



Newsletter December 2014

Dear Members of Lifecircle

This is the first Newsletter since the general assembly and my last report last May. In the meantime we have been doing a lot of work within lifecircle and Eternal Spirit. A lot has been happening in the last four months.

The old man, who is now 96, whom I had taken home from hospital to die, and who recovered completely from his severe stroke, died last summer at home, in a natural way with palliative care, after a further short but aggressive illness. He was able to live for another 18 months at home, a life which was restricted, but still with a lot of life quality. I am very thankful, that I was able to fulfil his wish to die at his wonderful little home.

This spring we were able to find a 86 year old lady who was willing to take part in a film. A young, dynamic theatre group has spent a whole week with her filming her at her home. The team filmed her reflections concerning her wish to die, her last wishes, and finally how she died. She was suffering from several illnesses of old age known as multimorbidity. Her life quality was so poor, that she decided to have an assisted death before it got worse. As she wanted to give a testimony of her gratitude for the assisted dying, she was willing not only to have her last days filmed but also her death. I will never forget how sad the film team was, when the old lady died. She had become their "adoptive-grandmother" during the filming time. This testimony of an old age rational assisted dying will be shown for the first time in January in Zurich. Our member, the old lady, will take part in the film on the screen. Those of you, who cannot imagine seeing a person who has died already, playing on the screen of a theatre, should put in Google „Markus und Markus Theatre“ and you will find the pieces they have already made.

Furthermore a German couple offered to take part in an educational film about assisted dying. The couple were 94 and 96, also suffering from multimorbidity. They decided to have an assisted dying together as long as they were still able to make the decision themselves. She had experienced several strokes, and he was suffering from terminal renal failure. We had the chance to do a film with the couple and a filmmaker who was extremely sensitive. The couple show what things have to be done, and what has to be thought about before an assisted dying can take place. Also in this case we were allowed to film even the very last moment, when they opened the infusion and fell asleep. So here we have a DVD, which shows very well the procedures with lifecircle, and Eternal Spirit. In addition to a lot of information this DVD also tells about the destiny of a young man



who is suffering from multiple sclerosis and ataxia. He shows how he has still a lot of life quality and autonomy despite his severe handicap, thanks to a electric wheelchair. He explains, how much his love for his girlfriend keeps him alive. But he also explains why, and under what circumstances, he would end his suffering by an assisted dying despite his love for his girlfriend. I would like to thank the filmmaker Andreas Von Hören very much for this film, full of sensitivity and information.

As a third testimony I published a book last August with the title "Father, you are allowed to die, a physicians plea for voluntary assisted death". In this book I write about my experiences and feelings during the assisted dying of my father. I explain why I became a fighter for the right to die with self decision and an assisted dying, having been a convinced friend of palliative care before. I also speak about conflict concerning religious beliefs, concerning the question "What comes after death?", and other subjects concerning the end of life. I wrote the book describing the life and death of real people i, almost like an adventure book, to make it very interesting to read. You can order the book and the DVD in German or English on our website [www.lifecircle.ch](http://www.lifecircle.ch) or by letter to our post address (lifecircle, Postfach 29, 4105 Biel-Benken). I am sorry that up to now we could not find a library to sell my book. So I have printed it on private basis. All the proceeds go to the association lifecircle.

This month, all right to die organisations met for a convention in Chicago. Such a meeting with many speeches about the autonomy and rights at the end of life takes place every two years. We were able to exchange experiences and we once again realise that we are very well off in Switzerland regarding assisted dying, but not so well regarding palliative care, compared to other the countries in the world. There is still a need to promote palliative care and hospices, and to press for the acceptance of assisted dying in hospitals and nursing homes. There is still a lot to do even, in Switzerland.

There has been a change within our staff. Sophie Haesen has started working as a hospital doctor, but she has decided to go on working for lifecircle as a translator. We have been able to replace Sophie Haesen by another dynamic young lady, Beatrice Zurbrügg, a medical secretary. Mrs Zurbrügg has already done a lot of work for us and will be taking care of our members questions.

The association lifecircle has donated 1000.- to organisation "Insieme" in Basel which looks after people with mental and physical disabilities They organise excursions and offer a day centre.



Beside a lot of advice giving we have been able to assist some of our members with their dying. As with every assisted dying, the joy and thankfulness of the people who were allowed to die was amazing. I would like to tell you about a happening which was especially moving for me and which has convinced me that it is right to ask our members to tell their family about their wish to die:

At the beginning of summer a very old lady, aged 99, asked for an assisted dying. Only, when I saw her at the hotel in Basel, I realized that she had not informed her son about her wish to die. He was on holiday around the world, but would be back five days later. His mother was convinced that he would not respect her wish to die and that he would stop her from making her wish come through. But as her own mother suffered a stroke at the age of 99 and did not die from it, but went on living in a nursing home for another six years badly handicapped, she did not want to take the risk of the same thing happening to her

After long discussions I decided that I could not hurt the son of this old lady by allowing him to learn of his mother's assisted dying while he was on holiday and him not having been able to say good-bye to her. This is exactly the important difference between a suicide and an assisted dying: the family can say good-bye, and, ideally, the wish to die can be understood and accepted or at least respected. For that reason the hard suicide leaves psychological wounds which never heal, with the family, but with an assisted dying this should not be the case.

Mrs Schmidt had two grand daughters, who lived only three hours drive from Basel. When I informed these two young women about the fact that their grandmother was with us and told them the reason of her trip to Basel, they immediately left home and headed for Basel. Never in my life I have seen an old lady so furious. But after some discussion we were able to convince her to go on holiday to her grand daughters instead of dying. On the other hand they promised their grandmother to support her in case her son would not respect his mothers wish to die very soon.

Five days after the sons return from holidays Mrs Schmidt travelled to Basel again, to go into the assisted dying she was longing for so desperately. It was one of the most moving assisted dyings that I have experienced. The son and his mother were so very thankful that they had the chance to say good bye to each other. For him it was clear that he would not only respect his mother's wish, but he would also be with her in her last few minutes in Basel His wife and his two daughters were also there with Mrs Schmidt. After she had opened the infusion, the two granddaughters stood one at the right and one at the left of the bed. Both held one of their grandmother's hands and over the bed they held



hands with each other. Their hands sort of formed a magic triangle of strength, support and love. Mrs Schmidt's son was sitting beside them on the sofa and kept saying to his daughters: "Be strong, my girls, be strong!" This is the true meaning of "assisted dying": letting a loved one go in peace and understanding.

A surprising and pleasant change came for us at the beginning of August. The authorities of Basel told us that the police in their uniforms would not come any more, just the coroner with a civil car. This is a very important change, especially for assisted dyings that take place in private houses. There are no more problems and questions from neighbours because of police cars standing in front of the house for hours. The members and the people working for the Foundation are very thankful for that. I think this was only possible because of our way of working according to very strict guidelines that we have created and that we follow voluntarily. It shows us that the authorities honour our way of working with complete confidence.

I do wish our members all the very best and lots of love and understanding.

With kind regards

Dr. Erika Preisig