



COLBY FREE PRESS

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Author speaks in favor of right-to-die

By Tisha Cox
Colby Free Press

Many clichés state how someone's life is important. But author William Colby advocates the importance of people having the right to die as they see fit.

Colby, a former attorney and author of the book "Unplugged: Reclaiming Our Right to Die in America," gave a presentation Tuesday at Colby Community College. Colby, 51, rose to prominence representing the family of Nancy Cruzan, which was the first right-to-

die case heard before the U.S. Supreme Court.

Colby took the case, his first right-to-die case 1987. In 1983, Nancy Cruzan, a 25-year-old Missouri woman, was in a car wreck in rural southwestern Missouri. He said at the time, there was no 911

and it took time for help to arrive. Emergency medical technicians started resuscitation and re-started her heart.

During legal proceedings, Colby concluded Cruzan's brain had been without oxygen for at least 30 minutes, causing brain damage, and destroying everything that made her who she was.

"The family didn't know until two days after the accident that she had suffered from anoxia (lack of oxygen to the brain), and their lives changed forever," he said. "Trying to get a response (from her) became their lives," he said. "That's what they did."

Eventually, the family had two choices, keep her alive by use of a feeding tube, or remove it.

"The accident had taken away all good choice," he said.

Thirty days after the accident, she was in a vegetative state; four months later, a permanent vegetative state.

Colby said Cruzan wasn't in a full coma. She slept and woke, would startle at loud noises, respond to stimulus and could have survived that way for up to 40 years.

Her family decided to remove her feeding tube.

"The Missouri Department of Health had never removed a feeding tube from a patient at a state hospital, and made the decision to go to court," he said.

That was when the fight began.

Eventually, the case went before the Supreme Court, and the federal government decided to get involved. The government sided with the state and decided under the U.S. Constitution, adults have the right

to make a decision on their own health or refuse treatment.

The family appealed. After a second trial Cruzan was moved from rehabilitative care to hospice in 1990.

Four days later, protesters on both sides of the issue showed up and were arrested trying to get into the hospital. Colby said there were people there in support of right-to-die as well as those who didn't want the removal of the feeding tube.

"It was unique in our culture in a lot of ways," Colby said.

Eleven days after the tube was removed, Cruzan died.

"That case got the states and federal government to pass laws and more importantly, get people talking about death," Colby said.

He said death isn't a dark or sinister topic, nor something to be avoided. And by talking about it when healthy, can give families piece of mind.

"That talk is a gift," Colby said.

In the 1970s, he said a Chicago lawyer came up with living wills. Living will state what someone would do if they went into a coma and didn't want a respirator.

Living will laws were later approved, and people have started to consider who will and how their medical power of attorney will be handled. However, the laws can't deal with everything.

"The black and white of the law can only go so far to address the grey — the human emotion," Colby said.

He used the 2005 Terry Schiavo case in Florida as an example. Schiavo was in a condition similar to Cruzan.

Under Florida law, her husband

had the right to make decisions regarding her health and treatment. But eventually, it all came down to money, Colby said.

"Her husband and parents didn't talk for several years after an argument over a life insurance policy, and the relationship festered," he said.

Colby said they "rightfully" challenged Schiavo's husband and his motives in court through two trials, but the entire case moved right-to-die into the national spotlight.

"It all could have been avoided if the family had talked about her wishes before she had the cardiac arrest that put her into a vegetative state," he said.

Colby emphasized that is what families need to do — makes plans well in advance.

He said in the wake of the Schiavo case, people have started to talk about right-to-die. In 18 months, the Caring Connections Web site had more than two million hits. Caring Connections is a program of the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization.

Colby has not practiced law in several years and has now dedicated himself to the right-to-die debate.

"For most of recorded time, when we were dead, we were dead," Colby said.

Colby said medicine is only going to keep evolving, and no one can guess what changes might come.

"I'm not sure our science fiction writers can tell us," he said. "However, as technology evolves, people are going to ask hard questions about how they want to die and who will take care of the decisions that must be made when they cannot."



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press

Author and former attorney William Colby signed copies of his book Tuesday at the Colby Community College Cultural Arts Center. Colby gave a presentation on the right-to-die debate, and talked about his own experiences as a lawyer dealing with cases. He was the attorney who represented the family involved in the first right-to-die case that went before the Supreme Court.

Kansas art official to visit Colby

By Patty Decker
Free Press Editor

For the first time, Colby will be one of only four communities hosting a welcome reception for the state's new art commission executive director.

Llewellyn Crain of Manhattan will visit 3:30 to 5 p.m. Tuesday in the gallery at Frahm Theater on the Colby Community College campus, said Sharon Kriss, commission member from Colby.

"It is a real honor to have her come this far and I hope as many people as possible will plan to greet her on Tuesday," she said. "Llewellyn is a strong believer in the power of the arts."

As a six-year member of the Kansas Arts Commission, Kriss said her task has been to promote the group's mission of ensuring the people in Kansas value and celebrate the arts throughout their lives.

"The Kansas Arts Commission has assisted the Western Plains Art Association, the Pride of the Prairie Orchestra, and the Kansas Music Teachers Association with monetary support for many years," Kriss said.

"This support has helped these organizations present quality art and entertainment to the citizens of western Kansas."

Crain became director of the commission in May after being selected as the best of 52 candidates seeking the position.

Prior to living in Kansas, she served as the director of educational initiative for the Los Angeles Phil-

harmonic and the director of community programs at the Los Angeles Opera.

In those positions she was commissioned and produced new works for children and adults, developing education programs for all ages and participating in marketing and development.

"The arts are vital to the health of Kansas towns and cities because they are among the most profound and most satisfying aspects of our humanity," Crain said.

She said she is looking forward to meeting people in Colby and around the state to find out more about the arts in the various locations.

"I want to know what is going on in your area and how important the arts are to you and how the Kansas Arts Commission can better accomplish its mission."

During the first 30 minutes of the reception Crain will meet with area residents and at 4:15 p.m. will have a short speech about the commission.

In addition to visiting Colby in August, the new director spoke in Wichita, Manhattan and Atchison.

"This is a wonderful opportunity to meet the executive director and commissioners and learn more about the Kansas Arts Commission," Kriss said.



Crain

New year, new pencil



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press

Tristan Slinger, kindergartner, sharpened his pencils during the Colby Grade School "sneak peek" Wednesday evening. The school opened its doors so parents and students could tour the building, drop off school supplies and meet their teachers before the first day of school today.

Economic developer sees hope

By Jan Katz Ackerman
Colby Free Press

Logan County Development Corporation has hired a new director and he is excited about living in northwestern Kansas.

Jamie Bell started work in July and brings to the area an extensive knowledge base about how small communities function.

"My goal is to work with local businesses to help them expand and to bring new business to the county," Bell said.

Born and raised in Pratt, Bell said Logan County is not new to him. Formerly a licensed private investigator, Bell said he worked an insurance case in Oakley and "really liked the town."

A 1996 graduate of Wichita State University, Bell's background includes city management, as well as work in social services as director of a homeless shelter in Liberal.

Former city manager at St. Marys, Bell said he is ready for a new challenge and excited to help Logan County grow.

"Sometimes you have to look outside the box," he said. "Most downtowns have a restaurant and pharmacy, but I'd love to see a great art gallery here and get people off Interstate 70 and have them explore downtown and other areas of the county."

Bell said while Logan County has "fundamental businesses" already in place, he hopes to draw new business which will help increase population. Using plans which are currently being developed, Bell said he is confident business and population growth will take place.

"We have to look at alternate work styles such as windmill energy," he said. "And we have to work with businesses in towns such as Winona."

Bell and his wife, Phi, who is studying nursing at Colby Community College, have two sons, Skyler, 4, and Bryton, 9-months.

Medicare holds funds

WASHINGTON (AP) — Many health care providers will have to make do next month without a government paycheck or two.

The Bush administration says it will not make any Medicare reimbursements to hospitals, doctors and scores of other providers during the last nine days of the current budget year, from Sept. 22-30. Congress ordered the hold.

The providers taking care of older people and the disabled will get paid in full after the new budget year begins Oct. 1. They should not count on any interest on the amount they are owed.

By delaying payments, the government moves \$5.2 billion in Medicare expenses to next year's budget, rather than the current one.