

The Betty Letters

My Dear Grandchild,

I have had a horrible time of it, this past week. My dog, a silky terrier, had to be put down, which is a phrase, meaning euthanasia. Dong-Dong, my little silky terrier, had been with me since he was three months old, when he was the size of a little rat. For twelve years, he had been my friend: I fed him; I played with him; I cuddled him; I went for walks with him; and, I took him into the garden when he had to do his business. In the early mornings, he would jump on my bed and force me to get up so that he could eat or drink in his designated area and, then, take a walk round the garden in order to chase the squirrels and birds and to smell the morning air. But, over the past few months, I noticed that he was having trouble in walking. My usual veterinarian said that he, probably, had hurt the muscle in left foreleg. But the situation became progressively worse in the days that followed, affecting all of his legs until, one day, he could not walk, at all. I, then, took Dong-Dong to a veterinarian, who specialised in neurology. Within minutes of the examination, this young, female veterinarian had diagnosed Dong-Dong's condition as being a problem with his spinal column. She recommended a CT scan (Computerised axial Tomography) in order to obtain a better picture of Dong-Dong's problems and, then, to operate the next morning. The next morning came and, in a telephone conversation, I was told that my dog had a tumour, which was inoperable, and that his life would not be long and that it would be full of pain. It took me no time to order the poor dog to be put down as painlessly as was possible. The veterinarian agreed. The deed was done within the hour and Dong-Dong was out of his agony – forever. I cried, of course: Nobody likes to lose a good friend, be it a dog or a human being. But, then, I reflected on the events of the past month and came to the realisation that, in our civilised world, we are willing to recommend and to execute euthanasia, in the case of our pets, but it is banned in many Christian countries with regard to human beings.

The definition of euthanasia is, simply, failing to prevent death from natural causes – terminal illnesses and irreversible comas. The word is derived from the Greek, meaning 'The good death'. Since 1937, assisted suicide has not been legal in Switzerland as long as the person, who assists the sufferer, has no personal motive or gain. In 1993, the Netherlands decriminalised euthanasia under a set of restricted conditions whereby voluntary positive euthanasia (essentially, physician-assisted suicide) for the terminally ill could be administered. In 2002, the country legalised physician-assisted suicide if voluntarily requested by seriously ill patients, who face ongoing suffering. Belgium, in 2002, also legalised euthanasia for certain patients who requested it. In the United States of America and Canada, euthanasia is still illegal, however. The US, the greatest country in the history of the world, due to its strong Christian ethic, no doubt, permits a terminally ill patient to suffer a horrible death, refusing to put an end to the patient's pain and suffering, but, in the case of a dog, cat, rabbit, etc, it is legal to order a veterinarian to administer an overdose of an anaesthetic in order to induce death in the poor animal. I have repeatedly told my personal trainer in my club that it is not how long that a person lives that is important, but the quality of that person's life. How vacuous would my life be if I could not walk, eat my favourite food, enjoy the company of my loved ones, relish in noting the antics of my grandchildren, smell the freshness of spring flowers, feel the warmth of the summer's sun on my

face, or experience the mental orgasm of listening to Beethoven's Sixth Symphony, The Pastoral, or recalling some of the words of William Wordsworth in his immortal poem, The Daffodils:

*'For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then the heart with pleasure fills,
And dances of the daffodils.'*

It seems to me that man should afford to himself those same privileges of life that he affords to his pets. Conversely, it follows that if man is to be afforded dignity in life, then, there is no reason that he cannot be afforded dignity in death.

Talk to you next week ... God willing.

Chief lady

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