

The Murder of *Terri Schiavo*

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The murder of Terri Schiavo which was accomplished at approximately 0905 on Thursday March 31, 2005 in Pinellas Park, Florida has surely done more to advance the moral decay of the *United States of America* in a short period of time than any other single event in recent memory. The reason this one particular event has had, and will continue to have, such a rippling effect on the American society is because of its core connection to the very foundation of our country. The founding fathers of this nation sought to escape persecution, oppression, and tyranny of any type because they understood its direct effect on the quality of one's life. It was their love of life that drove them to undertake great hardships, to leave the comfort of their homes, and their families and friends, and to travel across an ocean to a certain unknown in order to experience freedom. It was their understanding of the origin of life being the *Creator* of all things, and that the *Creator* had indeed made all people equal, that motivated them to carefully craft the documents that now guide our governments and establish the rules and guidelines by which we now live our daily lives. It was a deep respect for life and the desire for a quality of life beyond that which rulers, and those which carried out the ruler's wishes, could provide that caused them to declare: "*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness –*"¹. It was their understanding that there were "*truths*" in the world, not some gray areas subject to change at the whims of society, but established and grounded facts. Axioms upon which the very core of the human race, even the planet Earth (upon which those very humans inhabit), existed and that these were "*self-evident*", obvious to any who cared to open their eyes and see, not needing to be taught, debated, or argued in a court of law, but rather were known by all from their birth. That among these "*self-evident*" "*truths*" were "*that all men are created equal*", establishing their understanding of the *Creator*, God who "*endowed*" (gifted) them with "*unalienable Rights*", rights that could not and can not be separated from them except that God, who granted them in the first place, take them away. And that among these *Rights* were "*Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness*", Life, existence, being, having been granted by God, and being incapable of being given by any person, should be held as a right, a privilege, and an entitlement to each and every person who walks the face of the earth. And so the founding fathers of this great nation of ours clearly and succinctly stated their understanding that humans were created by God, which God granted them Life, and that God granted them the right to a free and happy life. And it is that understanding, and that foundation upon which our nation was built, that is now being eroded and torn down. This is evident because in the case of Terri Schiavo, we (the people of this country) have now proclaimed ourselves to be the arbitrators of life, not the *Creator* who originally gave it, but rather the creation to whom it was given. And in the case of one single individual proclaimed ourselves capable of deciding that which the *Creator* himself chose not to decide, the quality and happiness of that single individual's life and when and how we should impose that individual's death.

¹ The Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson, July 4, 1776 – Second paragraph.

To understand the case we must understand the *self-evident* (or obvious) *truths* (facts) that the founding father's knew – that we humans are created by God and that no one here on earth, nor any other power evident in all of the universe, can create and sustain life other than God himself. And with that understanding we must also come to realize (as did the founding fathers) that each and every life around us has been *endowed* (gifted) by the *Creator* to that individual and that our governance or treatment of others life should be subjected to strict and well defined rules. When we enter into War, impose the Death Penalty within our judicial system, or act in the Self Defense of our own life or the life of those around us, we do not (and should not) do so lightly. We only undertake such measures because the action of others around us clearly displays a lack of regard and respect for life. Thus we impose measures to end the negative impact on others lives by those who hold life in such little esteem. In order to preserve Life, Liberty, and Happiness, for those around us, it at times becomes incumbent upon us to curtail the activities (and sometimes the Life itself) of those within society who would unduly disrupt the lives of those around them. Conversely, when we see a life in distress or under duress we are obligated by our very respect and reverence for life to commit every resource at our disposal to the preservation and comfort of that life. This is precisely why the people of the world rushed to the aid of those affected by the recent earthquake and resulting tsunami in the southern Pacific Islands region of the world. It is because of respect and reverence for life that we are careful in our actions to those around us. We understand that if we hold others in low esteem, the time may come when we are held in low esteem. When we throw caution to the wind and loosen our respect and reverence for life itself, we fracture the very foundation upon which we stand and society as a whole begins to crumble into disorder and disarray. This is precisely why a 'live-and-let-live' attitude is not conducive to a healthy, balanced society. It is because one cannot sit idly by while others engage in self-destructive behavior, even if that behavior purportedly has no negative consequences to those around them. There is no middle ground, you are either committed to life, or you are not. There is no such thing as a dignified death; there is no honor in death.

So we come to understand that in cases like that of Terri Schiavo we must strive to maintain life at any cost and that to do any less is a betrayal and abuse of the very gifts given us by our *Creator*. And that would be a betrayal of the intent and the foundation upon which the nation was built. For us not to maintain life to the best of our ability is to usurp the authority and the sovereignty of the *Creator*, and to establish ourselves as the arbitrators of Life, Liberty, and Happiness. When we take the establishment of Life, Liberty, and Happiness out of the hands of our Creator and seize this power as our own, we undermine the *self-evident truths* that our founding fathers used to build the framework of our society upon and this in and of itself cracks the foundation of our society. Consider the fact that Terri Schiavo lived. She breathed, she moved, and blood pumped through her veins. She was animated, she had emotions, and she aged. It is true we had to establish special case care to meet certain needs in her life, but we do this to varying degrees with all life around us every single day. It is also true that we assessed her as hopeless and without chance of a normal recovery, yet there are hundreds of thousands of people with various illnesses and injuries all around us who exist in the exact same capacity as Terri Schiavo. And yet her *Creator*, the very God who gifted her Life to begin with, saw fit to allow her to live. Terri Schiavo continued to live by the grace of the *Creator* who granted her life some 41 years earlier. And the fact that she was alive is undisputable and without question. For us to say her life was without merit and had no quality is to mock the *Creator* and to attempt to establish the fact that God is a cruel and unjust tyrant who allowed Terri Schiavo to live in a hapless state simply for his own sadistic purposes. Therefore we took matters into our own hands and shook our fists

in the face of God and stated that we knew what was best and that it was more dignified for Terri Schiavo to die, and that to live as she lived was not really life at all but rather was an existence so horrible, so demeaning, so unthinkable, that to embrace death was a better choice. And thus having convinced ourselves of this we chose to alter our thinking to now believe that it was better if we allowed her to die and at this moment in our consciousness we betrayed life and the *Creator* who gives and sustains that life and embraced death and the darkness and vile that surrounds it. It is unthinkable that we the people now believe we have the authority, sanctity, and the understanding of God that we should choose who lives and who dies outside the bounds of those that threaten another life that is not their own. How can it be that death, that is the very antithesis of life, is now seen as a better choice than the rare and precious gift that is granted only once, and only for a season of time, and should be cherished above all else, that is Life? And yet that is exactly the point that we have arrived at. The circumstances surrounding the death of Terri Schiavo lead one to the inevitable conclusion that her life was taken from her unlawfully and unjustly and that indeed she was murdered. For that is the very definition of murder and the fact that we wrenched authority that we did not possess away from our *Creator* so that we could impose our own will and understanding on another individual, on its own merits is unlawful, regardless of the sanctions granted by our courts.

We are now left with the question of who is responsible for the murder of Terri Schiavo, and it is more than a mere academic question in order to establish blame that we may then point to down through the ages. Rather the answer to the question of who murdered Terri Schiavo leads us to the understanding of just how fractured our nation's foundation really is and as to whether or not it can be repaired in time to stop the house which sits upon it from sliding off. And yet the answer is not a simple one. There are certainly simple facets to the answer but overall they make up a very complex puzzle. First and foremost, the number one person responsible for the death of Terri Schiavo is her husband, Michael Schiavo. Of all the people who could have stopped the process at any point in time and absolutely assured the fight for her continued life, Michael Schiavo was at the forefront and was established as the only person with his finger on the trigger of the murder weapon that could have taken it off at any time. The fact that Michael Schiavo was offered opportunity after opportunity to simply walk away when he deliberately chose to stand and see Terri Schiavo dead suggests that he has little to no understanding whatsoever of just how precious a gift life is and what our commitment to it should be. Of course his claim was that his wife had told him that she did not want to live this way, but there are two important points here. One is that what he claims his wife told him is unsubstantiated hearsay and we have never allowed this in our courts at anytime. Even if his account is accurate, at best it is a private conversation between a husband and a wife and should have been protected as such by the courts. We have always respected the sanctity of the bedroom and have restricted the conversations that take place there in order to not violate the privacy shared by a husband and a wife. The second point is that even if we were to assume that this claim accurately represented the wishes of Terri Schiavo, how are we to distinguish that from assisted suicide which we have already determined as immoral and unlawful? Can we morally and ethically claim to honor the wishes of Terri Schiavo by assisting her in 'pulling-the-plug' when there are those around us who claim to not want to live as they are living and have asked us to 'help them to die' whom we refuse to 'help'? Furthermore if we are to believe that Terri Schiavo's condition was such that she was in a 'vegetative' state, then how could she have possibly known whether her wishes were carried out or not? Was Terri Schiavo any more aware at the moment of her death that she had existed in that state for a number of years than she was the very first time her feeding tube was removed? It is inconceivable to think that if

she were not aware of her condition and her surroundings that she would be any more or any less inclined to want to die. And if she were aware it is inconceivable to think that she did not want to live. Are we simply to believe at this point that Terri Schiavo died and entered some type of euphoric state at which point she turned and smiled down on Michael Schiavo and 'blessed' him for 'releasing' her? That type of thinking makes a mockery of the God we claim to believe created Terri Schiavo in the first place. It is patently absurd to believe in a loving and caring God that gives and sustains all life on the one hand while on the other we believe that the same God who gave the life is incapable of ascertaining the correct moment in time as to when that life should be taken away. The obvious conclusion, the only conclusion here is that Michael Schiavo has no understanding whatsoever of the value of life and was blinded into believing that he was capable of making the decisions that only God should make and took that authority from the *Creator* into his own hands and exercised it to the fullest extent possible. For this Michael Schiavo deserves our pity and our prayers. We should pray that the God, from whom he stole the authority of life and death, has mercy on him. We should also pray that Michael Schiavo's eyes would be healed so that his blindness would be lifted and that he will see (and understand) the *self-evident truths* that our forefathers cited as the basis for founding this great nation of ours.

Michael Schiavo did not act alone however. He needed a support team around him and those that would guide his way through the trials and obstacles that are our court systems today. Foremost at Michael Schiavo's side and arguably number two in responsibility for Terri Schiavo's murder is George Felos, Michael Schiavo's legal council. George Felos could have at any time guided his client in another direction, refused to take the case, or recommended another attorney. In much the same way as Dr. Jack Kevorkian claimed to aid the suffering and down trodden some ten years ago, another member of a professional community, this time the legal profession, has stepped forward to champion the cause of the 'right-to-die'. This in and of itself is nonsensical given the fact that death is the exact opposite of life and Life has already been identified as a *self-evident truth*, an *unalienable* right endowed upon us by the *Creator*. It is unfathomable to think that God would grant a right to Life and then cancel that out by granting a *right* to death. It is far more plausible to believe that God granted us the gift of Life and that our own sinful nature and rebellion against God is what has brought the curse of death upon us and the rest of the world. Yet the comments from George Felos during the time leading up to and immediately after the death of Terri Schiavo lead us to believe that he does not view death as a curse but rather as an equal gift to life. To talk of the 'dying process', and a 'peaceful' and 'dignified' death is a mere mockery of Life itself. There is no 'peaceful' or 'dignified' death, death is a curse and is only brought about by a disobedient and sinful man. George Felos also deserves our pity and our prayers that the God whom he mocks today would have mercy upon him and lift the veil from his eyes.

George Felos was not the only supporter of Michael Schiavo however. George Felos simply argued the case before the courts. The courts, the Judicial branch of our Government also had the opportunity to say no and to turn away the request. However the courts chose to support Michael Schiavo in his quest to murder Terri Schiavo. Remember that our courts have not always ruled correctly in all cases. In the 1857 Scott vs. Sanford case the Supreme Court found in favor of slavery on the grounds that a man was not a citizen of the United States. An amendment to the Constitution was necessary to clearly clarify the state of slavery in the United States, however that did not justify the earlier injustices all ready committed under the purported rule of law. Of all the courts to hear the case concerning Terri Schiavo, two Judges stand out as particularly pointed in their opinions. The first is Judge George Greer who originally found in favor of death and denied Terri Schiavo her *unalienable* right to Life as identified by our founding fathers. Judge George

Greer could have easily denied Michael Schiavo the sanction he sought to end the life of Terri Schiavo. But Judge George Greer aided Michael Schiavo and George Felos in their quest to end a life. And with this blessing in hand, Michael Schiavo proceeded to carry out the murder of Terri Schiavo. The second is Judge Stanley Birch Jr. who went so far as to not only vote in favor of supporting the lower courts ruling of death, but openly criticized the White House, Lawmakers, and the American people whom supported the sanctity of Life. Of particular interest here is that Judge Stanley Birch Jr. rebuked some for acting “in a manner demonstrably at odds with our Founding Fathers’ blueprint for the governance of a free people — our Constitution.” What is interesting here is that it is the very Lawmakers whom Judge Stanley Birch, Jr. criticized who write the laws that the President then signs that he must then legislate from his bench. And even if he so chose to rule that any such law were unconstitutional, it is in the full purview of the people of the various states to seek a constitutional amendment to bring the Constitution in line with the law they wished to support. This is in no means “demonstrably at odds with our Founding Fathers’ blueprint for the governance of a free people” rather it is exactly as the founding fathers envisioned the system working. It is rather Judge Stanley Birch, Jr. who seems to be at odds with the understanding of the founding fathers and their utter respect and commitment to life. To this end we should also pity and pray for Judge George Greer and Judge Stanley Birch, Jr. that the God whom they chose to not recognize as the arbitrator of Life would have mercy on them and open their eyes that they may see and understand the same *self-evident truths* as were understood by our founding fathers.

Sadly however the chain of responsibility does not end with our Government itself. The laws that are crafted by our elected representatives and then legislated from court benches around our nation are simply a reflection of our society itself. Try and imagine this exact same event taking place 50 years ago, 75 years ago, or 100 years ago. Every single one of us who is intellectually honest with themselves knows deep down that the outcome would have been drastically different. Society of the past would not have tolerated such an event and the laws and the courts would have reflected the balance of that society and would have ruled accordingly. Society today however is willing to tolerate certain behavior to an extent and thus sizable enough segments of that society support the laws and legislation to the point to allow, in this case, the murder of Terri Schiavo. Therefore, the American society itself has culpability in that we have allowed our values to decay to the point that we actually believe it is better to chose death rather than life.

This leaves one final question to be considered, and that is how is it that we have allowed such a thing to occur within our society? The answer to this may be somewhat protracted but there are clearly some landmark decisions that have led us down this path. The 1972 Roe vs. Wade Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion within the United States has clearly gone a long way to justifying in societies mind the death of some members of that society, the consequences of which have yet to be fully felt within our society. The actions of the aforementioned Dr. Jack Kevorkian during the 1990’s in facilitating ‘assisted suicides’ clearly gained sympathy and support from a segment of our population even though his actions were eventually denounced and put to a stop. And finally the whole quality of Life issue that has surrounded us the past few years and growing debate on when it is and is not appropriate to apply and remove Life support systems from an incapacitated individual has simply kindled a fire within us that has led us to now ponder the question of when it is appropriate to live and when it is appropriate to die based upon our definition of the ‘quality’ of life. There are also those within our society that have made the case that this happens every single day, that we seem to have lost it on the Terri Schiavo case because there are

a hundred similar cases just down the road from us in each and every city in the country. To these people I ask the question, if this is such an every day occurrence, then why the need for the court filings in the Terri Schiavo case to begin with? And just what was it that made this case unique enough to draw such national attention and to spark such heated debate? Furthermore I ask the questions that if this is such an every day occurrence, then where are the other cases and how may I find them? Just because they do not have the national attention of the Terri Schiavo case does not mean they are any more justified or right if one were to assume that they would arrive at the same outcome.

The one thing that is certain is that we have presumed to assume the role of God within our society and within our courts in that we may now declare how and when a life meets a certain quality that we deem worthy of living. It is now societies decision, you and me, each and every one of us, to either hang onto that power, and thus head down the assuredly slippery road that it will take us down, or to place it back into the hands of God from whence it came and to wholeheartedly embrace life and the support of it everywhere. If we do not, the fracture of the foundation upon which our society is built will deepen and the house will crumble. The murder of Terri Schiavo has already taken place; it is the cry of tempered indignation by those of us who embrace Life that should now be heard to the extent that her death will not have occurred in vain. The case for death was made with Terri Schiavo, but we must now make the case for Life if we are to preserve the foundation upon which our founding fathers built this great nation. To do any less would be to betray the *Creator* from whom we believe those Rights were originally endowed, our founding fathers who entrusted future generations (of whom we are a part) to preserve the intent and purity of all they attempted to establish, and the rest of the people of the world whom look to us as a shining example of Freedom, Liberty, and Truth. The only question remaining is: Will we stand for Death, or Will we stand for Life? I choose Life.