



ANDREW DAVID

IT IS YOUR BODY! IT IS YOUR LIFE!

BY J. D. JENKINS

My primary physician is Dr. Kevorkian.

—BETTE MIDLER

If we as a nation were to eliminate every dangerous drug, every faulty auto part, remove every drunk driver from the road, eliminate guns from the streets, and every other pet grievance concerning life's dangers, would we live forever? I think not. There are some who teach an idea that death is a condition that must be equated with a cause. If there is no cause, there will be no death, right? Our nation has adopted a philosophy of self-delusion: I am my brother's keeper.

There are some of our fellow citizens that long for death every day they are forced to live on in a never ending nightmare of pain and suffering. To these and all others there is hope on the horizon.

The fight that Dr. Jack Kevorkian is fighting one of the very gallant battles in the history of social protest. Here is a man standing for a principle that simply put is: People should not be forced to suffer and should be allowed to end their lives with dignity and with a minimum of pain. The fight is being waged against religious and judicial institutions. The religious institutions are threatened if the people are no longer afraid to die. If people are no longer afraid of meeting an all-avenging God or are more afraid of current suffering than they are of future judgment, religion is in trouble. The people who earn their living in the religion business are threatened. The power over people's lives is decreased. Religion and the religious are in trouble.

The judicial institutions enforce the religious codes that rule people's lives. Western religious codes make suicide a great crime. It is considered self-murder, a desecration and destruction of the true temple of God. Some laws are easily changed. Laws that protect the basic religious codes don't change. The masses acting without regard to religious and judicial authority is the greatest threat to the power of these institutions. There is fear that spiritual and judicial anarchy will follow when people act out what is right in their own eyes.

Dr. Kevorkian's struggle is much more important than the question of doctor assisted suicide. It evokes the question, "Does humanity have the courage to break with the religiously code of conduct that has ruled its life?"

There is a close link between the issue of physician assisted suicide and the issue of abortion. There are candidates

for high political office who would have every religious code vigorously enforced. The extreme religious right within the Republican Party's highest ranks want a Constitutional Amendment that bans all abortions. The religious powers that be are fighting back to protect their codes of conduct. Dr. Kevorkian has been placed on trial three times for the same action. He helped people exit a world that was full of pain for them. The courts and prosecutors are acting like the inquisitors of old. They would mete out punishment on those who oppose religiously imposed codes.

There is within the Constitution the idea of separation of Church and State. The Bill of Rights and Constitutional amendments are for the purpose of guaranteeing rights and restricting action. The movement toward a Constitutional amendment to ban abortion would restrict access for all women to the private and knowledgeable care of their physicians. There is no logical reason for this restriction. There is only an emotional reaction based upon the fanned fires of religious fervor. In the case of Physician assisted suicide there is the issue of a person desiring to have power over their own body. An individual wants the right to make a decision and work with their doctor. In much the same way slavery made people prisoners to a master's will, so pain can be the master of any person's life. There are people who would be content to live out their lives in the chains of their pain. Others would be free and would be willing to take the risk of escape at any cost. Some will make it. Others because of their attempt will suffer even greater pain for having tried and failed. When the emancipation from slavery and the Constitutional guarantee of freedom came, people were able to make their own choices. Many stayed where they were. Many moved on. The right to a free choice is what proved to be so important.

If there is to be any amendment to the Constitution it should be one that guarantees the right of each person to freely choose what is best for their own body in both life and death. Perhaps it might say:

No government or institution shall impose any sanction or penalty on any individual for exercising his or her inalienable right to choose what is right for themselves. In bodily function, and in the event of the individual's death, dignity shall be protected and unwanted pain relieved.

J.D. Jenkins lives in Astoria. He is often seen in local theatrical and musical productions.

SYSTEM BASHING

BY ANANA MUSS

(a monologue)

How do you think it's going?

You know I'm depressed and it's getting worse and you know there is nothing you can do about it. You just sit there and regurgitate your trite clichéd phrases and pray that one of your clients doesn't commit suicide. I'm sure you could explain that away, too....*Freud or the trials of our ever changing world*, and the client would not be around to tell you what an inefficient asshole you are. But you would work it through. Let me guess...for me you would plant a large white daliah. Oh gee, I am special.

I'm surprised this whole room doesn't just fly apart around us from the revolution of the life force. From a revolt of all the humane energy that is inside all of us waiting to be tapped, to be used, to be communicated to each other instead of the clinically correct bullshit that passes between counselor and sicko. I know I'm in a bad place right now, but if I can't talk to you...Oh, you know that is not what I mean. Yeah, I could sit and talk to you all day and make you rich and of what use? You are so controlled. You should have been a monk so you could revel in your control and win God's praise at the same time. I'm sure there are no thank-yous here on earth. There shouldn't be anyway. The only reason counselling helps people is that it adds some structure that was taken away by the breakdown of the extended family in our society. The same breakdown that made daycares, nursing homes and support groups necessary. It has become very middle class to go to your counselor. You wear your "I go to my counselor" stripes on your sleeve. Anyway, I'm surprised this place doesn't just fly into splinters in a whirlwind and leave us sitting here on a bare floor looking at each other. It wouldn't take us because we are probably not worth messing with. Have you ever read *Hershell & The Hanukkah Goblins*? You should read it about six times till you think you understand it. Then you should have some little kid explain it to you. It has more psychotherapy in it than all your books with the big words that make you sound so professional and important.

You know you are the real sinner here because you know what is really going on and you just sit there tipped back in our chair with your left ankle resting on your right knee, with your head tilted slightly back like you are really contemplating something and when the big hand on the clock is either straight up or straight down everything is all wrapped up and we are out of here. One of these days the life-force is going to get tired of you. It is going to ring you out so bad that you will be worse off than if you had a prefrontal lobotomy. You'll be like a pithed frog in the specimen tray in freshman biology lab, like a balloon that has been blown up for a week and when the air is let out is just a shriveled lifeless piece of parched dead skin lying on the floor.

You sit like this is a board game. The first offender with a DUII can take diversion rather than be convicted. Of course he jumps at the chance. After his state ordered evaluation and state ordered pee-test he comes to you for Alcohol Education on Saturday mornings and a weekly counseling session. You make sure everything you say is clinically correct and check all the right boxes so the state doesn't get your ass. Beyond that it's like a bunch of pawns with pithed brains moving mechanically around the board to get through the system. The ones who get "home" first are the ones who figure out that the word counselor is a misnomer. Even if a person has started drinking a little more than he would like (which is indicated by the DUII) he soon learns that trying to get help through the system is the wrong thing to do. If he admits to having any drinking problem he will be in the system for years. The only way to get "home" is to convince the counselor that the system has educated him well in alcohol abuse and he understands that he exhibited poor judgment and his behavior was not connected to any catalyst that will elicit the same behavior again, *i.e.*, make him drink. And that he has turned his life around, is working full time, spending weekends camping with the family and has taken up his old hobby of whittling bird whistles at home in front of the fireplace passing the time in the evenings. Of course the counselor is not convinced and the client has received no therapy that is of any real use to him. The counselor has been able to check all the right boxes because the client has sworn in front of God and State that he is reformed.

The omnipotent life-force rises with renewed zeal from the repression of the inner voice, the repression of emotions that if expressed would offend others because we no longer know how to relate and consider human and humane interactions. Our world is too impersonal, bureaucratic, computerized, striving under middle class America. We are forgetting that we possess that which cannot be computerized. Our emotions, our soul, our inner eye, our inner voice, our connection to the collective universal energy. We can still hug and smile and sing. Counseling should be personal help for the individual not dictated, regimented group programs that only teach calculated deceptive maneuvers that are not relevant to the original problem. We learn the methods that fit into our legal system to get down the path on the board game without "going to jail" or getting caught in other circuitous entangling paths instead of "home." We go to meetings and lie while we smile and nod appropriately and pay attorneys and counselors thousands of dollars instead of the state.

Yes, I see it is that time. Am I emotionally well, coach? No, love my job...no desire to drink.

Annan Amuss is the *nom dé plum* of a longtime Astoria resident.

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