



BUCKS COUNTY COURIER TIMES

# A life that mattered: The cruel case of Terri Schiavo

## GUEST OPINION

By CAROLE TROISI

Phil Gianficaro's March 29th column on Terri Schiavo says her parents' worst cruelties overshadowed their best intentions. He owes the Schindler family a huge apology.

What was cruel was how Terri's husband stopped her rehabilitation once he got the money from the lawsuit. Until then, Terri showed signs of improvement, forming words, laughing at jokes. She enjoyed outings to the mall in a wheelchair with her mother to get her hair done; the pictures are in her family's book, "A Life That Matters."

Nursing reports state that Terri was aware and responsive. But once Schiavo had the money, and a girlfriend he fathered children with, he stopped Terri's rehab and she regressed. She was brain damaged but alive and not hooked up to a ventilator; she only needed food and water through a tube.

That used to be considered "normal care," not "medical treatment." Her family wanted her to get that care and to get more rehab. That was not cruel. That was love.

What was cruel was how Terri was used as a pawn by the euthanasia crowd to promote their agenda, saying her death was "peaceful" and that she was "blissfully unaware." How absurd! Terri was healthy, her heart and organs were in good condition, she breathed

on her own. She was not "brain dead;" she would have felt the pain of dehydration!

Experts for the Schindlers disputed Terri's persistent vegetative state diagnosis, but Judge Greer discounted all the evidence. Why? There have been a number of people incorrectly diagnosed as being

in a PVS. One such woman, Kate Adamson, had food withheld for eight days, which she described as agony, unimaginable torture. Terri suffered that same torture.

Accounts by Terri's family, attorney Gibbs and Father Pavone, all of whom witnessed it, say Terri's tongue and lips were horribly cracked, her tongue swelled, her face lost its flesh and her eyes were sunken in with black circles underneath.

Her breathing accelerated to a high pitch, and her skin dried out. According to her brother Bobby, she looked terrified and she looked skeletal. That is not humane, that is not peaceful!

According to some medical experts, dehydration causes delirium, nausea, tingling in the limbs, spastic muscles, shriveling of the

skin and dim vision. The brain becomes smaller so blood vessels connecting the brain to the cranium can pull away and rupture. Talk about cruel! There is your answer to the autopsy report stating that Terri's brain had shrunk and that she couldn't see — the dehydration caused most of it in her final days.

As a devout Catholic, Terri would never have wanted to be put to death. It's completely unthinkable. She was disabled but alive. We as a society cannot fail to provide basic care to disabled persons or deny them their constitutional right to life, no matter how distasteful we think their "quality of life" is. Where will it lead — euthanizing your child with Down syndrome, your parent with Alzheimer's disease, or your friend with MS?

Mr. Gianficaro should open his mind and his heart and stop beating up on the Schindler family; they are good people who have suffered more than he could imagine.

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