

WHAT ABOUT

**BWD:** Are you suggesting that a person, while they're of sound mind, can sign a memorandum giving a third party in their judgement at the time the moral right to slip that person the bitter pill?

**Sandra:** Yeah. I think that's a bloody good idea. But the way things are at the moment, I've got to decide when I go, because I've got to be compos mentis. I can't tell somebody else to do it for me, which is a great shame. But just because I've got to make sure that I can actually do the deed myself, I can't tell my doctor, "Listen, I've had it. This is it as far as I'm concerned. I'm absolutely no use. I can't even hear people. I can't do anything for people. I can't contribute anything."

**BWD:** What about the love of your family and friends? Do you think it's selfish of us to want you to stay alive, because we like you, even if you decide that you would rather not?

**Sandra:** Well, heaven's above. You're a friend of mine. Would you really like to see me non compos mentis, and being looked after and treated like a body? I'm likely to experience a good deal more pain. I'm never sick or anything like that. I haven't been sick for over 15 years now, but I fall apart, in my legs, in my back. I can't hold myself up anymore. My shoulders are going. What's going to happen to me when or if I have to have a shoulder reconstruction? I'll be in a wheelchair. For goodness sake, about all I can do is now reading.

Also, who wants to come and visit somebody who is at death's door, really, unless they feel obliged to?

**Paul:** You might be surprised.

**Sandra:** You might come and see me, dear Paul.

**Paul:** No. I wouldn't come and see you, but ...

**Sandra:** Of course you wouldn't. You probably wouldn't be able to by then.

**Paul:** You might be surprised at who would come. But you're getting away from my point.

Isn't one of the possible problems with a professionally organised premature death that, in some families, the family members want the aged person out of the way so they'll get the inheritance? So, they'll work on that person and they'll work on the doctors, to bring about a premature, as opposed to a natural, time of death.

**BWD:** You think that assisted dying should remain illegal?

**Paul:** No, I don't, but I think you want



SANDRA SHOWS OFF HER ADVANCED HEALTH CARE DIRECTIVE.

to have some sort of inbuilt protection against that eventuality.

**BWD:** But Sandra's point is, I think, that she's going to sign a statutory declaration that she's doing it of her own free will.

**Sandra:** I have. I'd like to have all my relatives and friends here so we can have an enormous wake — and then I can cark it.

**BWD:** Do you think Sandra, that when you have a big wake and all your friends are here, it might be emotionally very testing for those people to maintain a festive air about the whole thing?

**Sandra:** Look, if they're really fond of me, and if my family is really fond of me, it doesn't matter when I cark it. It's always going to be the same. I think that if your relatives want to get rid of you nice and early, because you're no longer any use to them, it doesn't seem to me to be a lot of love in the relationship.

**BWD:** Paul, what are your thoughts about dying — are you afraid?

**Paul:** No. Never have been. Once you're dead, I don't think it matters. You're dead and you're out of it. What's the point? You're physically out of it. I don't think there's a soul to take you to Heaven or Hell. It's just finish. Finito. Bust. Kaput. There's nothing.

**BWD:** Are you afraid, as Sandra is, of falling to bits, so to speak — of having a period between like you are now and a death that's unpleasant?

**Paul:** Not particularly, except with one caveat — that there's no pain while this is going on. I can see, by going to Narbethong for a fortnight's respite, that it isn't so bad really. Even if I wasn't able to walk, as long as I'm kept warm and fed, I don't think that will be so bad. I'm not even sure that it's such a bad thing to become non compos mentis before I actually cark it. I'm not sure about that.

You see these people in a nursing

THE MOURNING AFTER?

home who've got to be hand fed, they appear not to recognise you — they're just there with jaws sagging. But I just wonder if they are really feeling shitty, to use a medical term. I'm not sure that they are — and we'll never know. They can't tell you because they're senile and they're psychologically incapable, I think, of telling you. Maybe they do think, "Oh, this is a shit of a life," but they can't express that. They can't tell anybody. So you've got to be careful of this, I think.

You've got to be careful, writing people off just because they appear to be gaga, because you don't know.

You don't know what they are inside their thinking. They might not be what you think just because they look like a living vegetable.

**BWD:** I don't think Sandra is saying that you'd ever bump anybody off who didn't volunteer. Nobody is suggesting that anybody's life would be terminated just because they

appeared to be in a vegetative state. What Sandra is saying, as I understand it, is the person should be able to have the right to say, while they're still compos mentis, "I've had enough. I'm going to call a big party and you can all come round and celebrate with me, and I won't be here tomorrow." Is that really what you're saying?

**Sandra:** Yeah — and that I've had a good life. I'm 86, and Paul's going to be 86 next week.

**Paul:** Am I? Jesus. Me too? Yeah.

**Sandra:** Oh, you're just a chicken compared to me.

**Paul:** Yeah. And that's all right. That pre-requires that you make this decision before you get to the stage where relatives, friends and loved ones think of you as being non compos mentis.

**BWD:** That's what I was trying to get out of Sandra, the question of timing.

**Sandra:** Yeah, well that's it. Actually, with the recent operation that I had, I woke up and became compos mentis before I could do anything. I couldn't breathe by myself and I had a nurse there saying to me, "Breathe Sandra, breathe Sandra."

My brain said, "I can't breathe, so I'm going to die". And I thought to myself, well, it's a good way of going. That was an instant thing, and I relaxed. But of course they have a machine that does the breathing for you, I just happened to have woken up a bit too soon.

It's never happened to me before, but I do remember, I just thought to myself, "Oh well, maybe I'm going right now. That's fine". You've got to be practical about this.

What makes us think that we are so special that we've got to be kept alive at all costs? In a way, I would have been dead ages ago if it weren't for the new hips, and this, that, and the other thing they've put into me. I'm really surprised that I've lasted this long.

**BWD:** Is it going to be tricky when the time comes to have your going away party; when you invite people who you've loved, and who love you, to come to a party and say, they love you, but they'll be happy anyway to see you gone? They'll be sitting here having a quiet chardonnay, and you're sitting there, and they know that tomorrow you won't be here. Do you think they will have trouble feeling okay about it?

**Sandra:** If they feel like that then, they

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