to end it, Terri's family fought him. The fight went to the Supreme Court and eventually even Congress and the President were dragged into it. Never had there been a media circus like it around something so devastating to the people actually involved.

She and I talked about it often in the context of her clients, but also for each other. Both of us knew people that had been kept alive on machines for extended periods and neither of us wanted that for ourselves.

For Victoria, the stroke was the final straw that killed her kidneys. She would require dialysis for the rest of her life three hours a day, three times a week. Victoria would spend most of the next four months in the hospital.