

Terri Schiavo—A Life that Truly Mattered

An Interview with Terri's brother, Bobby Schindler

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If you were alive in 2005 and received any news updates, then the name Terri Schiavo is not foreign. On February 25, 1990, Terri collapsed in her home and never regained consciousness. In the following years, a great deal of attention would be given to the quality of Terri's life. Was Terri really "alive" or was she just a "functioning corpse"? In February 2000 her husband, Michael Schiavo, received permission to remove her feeding tube. This began a litany of court cases to determine what course of action was in the best interest of Terri. Ultimately, Michael retained guardianship over Terri, and the tube was removed. Terri Schiavo died in the early morning hours of March 31, 2005. A little over a month ago, we had opportunity to spend some time with Terri's family and sat down for an interview with her brother, Bobby. This interview was condensed to fit space requirements, but we hope as we share his words that the point is not lost: This truly was a life that mattered.

Bobby Schindler (BS): I don't know how much you know or don't know about Terri's case, but it has been misrepresented and manipulated by the popular media—to the point that up to this day people have a total misinterpretation and distortion of the facts of Terri's

case. It's quite upsetting, but I think it's a clear indication of an agenda by the mainstream media and really how powerful they can be in certain situations, as we saw in my sister's case. I'll go through a quick timeline. Feb. 25, 1990 is when Terri collapsed. Our family still doesn't know why she collapsed. Even the autopsy report that was conducted last year came to no definite conclusion on why Terri collapsed. In fact, the medical examiner even went so far as saying that he is leaving the autopsy report open in case anybody would come forward with any additional evidence.

(Leaving the case open is highly unusual, and is normally an indication that questions remain.)

Bobby continued:

BS: Well, Michael and Terri were the only ones home in the apartment that evening. She collapsed, and there's all kind of questions on this timeline of when Terri collapsed until the paramedics arrived. Well, I guess I was the first one there, until Michael called the paramedics and then they got there. But she was deprived of oxygen for a while. From what we can gather, she was deprived of oxygen from five to ten minutes, and that's what led to her profound brain injury. And from that night on, although we believed she was improving, she stayed in that condition where she was dependent on others to care for her. She was only on a feeding tube... Physically, she was as healthy as you or I, really. But all she needed to survive was a feeding tube.

Bobby spoke passionately about the years spent trying to improve his sister's condition, and the court cases they went through.

He continued:

BS: Yes, but there's never any mention of Terri ever having this alleged wish that she would not want to live in this condition if she ever became incapacitated.... The summer of 1993 Michael began the relationship with Jodi Centonze, who he's now living with, who he's now married to—and it was also the first time that we learned later that Michael tried his first attempt to end Terri's life, by withholding antibiotics that would have led to her death...

Focus Press (FP): Was that treatment for a urinary tract infection?

BS: Yes. And everything I'm telling you is all public record.

FP: Can you be specific and tell us what condition Terri was in during the years following her collapse?

BS: I think part of the problem we had was that we've become desensitized to how we treat human beings, unfortunately. But Terri was not on, as I said earlier, a ventilator. She could take day trips to the mall, beach, or park and could even be sitting with us here today if her life had not been cut short. A feeding tube was the only thing sustaining her. She was not brain dead, despite what the media even reports to this day. Throughout this,

from the moment she collapsed, up until death—even in the autopsy reports—no doctor, not even Michael’s doctors, have ever diagnosed her as being “brain dead”...

FP: We know today that “brain dead” equals death. Anything short of that still represents life. So she was diagnosed in a “persistent vegetative state”, is that correct? But we know today that PVS represents a huge range of brain injury.

BS: Oh, that was my next thing I was going to say...

FP: You’ve got people who may be out for a little while, who come back completely, or you have people who are *close* to “brain dead.”

BS: Right.

FP: A vast spectrum in between, and to make any generalizations about that whole broad category is just... insane.

BS: Well, I think that’s been done purposely by this death culture. They want to create a completely subjective diagnosis to use to kill people like my sister.

FP: And I know, I’m sure you’re very much aware that they’re trying to push the envelope on the definition of death in order to free up more organs for transplantation.

BS: Sure. That's the only reason it's done. And what else isn't reported, I don't know if you read this, but a study done by the British, (and I don't believe that AMA has taken issue with these findings) demonstrates that persistent vegetative state is misdiagnosed 43% of the time.

FP: Yes. I have read similar articles that indicate this diagnosis is not a "sure science."

BS: So we are killing people that are being labeled with a diagnosis that is misdiagnosed 43% of the time! And someone made this analogy that really struck home with me. They said, "Can you imagine if we were killing those on death row on a 50/50 chance that they might be guilty or might not?" And that's what we're doing to the disabled. We're basically saying that they're in a PVS state, its okay to kill them, and its based on almost a 50% misdiagnosis rate. They have done a terrific job on society, getting people to look at others like my sister as having so much suffering, being in so much pain, that the only humane thing to do is to kill them. And they are selling us a bill of goods, and that's why we are- we saw what happened to my sister.

FP: They market it as, with key phrases like, "quality of life" and things like that, and completely take out the whole, "made in the image and likeness of God", and the "sanctity of human life."

BS: It really is.

FP: I was going to ask you, because you just touched on it. You mentioned, putting somebody down by lethal injection versus starving and dehydrating somebody. Were you guys able to see what kind of went on in her last weeks, days, and hours? Because obviously the media's telling everybody, "Oh, you know, they just go to sleep, it's not painful, it's not a big deal." Several medical cases describe it as being a very big deal. Any time you dehydrate somebody, they can go through some pretty serious complications.

BS: Kate Adamson, I don't know if you know who Kate Adamson is, she was actually starved and dehydrated for seven days. And her husband thankfully recognized, or knew beforehand, even before it started, that she was there, and got the doctors to stop. And now, she goes around and speaks about it... She talks about how horrific it was for her to undergo this. Oh, it's really hard for me to listen to because I know my sister was there. I think if you were honest and truthful with what takes place when you starve and dehydrate a person to death, I would hope that there would be such a public outcry with what was happening.

FP: It blows my mind, I've got two Golden Retrievers at home, if I didn't feed and water the, I'd get put in jail. Yet, you have a human being, and it's viewed, as you know, "easing their suffering."

BS: I think you probably realize, not only with this issue, but with other issues that confront us, that a tremendous amount of apathy exists in our culture. I think we're more

concerned with ourselves—I think a lot of us are very selfish. And I've got to tell you, before my sister's case came along, I never really thought about this issue. I never really understood how sensitive we should be acting or just how we should be treating people with disabilities. And I think most of the public doesn't understand this issue, doesn't understand the disabled community, and doesn't really look upon them as being different. I think it's upsetting for us to see people with disabilities. But there is so much apathy out there. And this issue—it is not going away. It's going to affect, I think, all of us—either through a relative, or friend, or something at- or even us at some point in our lives.

The Schindler family has written a book titled *A Life that Matters* and has formed the Terri Schiavo Foundation to help fight for right to life cases.