

After Nancy Cruzan: ‘societal consensus’ or consensus for suicide

by Linda Everett

After 12 days of court-ordered starvation and dehydration, Nancy Beth Cruzan, the permanently handicapped 33-year-old whose family obtained a state court’s permission to kill her, died on Dec. 26.

This was no crime in which Americans were innocent bystanders or simply observers—they were accomplices. People scrambled to give their opinion on when and how incompetent patients would or should be killed—no matter that their opinions were crafted by the ideological stalwarts and inheritors of the Euthanasia Council, the American Eugenics Society, and the Malthusian League—all verifiable supporters of the Nazi practice of eliminating illness by “state health control”—that is, extermination. For nearly five years, the media, the euthanasia lobby, the Cruzan family and their attorneys promoted lies about Nancy Cruzan to get the general population to rationalize her murder and that of thousands of other vulnerable individuals like her. Euthanasia advocates in judicial and medical layers whipped up enough fear of “ending up” like Cruzan to legalize murder through documents like the living will and durable powers of attorney, which federal Medicare officials have now clinched as their latest mandatory cost-containment tool.

Such “personal” opinions and premature death arrangements not only added a nail to Nancy Cruzan’s coffin, but also “nailed” our Judeo-Christian culture, with its belief in the innate worthiness of each human life, no matter its enfeebled condition. Right-to-die enthusiasts see the paganism that’s left in its place as the product of a “societal consensus.” However, once the lies of Cruzan’s killing are exposed, should Americans refuse to act in the tradition of the United States—the only nation to bring to trial the Nazi doctors for the crime of euthanasia—then we might more honestly say that what we face is a “suicidal consensus.”

Sanctity of life, not quality of life

Nancy Cruzan sustained severe brain damage as the result of an auto accident in Carthage, Missouri in 1983. Although Missouri law clearly prohibited starving patients to death, Nancy’s parents, Joe and Joyce Cruzan, requested her doctors at the Missouri Rehabilitation Center to stop all feeding.

The hospital, a state-run facility, refused.

In 1987 the Cruzans petitioned the Jasper County Probation Court, where Judge Charles Teel approved their request to kill their daughter. His decision was overruled the following year by Missouri’s Supreme Court, which held that the state’s interest in the preservation of life encompassed not only the life of an individual, but included an interest in the sanctity of life itself. The court said that the state’s interest in the preservation of life was *not* qualified by an individual’s quality of life, as other previous pro-euthanasia rulings had claimed nationally.

The Cruzans took their case to the U.S. Supreme Court, which, in its first ruling regarding euthanasia last June, decided that everyone has a constitutional right to die, and that states were not acting against those rights if, as in the case of Missouri, they asked for “clear and convincing evidence” of what patients who, like Nancy, are unable to speak for themselves, would have wanted, before allowing their families to kill them.

The Cruzans’ attorney, William H. Colby, of the firm Shock, Hardy and Bacon, found new “evidence” that Nancy would rather starve to death than continue living as a “vegetable.” The Cruzans returned to Judge Teel’s court last November, with a new petition to kill Nancy.

The only ones who could intervene and save Nancy refused. Missouri Attorney General William Webster, a former “pro-lifer” who sniffed a turn in the political wind and a future governorship, came out endorsing Missouri’s new right-to-be-starved law. He had the state removed from the case. The state’s interest in protecting the lives of patients in its care also evaporated when John Bagby took over as director of the Missouri Department of Health, which oversees the rehabilitation center where Nancy is cared for. Bagby’s predecessor, Dr. Robert Harmon, had vigorously opposed patient starvation and eventually resigned from his post. But Bagby was ready to “just follow orders,” saying, “I can conceive of no basis upon which I as director of the Department of Health or anyone under my supervision in that capacity, would refuse to carry out a lawful order of a court regarding a ward of the court.”

During the hearing and after Judge Teel ruled that Nancy's tiny feeding tube be removed on Dec. 14. Thad McCance, Nancy's court-appointed guardian, refused to intervene or appeal Teel's decision. He said that Nancy "died that night in 1983."

For the next 12 days, while people from across the country gathered in prayer and protest outside the rehabilitation center, state and federal courts repeatedly denied petitions filed by several groups and coalitions including Operation Rescue, Lawyers for Life, and Missouri Right to Life for guardianship of Nancy or for court orders to stop her starvation. The courts and religious leaders of various denominations chided the petitioners for attempting to intervene. The media, not missing a beat in using Cruzan's life—and death—to generate a profusion of murderous lies, now hailed Nancy's "accomplishments" in procuring her right to a "dignified" death, at last, by barbaric starvation.

The media's lies

Lie: Nancy was a "vegetable," "a piece of broken flesh that really had no meaning," an "empty shell of a body." Pro-death neurologist Ronald Cranford said that she was in a "persistent vegetative state," didn't feel a thing and just "looked alive." Even if all that *were* true, it's not a reason to kill.

Fact: Nancy's nurses at the Missouri Rehabilitation Center and hospital administrator Donald Lamkin stated, "Nancy was clearly aware of who walked into her room. She was not in a coma."

Fact: Rev. Ralph J. Duffner wrote in an affidavit to the court that as the center's chaplain in 1987, he visited Nancy several times, and observed her increased agitation and disturbance whenever the TV in her room broadcast news of her parents' legal fight to have her feeding ended. Reverend Duffner stated that on three different occasions, at intervals of several weeks, he went into Nancy's room when she was awake. "I announced myself as a Catholic priest, and said, 'Nancy, if you don't start talking, they are going to kill you.' The breathing of Nancy went from a normal pattern to one which was very rapid. I know she heard me. . . . I believe that Nancy Cruzan, even though she is unable to speak on her own . . . is against the procedure [starvation] the court has decided."

Fact: Nancy's nurses testified that she cried several times after her family visited or when cards were read to her. Cranford called this "mere reflex." Nancy was dosed with nervous system depressants three times a day, yet a film shows that she still grimaced, moaned, and pulled away from painful stimuli. The family won't show a film, which was shown in court, of Nancy smacking her lips and turning her head toward her nurse as she prepared her lunch. Her parents and nurses present comment, "Yes, she always does that."

Lie: The family and their attorney pointed to Nancy's contorted body, and talked of its continual debilitation.

Fact: Cruzan's family demanded a halt to Nancy's daily

rehabilitation and physical therapy, which would have assured both comfort and range of motion of her limbs.

Lie: Treating Nancy is prolonging her death. Why not let God be God, and let Nature takes its course?

Fact: Nancy depended on basic care and daily nutrition, given lovingly by her nurses, for seven years. The Missouri Supreme Court rejected the Cruzans' rationale in 1988, saying, "This is not a case in which we are asked to *let* someone die. . . . This is a case in which we are asked to allow the medical profession to *make* Nancy die."

Lie: The euthanasia mob threatens the elderly that if they do not sign living wills, they will end up like Nancy—filled with tubes and force-fed.

Fact: Court records show that Nancy was originally fed orally, drinking a glass of juice, and chewing and swallowing "whatever was put in her mouth"—mashed potatoes, bananas, poached eggs, and link sausage. A stomach tube was implanted to make long-term care easier. The right-to-die lobby blames technology for "prolonging death"—but a stomach tube was first used to save the life of a five-year-old who swallowed lye in 1896!

Lie: The media claim that nurses supported starving Nancy.

Fact: When Webster pulled out of the case, the center and its staff had no legal standing to oppose killing Nancy. The nurses overwhelmingly opposed it, and fear that their state-run facility will become the state's official killing center—and with good reason. The father of another of the center's patients, Cristine Busalacchi, handicapped since 1987, wants to move her to Minneapolis to starve her with the help of the same expert who helped the Cruzans, Ronald Cranford. Nurses told reporters: "I refuse to have anything to do with it, it's murder." "We love Nancy . . . [and won't] do something that is against everything we stand for."

Lie: The family repeatedly told the court, "This [starvation] is what Nancy would have wanted."

Fact: When asked if he wouldn't let someone else who loved Nancy adopt her, Joe Cruzan told a pro-life leader, "I cannot go on with my life until she is dead and buried." A witness says Cruzan told a Head Injury Support Group five years ago that "he was tired of the hassle and everything connected with Nancy's condition. . . . He was going to seek a way to disconnect her feeding tube, and if this could not be accomplished in [Missouri], he would take her into Kansas and finish the job himself."

Fact: The starvation ruling turned on conversations from 10 and 12 years ago which Nancy's alleged "friends" (one knew her for a month) happened to remember last October! Even if these *were* Nancy's views, they are wrong. Western civilization does not kill people because they would rather not be alive. Besides, not only do people change the views they once held as teenagers; it is well documented that after a stroke or serious injury, people who previously "opposed" life-saving care start to demand it.