



Deliverance Newsserver

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1. Last Drinks

Courier Mail
Q Weekend
SAT 21 OCT 2006,

When Gold Coast widow Nancy Crick committed suicide in 2002, John Edge was there. Detailing in a new book the "farewell party", he could yet be arrested for helping his friend die.

Here is an exclusive extract, starting with the final entry in Nancy's online diary.

Seems to me most people who end their lives do it alone, as if it's wrong. Well, I don't believe it's wrong and neither do my friends. If anyone out there is asked to serve on a jury called upon to judge those who chose to be with me when I died, I want you to acquit these people. This will be my last diary entry. I want to thank all who have written to me from all over the world and all those who have helped me through this difficult time. My name is Nancy Crick, I'm 69 years of age and I live in my own home here on the Gold Coast. Three years ago I found I had bowel cancer and I've since had three operations. Despite the best surgery and palliative care, my life has deteriorated to such an extent that I feel death would be a blessed relief.

But I could not legally get help to do this and the Premier, Mr Beattie, says the law will not change.

I joined the Voluntary Euthanasia (VE) Society of Queensland to help bring about change to these unjust laws. I joined EXIT Australia and asked how I could best draw attention to my situation so others would not have to suffer as I have had to. One way I thought I could make a difference was by an internet diary, nancycrick.com. The diary has given me a chance to explain to everyone why I think we've got to make changes to the law.

I don't want to die alone. So I've invited relatives, friends and supporters of voluntary euthanasia - Nancy's Friends - to be with me. Under laws in Queensland and everywhere else in Australia, those who choose to be with me risk prosecution and possible life imprisonment. The law may decide to charge my friends who stayed with me. The law may say that simply being with me is the same as helping and assisting in my suicide. This is just not true. I have chosen to take my life at a time when I am able to do so myself; I am not asking for and do not need or want any help to die.

I am not being pressured or encouraged to take my life, in fact everyone has been trying to get me to stay longer ... Let me be clear, no-one has paid me, or my friends, family or supporters, any money to do this. I am not depressed or unstable or mad.

I've simply reached a point where my life is done and now I want to die peacefully.

I tried all the medical options ... but in the end it didn't work out. I'm not angry and I don't feel sorry for myself - it's just the way it is. If anyone out there is asked to serve on a jury called upon to judge those who bravely chose to be with me when I died, I want you to acquit these

people. They've done nothing wrong. I want you to find them not guilty of any ridiculous charge that tries to say they assisted in my suicide. It's my death - I'm doing it, no-one else. Goodbye.

(Internet diary entry, May 21, 2002)

EARLY IN THE AFTERNOON OF FEBRUARY 22, 2001, I received a phone call. "Are you the John Edge I've just finished reading about in the newspaper?" a gravel-voiced female demanded. "Oh good! I've been keeping an eye out for you euthanasia people for some time. Made umpteen phone calls without any luck, then today, bingo! I picked up the paper and next thing I knew I was reading about you and this euthanasia thing.

"Well, my name is Nancy Crick. I lost my bowel a couple of years ago through cancer. Since the operation I've gone from bad to worse. I'm in constant pain, together with diarrhoea and vomiting. Had a second operation recently. They said they would fix the problem. They didn't - it got worse. Spend half my life in the toilet, don't go out anywhere. I've had enough, I just want to die. Can you help me?" Stunned by the woman's upfront approach, I immediately suspected inadequate medical care, maybe a mental problem or pain-driven depression. "Where did you get the idea that the voluntary euthanasia people could help you?" I asked. "Oh! I asked my homecare nurse if she could give me something to take to end my life, and she said she couldn't but there was a group on the Gold Coast involved in helping people like me. Trouble was she didn't know how to make contact - no name, no address, no phone number, nothing except the words voluntary euthanasia and the name of some doctor called Nitschke. Now, can you help me?" I stressed that the purpose of the Gold Coast VE Support Group, of which I was convenor, was to lobby for the introduction of voluntary euthanasia legislation. We did not help citizens to die, no matter how dire their circumstances. I also told her that [leading euthanasia campaigner] Dr Philip Nitschke had been on the Gold Coast earlier in the month and I had no idea when he would return.

The caller sighed, "Oh well, I'll just have to wait." I suggested she come along to the rally she had been reading about in the newspaper. "Love to," she said. "Trouble is, with my condition I hardly ever leave home. But you could visit me ... Best to come in the afternoon as I spend most mornings on the toilet. Look forward to meeting you soon." A few days later I was driving through the Burleigh district and decided to pay Crick a visit. At the front of her small, neat brick-veneer home was a doormat that bore the message, "Make my day - piss off". I was greeted by a tiny, stooped figure wearing a huge smile and a pink woolly dressing gown and fluffy slippers, and was ushered inside. Returning from the kitchen with tea and chocolate biscuits, Nancy lowered herself carefully into a chair and lit up one of many cigarettes incinerated that afternoon.

"Aren't you hot in that gown?" I asked. "No, just nice and warm," she grinned. She shuffled into the lounge room, returning with a photograph. "Here's a photo of me and my youngest son, Daryle, taken not long before I was diagnosed with cancer. You can see how much weight I've lost, just skin and bones now. Temperature drops below 27 degrees and I start shivering." There in the photo was a matronly-shaped woman I guessed would have weighed 60kg. "What's your weight now?" "Under 30kg and falling," she replied. During my many visits I came to admire and respect Nancy. Her fierce independence, her lack of fear of death, her ability to call a spade a spade.

No moaning or groaning, just an ability to assess her situation pragmatically. She believed the original operation had been botched. When I asked her if it would be more appropriate to seek medical compensation than to take her own life, she looked scornful. "No way! Do you imagine I'd spend my time running around to lawyers, going to court, all that arguing - for what? Couldn't buy back my health. Besides, I don't reckon any of the doctors set out deliberately to harm me. It was most probably an accident.

I don't want money. I only want peace, peace from all this pain, shit and vomit." Towards the end of May 2001, she underwent further surgery. "Three times lucky," she said before the operation. Afterwards I found her sitting in her bedside chair with her dressing gown pulled tightly around her, collar turned up to keep the cold at bay. Nancy looked like a frightened, cornered creature. I kissed her gently on the cheek and whispered, "How are you?" The

creature became an enraged tigress. "Bloody fool. I should never have agreed to come back here. Never again. No more operations." And so it went on until she fell silent with exhaustion. Tears welled up in the sunken, hooded eyes and cascaded down the parched, wrinkled cheeks. They came not from pain or self-pity but from frustration and anger.

ON AUGUST 17 I ALERTED THE LOCAL MEDIA TO a workshop to be conducted by Dr Nitschke at Broadbeach the following Monday. Some of the elderly participants would be prepared to speak to the media, I offered. Channel Nine Gold Coast picked up the offer and I passed on Nancy's phone number, pointing out that she was too ill to attend the workshop herself.

Nancy's first TV interview as a frail elderly cancer victim patiently waiting to meet Dr Nitschke went to air in the Gold Coast evening news on August 20.

Two days later, the pair sat at her dining table discussing her medical condition. Coming away from the meeting an hour or so later, Nitschke spoke of a warm, witty woman not afraid to speak up for herself.

Nancy had made no secret of the fact she wanted to be gone by Christmas. I took little notice of this; to my knowledge she didn't have the means to accomplish her aim.

But a couple of days after meeting Nitschke she phoned me, overjoyed at the news her granddaughter was pregnant. With the baby due at the end of January, she would just have to postpone her "going".

During one of my visits, Nancy told me of a plan.

"Seems to me most people who end their lives do it alone, as if it's wrong," she said. "Well, I don't believe it's wrong and neither do my friends.

"Many of my friends are in Melbourne so I thought I'd invite them up, spend a bit of time together going over old times, that sort of thing.

We could then have a farewell party, a sort of been-nice-knowing-you get-together. Then, after I'm gone, they could stay on, have a bit of a holiday while they wait for the funeral. And when it's all over head back home to Melbourne." "Okay. Let me get this straight," I said. "You've invited some of your relatives, friends and neighbours to be with you at a farewell party here in your home. While they're sipping wine or drinking beer and nibbling on hors d'oeuvres, you're going to upend a lethal drug cocktail. You're crazy! You'll end up dead and they'll probably end up in jail.

You've gone out of your way to protect your family and friends from legal complications and now you're putting them at risk. I just don't get it." A couple of days later we discussed a possible date of departure. "I reckon it'll be late February or early March when I get away," said Nancy. "What do you think?" "If I were in your shoes I'd link my death to an important date as a sort of symbolic gesture," I responded. "For instance, September 22 is an important date in the VE calendar as the date on which Bob Dent [in 1996] became the first person to end his life using the Northern Territory legislation." "Too long to wait, don't want to go through another winter." "Well, there's July 1, which is the date the Northern Territory legislation became effective in 1996, or there's March 25, which was the date the Senate overturned the legislation in 1997." "That last one sounds okay. What day of the week does it fall on? A Monday, yeah, that'll do. I'll pass it on to the others." She mentioned at one of our tête-à-têtes that her granddaughter Celest was getting married sometime midyear. "It's all about keeping me here," Nancy said. "Must be around for the birth of my greatgrandchild, then there's Mother's Day, Celest's wedding, my birthday. Next thing I know it'll be Christmas again. There'll be no end to it." After the wedding was brought forward to March, Nancy knew the date of her departure would have to change, but she gave no hint as to a new date. "I won't be here for the winter," was all she would say.

On February 6, 2002, the website nancycrick.com displayed Nancy's first online diary entry, a brief description of her plight that concluded: "I made a promise to myself not to live through another winter. I intend to keep that promise. Whether it happens by natural causes or by my hand remains to be seen." The Courier-Mail, on February 8, carried a news report that stated: "Queensland Police say it would not be unlawful for terminally ill bowel cancer patient Nancy Crick to end her life if she did so totally unaided, but a police spokesman warned that anyone

who counselled her or helped her kill herself faced life imprisonment under criminal law." On March 25, Nancy's diary entry contained a dramatic plea. "I had intended to end my life on Wednesday, April 10. I've changed my mind because it is my wish to have the very best drug available [name of drug deleted for legal reasons]. Can any kind person out there help me?"

The drug was not available for human consumption in Australia and was confined to veterinary use only - to put down sick and dying animals. But it was available overseas, and three batches, two of them the drug Nancy asked for, eventually arrived in her letterbox. Her plea for the drug had meanwhile ruffled the feathers of Queensland Health. The saga was political dynamite, and a hastily convened meeting of QH representatives, Dr Nitschke and Nancy resulted in her reluctant agreement to enter hospital for pain control. During her hospitalisation, she told me later, "I did everything they asked except have further surgery. Now it's my turn to do things my way." She would wait a few weeks to let it be seen that she'd given the palliative care program a chance to work. "I've decided to go out on Wednesday May 22," she confided.

On April 27, Nancy wrote: "I returned from hospital two weeks ago; during this period I have continued to receive in-home palliative care ... the bad news is that pain reduction has been achieved by drugging me up to the point where I sleep for long periods, am drowsy, walk into walls, unable to get my tongue around words, not knowing if it's night or day. I shall, in the near future, carry out my intention to put this pain-weary body of mine to rest ... "

ON THE EVENING OF MAY 22, I DROVE TO NANCY'S home via back roads, stopping to buy a writing pad.

Around 7.30 I parked around the corner about 100 metres or so from her house. As I made my way towards her corner, my attention was drawn to a person seated in a parked car at a spot that offered uninterrupted street views. The car door opened with a friendly "hello" from a female supporter armed with a mobile phone - she was an advance warning scout.

The back patio was ablaze with lights, indicating some of Nancy's friends were outdoors. I found Nancy holding court in the lounge/dining area.

Acknowledging the presence of other guests, I hugged and kissed her before propelling her into the unoccupied hallway. "Everything okay?" she asked. "So far, so good. One thing in your favour is the State of Origin football match on tonight. Media and neighbours will forget about you and what you're up to. Mind you, it'd be a good idea to hold off till later in the evening." Nancy exploded.

"This is it! I'm not waiting any longer." "Where's the stuff?" I asked. Nancy patted her dressing gown pocket, turned on her heels and shuffled back into the lounge. I followed her meekly. It has troubled me ever since that the last important conversation I had with Nancy was ended by her angry response and about-turn.

Guests had polarised into two main groups. Seated or standing around the lounge area were the VE supporters, most of whom I knew by face if not by name. Other guests I recognised as Nancy's friends were around the dining table. Three faces belonged to complete strangers. The males had colonised the patio area. The kitchen was abuzz with activity, three of her friends busied themselves serving tea or coffee or topping up beer or wine glasses. Nancy appeared from the kitchen, clutching a champagne bottle and a glass. She thrust the glass into my hand, insisting I have a drink on her, before continuing to seek out other empty glasses to refill. I sipped champagne and made small talk. Nancy reappeared bearing a platter of sandwiches that I declined. She shuffled off exhorting guests to "come on, eat up". Raising my recharged glass, I toasted loudly, "To Nancy", but she was busy playing the hostess role to perfection. The superficial appearance of a friendly send-off, a goodbye get-together, belied a growing sense of urgency on her part.

Standing centre stage, she cast a cursory glance around the room, checking that we'd all had our fill.

She moved without warning to embrace the closest guest, and the next, in what became an assembly line goodbye. My turn - a gentle hug and kiss.

"Thank you for coming," and she was off. My mind was swamped with conflicting emotions - anger, sadness, rejection and bitterness. I had an urge to go after her, to ask,

"Is this all there is?" Fifteen dramatic months of friendship were reduced now to a mere 15-second goodbye.

I rose to my feet to carry out a security check.

The street was quiet; the only movement came from the lookout reporting that there was nothing to report. I returned to the house. Nancy had gone to farewell the guests on the patio. When she returned she announced, "Well, I'm off to bed." Guests appeared caught off-guard. What's happening? Is this it? Somewhat reverently, they made their way to Nancy's bedroom. I was one of the first, moving to the back corner opposite her single bed. The small room soon filled; some crowded outside the doorway and others backed up along the hallway.

Nancy stood at the bedside, removed a small brown medicine bottle from her pocket and placed it on the bedside table alongside a glass containing a brown drink. Nearby stood a large bottle, its label suggesting her drink was Baileys Irish Cream. She sat on the bed, removed the screw cap from the medicine bottle, raised it to her lips and took a sip. She grimaced. Raising the bottle again, she gulped down the contents, returning the near-empty bottle to the table and complaining of the terrible taste. The old, bony hand reached for the tumbler, and a sip or two of the sweet liqueur brought a smile to the weary old face. Settling into bed, she smiled.

"No more pain," she said. "Time for a cigarette." She took a couple of puffs and then, as she tried to place the cigarette between her lips again, her eyes closed and her head fell back on the pillow.

A friend retrieved the cigarette from her lips and stubbed it out. He sat on the edge of the bed holding her hands. It was a deeply moving moment. When he had suffered a marriage break-up Nancy had come to his aid, given him a place to stay and a shoulder to cry on. I guessed he had come to regard Nancy as a mother figure; his reverence was there for all to see.

Someone murmured it was time to leave the family to grieve. Taking this as a cue, I impulsively grabbed the near-empty medicine bottle and in my most authoritarian voice proclaimed, "No crime has been committed here tonight." The dining table had been cleared so I could place the writing pad and a pen on it. I informed those present that Terry O'Gorman, the President of the Council for Civil Liberties, had offered to represent the group, pro bono, to the stage of committal if that occurred. I invited the members of the group, Nancy's 21 Friends as we referred to ourselves, to write down names and contact details. As an afterthought, I mentioned Nancy's request not to pass on the news of her departure until the following day.

Appearing from the direction of the bedroom, one of the guests announced in a hushed voice that Nancy had ceased breathing. Others began leaving. Close friends and relatives were seated around the dining table. We sat discussing events of the night, saddened by our loss, yet relieved that Nancy had found peace.

WITHIN 48 HOURS OF NANCY'S DEATH, THE RESULTS of an autopsy were leaked to the media. Normally corpses are required to form a queue, but Nancy was afforded express service at the morgue. The purpose of such special treatment was to provide ammunition for a hatchet job, the "hatchet" being that the autopsy found that she had died free of cancer. I was taken aback to discover she had withheld this information. I concluded that there was a lack of meaningful dialogue between Nancy, her relatives and the healthcare fraternity. Nancy believed the three bowel operations she had undergone had failed to stem the aggressive cancer.

She further believed the medicos were not prepared to tell her the truth or admit failure. Believing that she had cancer and it couldn't be successfully treated, she decided to call it a day by opting for self-deliverance. Only then did the health carers speak out, revealing that she didn't have cancer. What, I wondered, was she supposed to do? Cartwheels around the house, shouting, "Whoopee-do! All this shitting and vomiting and pain are now made bearable by the welcome news that I no longer suffer from the big C"?

It's possible Nancy realised that if her medical assessment had been made public, it would have had negative consequences for her public plea for the drug. This would have been reason enough for her to clam up. I surmised that, to Nancy, a peaceful ending justified the means.

Edited extract from Telling It Straight by John Edge, \$35 plus \$4.50 postage. Mail order details: PO Box 351, Tweed Heads, 2485; ph 5536 6502.

Postscript: In June 2004, after a two-year investigation, Police Commissioner Bob Atkinson announced no charges would be laid against "Nancy's Friends" but any new information about the circumstances of Crick's death would be investigated. Last month, with the publication of Telling It Straight, Queensland police said they would examine the book for new evidence that could lead to John Edge and 20 other supporters being charged with assisting her suicide - a crime that carries a maximum penalty of life imprisonment.

Caption: Options exhausted... The pain became too much for Crick. "I've had enough, I just want to die," she told (

On page 25 John Edge;

On page 26 Ready to go... Crick at her Burleigh home in April 2002;

On page 28 laid to rest with husband James.

2. In a one-newspaper town the editor rules

Sydney Morning Herald
October 21, 2006

People from Sydney and Melbourne need only come to Adelaide to see the effect of reduced media diversity. Even people from Adelaide don't realise it because for years they have had only one daily newspaper.

However someone arriving here from Sydney, as I did, immediately sees the enormous political power that the single newspaper's editor and proprietor have. Whatever they decide the government's policy should or shouldn't be, it eventually is. The paper just runs its line on the front page and ignores the other side of the issue until the government gives in.

And it is portrayed as "public opinion", whether or not that is what the public thinks. The newspaper picks the issues it thinks are important, and the opinions that it publishes about them, and all others are excluded from the public debate.

No politician dares say anything that raises the ire of the editor or his proprietor, or they are crucified. It happened to the Democrat Sandra Kanck for daring to talk about voluntary euthanasia, something polls say a majority of Australians support, but you would think no one did from the way it was reported.

It doesn't matter much that the proprietor does not own a TV or radio station, because they are relative lightweights in terms of issues; they don't lead, they just follow the print media. The same proprietor controlling them, too, would just make it worse.

While a media outlet may publish the truth, coverage can be biased by what issues and opinions it does and does not choose to air. Bias in the media does not change public opinion much, but it distorts the political agenda by tricking both the politicians and the public into thinking that everyone else thinks something that they actually do not.

Diversity forces the media to reflect public opinion because, where they can, readers and viewers choose the outlet that says what they agree with.

With all of the 21st century's information technology it has got to be possible for everyone to choose from a diversity of views of what is important and what is true.

3. Family pays a price in euthanasia issue

The Cairns Post
19Oct06

The Cairns Post asked me for the story about my mother's death (7-10-06), and I gave it because I felt it was important to warn people of the danger of non-terminally ill people mixing with the euthanasia lobby and using the group's assistance to commit suicide.

Ian Byford (16-10-06) seems to have missed the point: loved ones get hurt, whole families get hurt, and tragic deaths can be the accidental result of the push for individual rights.

It took courage for me to go public with my personal story and I'd have thought most readers respect that.

Euthanasia is not a black and white debate, and for those readers who think it is I can only say leave me out of it, as I've already paid a high price for the cause.
Marie Gleeson, Rigg St, Woree.

END

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The Peaceful Pill Handbook by Dr Philip Nitschke & Dr Fiona Stewart

Copies available from www.peacefulpillhandbook.com

Launched in Toronto Sept 2006, now in second printing