

5. Northside-WR upsets No. 1 Lowndes

http://www.ajc.com/services/content/printedition/2009/03/22/goodwin0322.html

he was on the verge of quadriplegia. On the day of his death, his wife said, "Ted, he's going to ask you

whether or not you feel God and Christ would damn him for what he's about to do." He asked me that

question exactly the way she said he would. And I said, "No, I don't believe in a God, a compassionate God, or Christ, that would damn you for doing what you're doing." And I don't. And with that he closed his eyes and crossed himself and was muttering a silent prayer and never opened his eyes again.

Q: You talk about trying to give comfort in that moment. There's a reference (in the affidavit) to being with someone and holding their hands. Is that a grip of comfort or a grip of, "No, you shouldn't move your hands because if you do you could make this go bad?"

A: I hold their hands compassionately, and that's all I'm going to say.

Q: But you hold them?

A: Every time. They ask me to, generally. Sixty percent of the people that I've been with have had family with them. The other 40 percent have been alone. I believe that no one should die alone. This is one of the major tenets of our group. People, as they die, want someone to hold them. Holding their hand is the least that I can do.

Q: Earlier, you bristled when I said "assisted suicide." So, "right to die," "death with dignity," "compassion in death" --- how do you describe what you do?

A: What we are able to provide in these people is the hope that they will have a compassionate and loving group of supporters at the end who will enable them to do what is right for them at the time that is right for them.

Q: Some would say that's semantics; that basically what you're doing is helping somebody die.

A: We're not helping them. We do not assist them in any physical way. We do not provide the means for them to do this. We do not encourage them to do this. If anything we discourage them until we know that they've looked at all the medical options and all the other options; hospice care.

Q: The other day I had a doctor who does hospice care refer to Final Exit as "the snuffers."

A: Yes, there are those people who don't like our mission, who say we kill people. Within the right-to-die movement, you've got [some who] are focused on their legislative goals. They are willing to set aside the hopes, the needs of those who are non-terminally ill because they don't think they can bring in enough chips from legislators. They don't want their little boat rocked by people they consider to be these radical activists.

Q: Why not wait for a legislative approach?

A: We felt this wasn't moving fast enough, if at all. What you had in this country was the passage of the Oregon law, which guaranteed physician-assisted dying to terminally ill people in 1992. Initiatives in Hawaii, Maine, Vermont; these things came close in some cases but were beaten back. I had despaired of things (not) really happening without some sense of spark initiated. Every movement has had this. In the civil rights movement, the people that walked across the Edmund Pettis bridge, they're the ones who moved it forward, not people having drinks with legislators in the back room saying, "Gee wouldn't it be nice to give our people their civil rights."

Q: Why do you accept people who are not terminal?

A: Why should we make that decision for someone, that their suffering is any less than those that have, by the grace of God, a time limit on their suffering?

Q: Are you prepared to go to prison?

A: I hope not to go to jail. I don't think I've done anything wrong, and therefore I think it would be an injustice. But a test case will probably help clear the air. These [anti]assisted suicide laws have never been tested. It is a patchwork quilt of words that have no meaning unless someone puts meaning to them.

Q: What are your plans for your own death?

A: My plans are to die in bed surrounded by family with my boots off. But that is not given to any of us.... I don't believe in the nobility of suffering. There's nothing noble about suffering. And people who say that have never experienced suffering in a very meaningful way.

Q: You say the death is painless. There are doctors who say there's a 10 second window where there is extreme pain.

A: We will provide incontrovertible evidence in court that it is not the case. Look, after the horror I went through with my father's death, do you think I would be a party to have someone else suffer?

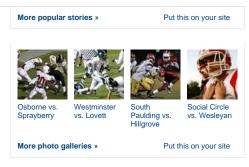
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