WITHOUT DUE CARE
AN AUSTRALIAN HOSPITAL TRAGEDY
By Therese Mackay
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Without Due Care: An Australian Tragedy is at its deepest level a passionate love story. It is also a warning to all Australians, and almost certainly to most who live in wealthy societies with advanced medical cultures. It is an ardent, honest book, written with a bewildered mix of love, anger and incomprehension.

The incomprehension is about a brutal reality that pervades modern medicine, bureaucracy and life. It is the impersonal insensitivity that seems inevitable when cultures are defined by financial calculations and professional arrogance.

In this instance, this total insensitivity produced a nightmare hospital staffed with callous nurses and condescending, and often incompetent, doctors, protected by professional bureaucrats and politicians.

But above all, the book is inspired and uplifted by Therese Mackay’s overriding love for her husband, Don, a quadriplegic, whom she had nursed and tended virtually 24 hours a day for 25 years.

It is a testimony to the human will and spirit and the capacity of two people to intelligently overcome the most daunting of physical tragedies and disabilities. Its anger is intensified by the almost total lack of these qualities among the professionals in a Sydney hospital.

At the same time, the author fully acknowledges the fact that these people are not necessarily representative of a profession that did enable her husband to live a very full life for 25 years after an accident that may have left him with no future at all.

While Therese Mackay is astounded and outraged at the treatment handed out to her husband, it is clear from her passing remarks that others, many others, have suffered similarly. Indeed, her family’s prior experience of the hospital and her own experience in protesting the fluoridation of drinking water might have equipped her better than many to handle the injustices she and her husband experienced.

He died over a torturous five weeks, after being admitted for a simple procedure related to a fluid build up in one lung. The story is convincing because it reflects the agony of someone given to assuming a basic humanity and competence in the world around her.

Of course, her own words and account suggest that this was unwise and unrealistic, but this failing is one that she likely shares with a great majority of her fellow Australians.

Her book is a profound warning because it highlights how corrupt mainstream medical culture can be when people are at their most defenceless. It is unpleasant to think about this but a little reflection on what has happened to mainstream food and medicine in modern advanced societies highlights the way in which self-interested calculation and the mechanical pressures of professional routine can over-ride humanity and simple fellow feeling.

Massive and highly profitable industries that are central to contemporary medical practice, culture and education are now beginning to be exposed as seeding and aggravating much of the plague of degenerative disease in so-called advanced societies. Their influence remains profound, however, often among the best and brightest of each generation, who spend much time, energy and wealth to obtain medical qualifications.

She mentions in passing that Don’s five torturous weeks in this hospital cost $100,000 and it is impossible for a reader not to wonder how this money was distributed.

Even worse, after admission to the Intensive Care Unit, her husband was signed up, with little understanding or awareness, to participate in a NICE-SUGAR Study. The author subsequently discovered this contributes to death when conducted on critically ill patients. The author describes the hideous frequency of blood tests and transfusions apparently conducted to service this study.

Therese Mackay’s story is far from being a methodical study of the failings of contemporary health care but is more a flood of bewildered feelings unable to accept the reality of a world where the carers and healers can so betray the reason for their existence. As such, the reader is swept into the author’s world, carried along by the repetition of the unbelievable, the shock of the unimaginable and the torture of the unconscionable.

This horror story then steps into the bureaucratic and political worlds, as they reveal themselves to be part of this man-made hell, concerned only to meet formal obligations that insist that mere human feelings and protests not be allowed to intrude on systemic imperatives.

It shows that democratic processes in possibly the most liveable society in the contemporary world, Australia, do not always protect those in need.

While the society provided the means and community for a quadriplegic to live a more fulfilled life than many with no physical disabilities, it failed abysmally when care and attention was needed in a routine treatment as that life approached a moment of celebration and special fulfilment with the imminent marriage of a much loved daughter.

Perhaps Therese and Don Mackay expected too much, having defied...
fate so bravely for 25 years, but nothing could legitimise the horrific last 5 weeks of Don's hospital treat-
ment. Yet, Therese's love and horror story is a monument to Don's life and death.

While his life clearly affected many in very positive ways, the tell-
ing of his death may be his ultimate glory, both in demonstrating the love that defined his life and the callousness of modern systems that inflicted his death.

Sadly, anyone who follows in any depth events in the contemporary world, knows that such callousness exists both in our domestic food and medical systems and in our external policies that legitimise many cruelt-
ties in the name of humanitarian and other noble causes.

Man still lives in a jungle but the nature of its rapidly changing and evolving character remains little defined. Therese Mackay has written an elegant and distressing account of the jungle of false promises and pretences that engulfed her and her beloved husband at a moment when both found themselves to be de-
defenceless.

— Reg Little

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