



DO NOT RESUSCITATE

Steve, Mary and Judy want the right
to choose when and how to die

A two part documentary series

A **STUDYGUIDE** BY MARGUERITE O'HARA

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Director Davor Dirlic

This two-part documentary, *Do Not Resuscitate* (Davor Dirlic, 2006), is about people's right to choose the time and manner of their death. It explores the issue of euthanasia through following three people as they investigate their options to maintain control over their lives and the manner and time of their death. For many viewers, watching a documentary about individuals talking about how and when to end their lives could be very confronting. Teachers need to be aware of the sensitivities many students will have to seeing people suffering, physically, mentally and emotionally. Equally, the issue of euthanasia is one that provokes passionate views on both sides of the debate. The film explores these legal and ethical questions in the way these three individual's stories are developed and contextualized.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS > *Do Not Resuscitate* is a Circe Film, produced by Lizzette Atkins. Other documentaries produced by this Melbourne-based company include *Passport to Parenthood*, *Undercover Angels: Sex, Spies and Surveillance* and *Vietnam Nurses*. *Do Not Resuscitate* is directed by Davor Dirlic. He grew up in Croatia where he graduated from the Zagreb school for Film and TV. In 1989, Dirlic moved to Melbourne. His last film *Passport to Parenthood* screened on SBS in 2004. The film was written by David Tiley, who also edits Screen Hub. Mark Atkin, the film's editor also writes and directs television documentaries. The film is narrated by Robert Menzies.



SYNOPSIS

DO NOT RESUSCITATE IS A FILM ABOUT THE TRUTHS PEOPLE FACE WHEN THEY HAVE TO DEAL WITH THEIR MORTALITY.

We follow three very different people, Steve, Mary and Judy whose lives are driven by suffering over eighteen months. They want the right to choose how and when they die. In Australia assisting them to die is illegal and carries a 14-year jail sentence, despite the fact that seventy-three per cent of Australians support euthanasia. But the prospect of dying a long and painful death drives them to go to extraordinary lengths to get access to the means to choose their own kind of death. The result is a profound exploration of how they and their loved ones deal with the stark reality of their impending death and the obstacles they face. As Steve, Mary and Judy challenge the status quo, the laws governing euthanasia in Australia are put to the test.

The series opens with an emotional plea on talkback radio from a dying man, STEVE GUEST (58) and the Australian public is confronted with the terrible reality of his suffering. Steve has cancer of the oesophagus and only has weeks to live. A former media advisor and press attaché, Steve is used to controversy. His call strikes a chord with the Australian public and ignites a media debate about euthanasia. Over the next two weeks, Steve allows us to share, in intimate detail, his pain and existential suffering. We hear his thoughts and fears in the days leading up to his death. His appeal

through the media for a 'good death' is answered and an anonymous supporter agrees – illegally – to provide the drug that gives Steve the means to kill himself. Following Steve's death from an overdose of barbiturates, the coroner refers the case back to the police. The people who were close to him in his last days, including his brothers, become suspects in a homicide investigation.

MARY WALSH is an energetic 63-year-old wife, mother, grandmother and self-styled political activist. Five years ago, she was diagnosed with ovarian cancer with a ten per cent chance of survival. She endured a gruelling regime of surgery and chemotherapy and is determined to commit suicide if her cancer returns. Desperate to be in control and despite her family's concern, Mary embarks on a trip to Mexico to buy the lethal drug Nembutal, which will become her means to this end. Obtaining the drug proves more difficult than she thought possible and Mary is totally unprepared for her foray into the Mexican underworld. Despite successfully obtaining the illegal drug, Mary is then confronted with the reality. In order to take the drug back to Australia she will have to break the law and smuggle the drug back through customs.

JUDY BAYLISS (56) is in the grip of multiple sclerosis. A former school-teacher, she was diagnosed in her mid-twenties and has been living with

this debilitating disease nearly all her life. She suffers intensely from her loss of independence as she depends more and more on the help of others for the simplest of tasks. Fifteen years ago she tried to kill herself. She still wishes she had succeeded. But Judy resists her decay with a mixture of stubborn defiance and pure hope and she contemplates becoming a human guinea pig in the brave new world of stem cell transplants. She travels to China to visit neurosurgeon Dr. Huang Hongyun, whose treatment is contentious because it involves the use of cells from aborted fetuses injected into the brain or spinal chord. When her trip to China fails to deliver any real hope for stemming her disease, the choices available to Judy become increasingly unpalatable and she is forced to face the reality of her situation.

On this powerful and emotional journey, we intimately experience the lives of three people looking death in the face and the choices they make. Through the media, a dialogue surfaces between the Australian public, Dr. Nicholas Tonti-Filippini, a Catholic bio-ethicist strongly opposed to euthanasia, and Dr. Rodney Syme, the president of Dying with Dignity Victoria and a staunch euthanasia campaigner. In conjunction with our three characters, Steve, Mary and Judy, they discuss their deepest feelings around death and dying, their beliefs and fears.



TOP L-R:
BOTTOM L-R:

CURRICULUM APPLICABILITY

This study guide to accompany *Do Not Resuscitate*, a documentary film in two 52-minute parts, directed by Davor

Dirlic, is designed for senior secondary students and tertiary students. It includes information and learning activities relevant to SOSE (HSIE), Religion and Society, Values Education, English and Media Studies. At tertiary level, this documentary would have relevance to students of Nursing, Human Services, Social Work and Medicine. Teachers and students should be aware of the often distressing nature of some images and sequences in this film. Davor Dirlic, the Director of this film, acknowledges that the subject matter of this film, death, suffering and dying, will 'awaken our innermost fears and trigger an intense emotional response'.

KEY TERMS

Finding agreed meanings for words like *euthanasia* is always going to be difficult. Many words associated with this issue are often loaded with either positive or negative connotations. Students will need to look carefully at how

language can determine responses, particularly in relation to words such as *control*, *suicide* and *euthanasia*. Below is a list of terms and organizations referred to in this documentary, defined as simply and clearly as possible.

- *Euthanasia* – from the Greek word *eu+thanatos* = good death]. The act of ending the life of an individual suffering from a terminal illness or an incurable condition, through lethal injection or the suspension of extraordinary medical treatment.
- *Dying With Dignity Victoria* (previously called Voluntary Euthanasia Society of Victoria) – an education, 'self-help' and law reform organization pursuing public policies and laws in Victoria that enhance self-determination and dignity at the end of life. (from their website)
- *Palliative Care* – an approach to treatment that improves the quality of life of patients and their families facing the problems associated with life-threatening illnesses. (World Health Organization definition)
- *Nembutal* – trade name for a sedative drug, pentobarbital sodium. Used in combination in veterinary euthanasia. Strictly controlled availability.

- *Multiple Sclerosis (MS)* – a chronic autoimmune disease of the central nervous system. It interferes with the nerve pathways and causes gradually deteriorating muscular weakness, loss of co-ordination, and speech and visual disturbances.
- *Bio-ethicist* – a person whose area of study and expertise is in the ethical issues of biological sciences and medicine.

PEOPLE IN THE FILM

- STEVE GUEST** – 58-year-old former journalist with terminal oesophageal cancer
- MARY WALSH** – 63-year-old in remission from ovarian cancer
- JUDY BAYLISS** – 56-year-old former teacher with multiple sclerosis
- DR. RODNEY SYME** – President of Dying With Dignity Victoria and a staunch euthanasia campaigner
- DR. NICHOLAS TONTI-FILIPPINI** – Catholic bio-ethicist strongly opposed to euthanasia
- JON FAINE** – ABC morning radio broadcaster in Melbourne

Also, family and friends of the three subjects featured in the documentary.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT BY DAVOR DIRLIC

EVERY HUMAN LIFE IS ENIGMATIC and precious and our instinct is to hang on to fight for every breath of it. Yet for some, the suffering of life outweighs the instinctive fear of death. The two things we know about death: the absolute certainty that we will die and the uncertainty when or how we will die, don't help us a great deal to accept it in a peaceful way. Voluntary euthanasia as a way of achieving dignified death is a hot topic that offers a particular angle on end-of-life issues. It also awakens our innermost fears and triggers an intense emotional response.

Do Not Resuscitate was always going to be a character-driven documentary. From the very birth of the idea to make a film about the end-of-life decisions, I knew that the hardest thing was going to be to find subjects willing to participate. The topic has always been very contentious and wrapped with layers of ethical questions not many people are keen to talk about – particularly not on camera.

I started the research by approaching the former Voluntary Euthanasia Society of Victoria, now Dying With Dignity Victoria. This is where I met a group of enthusiastic people who initially expressed their interest in taking part in filming only to turn down the offer even before the filming started. It was obvious that they feared going public because of the possible criticism from society and their families.

Three months into research I received a phone call from Mary Walsh. She introduced herself as a 62-year-old cancer survivor who was determined to commit euthanasia if the cancer came back. Frustrated with the Government status quo stance on euthanasia, she was equally frustrated with a lack of support from her family about her wish to die on her own terms if she came out of remission. Both strident and enthusiastic, Mary appeared to be ready to make a big splash. She was everything but camera shy and more than willing to use the filming opportunity to share her uncompromising views. After our first few interviews she asked me to

follow her to a tattoo shop where she put a DO NOT RESUSCITATE tattoo on her chest. With such a statement I knew I'd found my first character.

As the filming started, I was introduced to Judy Bayliss, a former teacher who had struggled with multiple sclerosis for most of her life. Impressively educated, at fifty-seven, Judy had been experiencing the gradual loss of her speech and bodily functions. Constantly oscillating between hope and despair Judy tried to commit suicide fifteen years ago. She wished she had succeeded and she still considered euthanasia a possibility. What struck me the most about Judy was that, in spite of her resolution to deal herself out when life became absolutely unbearable, she had never stopped clinging onto a hope for cure. Her existence resembled a long-term war between life and death options. Her simple but sharp comments forced me to re-evaluate my concept of euthanasia, thus giving my cinematic journey a more balanced direction.

I met Steve Guest two weeks before he died. In the last stages of cancer of the oesophagus at the age of fifty-eight, the former journalist and media campaigner went on ABC morning radio pleading for his right to die in a peaceful and dignified way. My producer Lizzette Atkins got in touch with him within minutes after the radio program finished. The next thing I knew I was driving to Point Lonsdale to interview the man who did not want to live more than he had planned. Steve absolutely charmed me with his sincerity and willingness to talk openly about his approaching death. Being a former journalist Steve understood my job very well and allowed me to come exceptionally close when circling with my camera around his dying body and asking questions. He was a rarely brave and articulate man who decided to use his grave situation to raise the awareness of a lack of political and legal will to tackle the issue of medically assisted dying.

**OUR LIFE EXPERIENCE MAKES US
WHAT WE ARE.**

What made the filming of Steve, Judy and Mary compelling was the realization that behind their cry to achieve control over their deaths dwelt an amazing density of three very unique personalities and life circumstances. The more I filmed them and the more I became a regular presence in their lives the more I became aware of how every single stance, every thought, every belief had a deep seeded history behind it. As much as the issue of euthanasia was a moral complexity hard to resolve, these people's life stories were equally complex. I found myself dealing with real people whose rich life experience made them who they were. In that sense they proved to be as right or wrong and as perfect or imperfect as any of us could be. Their life accounts were taking me right inside their complex worlds where a personal story told in an intimate way, had a powerful, universal resonance.

**A COLLATION OF OBSERVATIONAL,
INTIMATE AND POETIC IMAGES.**

For me this two-year cinematic journey continually had a sense of heading into the new, the unknown, a sense of deep exploration into things. The camera was set to find its way to reveal and un-veil, to explore, to come a step closer. How close could an eye or a hand be filmed? The three stories unfold following the emotional logic. We are here on a poignant ride with our characters. We listen. We want to know more. After the face is looked at, the camera moves on to explore the wall behind it. Someone's house, bedroom, window ... there is a cloud out there. From time to time images dissolve. A note on a piano is played. There is a silhouette backed up by the sound of a cello. A character's shadow is caught in a moment. There is a feeling of a gentle wind that incites an evocative flow of rough, touching and curious passages. Things could look funny for a moment. This is an intimate journey. It is confessional, personal enough to remind us that we all are made of the same human material.

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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:

Student Activity 1

Before watching *Do Not Resuscitate*, respond to the following questions either individually or through shared discussion. You could review your responses after watching the film.

1. What makes life worth living for you?
2. What does being healthy mean to you?
3. In what ways might your quality of life be changed through a chronic illness, a disabling accident or having a terminal illness?
4. How important is it for you to be in control of your life?
5. How do people in our society deal with death and dying?
6. Write down your own understanding of the meaning of *euthanasia* and share your understanding with

- others in your group or class.
7. What do you think are the range of views in our society about the issue of euthanasia?
8. Have you had, or do you know of, a pet dog or cat that had to be 'put down' (euthanased) by a vet when it became very ill?
9. Discuss the difference in meaning and/or tone of the following words and terms: mercy killing, dying, killing, passing on, assisted suicide, murder, euthanasia, dying with dignity.
10. What is your understanding of 'palliative care'?
11. Under what circumstances do you believe individuals should have the right to end their lives?
12. How might the suicide of a friend or relative affect those closest to that person?

SUGGESTED WAYS TO APPROACH THIS FILM

It would probably be best to view each episode of *Do Not Resuscitate* with a time space in between. On SBS television Part 1 will be shown on one evening and Part 2 a week later. Leaving time between watching each episode may make for more thoughtful discussion and allow time for researching some of the issues about euthanasia, some of which are raised in the final activity in this guide.

Student Activity 2

EPISODE 1

In this episode we meet the three individuals whose stories are explored in this documentary, Steve, Mary and Judy. While their life situations are all

Person	Medical condition. From what condition is each person suffering and for how long?	Occupation either now or before they became ill.	Family and friends evident in film.	How early life has influenced choices made in adult life.	Why these people chose to be a part of this film.	Project each is involved in that relates to their desire to choose time and means of own death.
STEVE						
MARY						
JUDY						

TABLE 1

very different, they are united by their wish to control the time and manner of their own deaths.

- To develop an understanding of what drives these three people, fill out Table 1 (above). Read the headings carefully before making notes as you watch the film. There are six areas to consider for each individual.
- Choose one of the following sets of questions about each of the three people in the film. As you watch the two episodes of the documentary, follow their journey closely. It may be easiest to divide your class into three groups: **S (Steve)**, **M (Mary)** and **J (Judy)** with members of each group responsible for contributing an ac-

count to others in the class of what you think about each individual's dilemmas and choices. You will also find out about some of the legal and moral issues relating to euthanasia. These questions focus on Episode 1. In each episode the director moves between the three as we follow their individual stories, but for ease of following each story, the scenes concerning each person have been grouped together. A quote from the person precedes each group of questions.

S (Steve)

Scene 1

'I want a pill in the cupboard that I can reach for and – and end this nightmare

that I'm living at the moment.'

- How does 'Steve from Point Lonsdale' introduce himself to Jon Faine on ABC radio?
- Describe the illness and how it affects Steve's life so dramatically.
- What does Steve want at this time in his life?
- Is assisting someone to take action to end their life legal?
- What penalties are there for a person assisting someone to die?
- Why do you think Steve 'goes public' on radio both about his own situation and the issue of euthanasia?
- Steve describes the main aspect of his suffering as 'mental anguish'. What do you think he is referring to?
- What does Steve want to discuss

with his brothers, John and Andy, when they come to visit him?

- What is Steve asking them to do in relation to his decision to end his life?
- What does the story about Steve's dog have to do with his own situation?

Scene 2

'It should be an absolute right in any civilized democracy for people to choose when to end their own life'.

- What is the legal situation regarding the use of the sedative drug, Nembutal, in Australia?
- Is it legal for doctors in Australia to provide advice to someone like Steve about ways to end their life?
- Who is Rodney Syme, the doctor Steve phones, who comes to visit him?
- What is Nick Tonti-Filippini's position on euthanasia? How does he characterize Dr. Syme?
- How is Tonti-Filippini's own medical condition relevant to the issue of euthanasia?
- Does it give him more credibility in the debate?
- Jon Faine of ABC radio has invited Steve to take part in a talkback Scene on radio two weeks after he made his initial call. He has agreed. Why do you think he agrees to do this when he is so unwell?
- What are some of the range of caller responses to the radio program?
- How does Dr. Tonti-Filippini respond to Steve?
- What is Steve's response to Tonti-Filippini?
- Why does the train driver, who has been an unwilling witness to nine suicides, call in?
- How do you think this radio program might affect the debate on euthanasia?

Scene 3

'From now on there is no possibility of any improvement in the quality of my life, and there's virtually none in it at the moment'.

- The second radio broadcast results in an offer from an anonymous supporter of euthanasia to supply Steve with the lethal drugs he needs to kill himself. Explain how you regard this practical assistance.
- How does Steve describe how he feels now he has the means to end his life when he believes the time is right?
- What is Dr. Syme's concern about how Steve wants to end his life?
- Dr. Nick Tonti-Filippini has equally strong feelings about people dying alone. What is his view about how people should die?

M (Mary)

Scene 1

We're used to having control about every facet of our life ... and yet the most important thing that we're going to do in our life and that's die, we don't have any control over.

- Mary has been in remission from her cancer for five years, so why is she anxious to have both the right and means available to her to take her own life in the future?
- How is Mary's family situation shown to be different to Steve's?
- How do Mary's daughters and husband Kevin describe Mary's personality?
- How does Mary describe her treatment for cancer, including the surgery and months of chemotherapy? How is her account visually supported?
- What words would you use to describe her relationship with her husband Kevin?

Scene 2

'I don't have a problem facing death'.

- In discussions with her family, Mary explains her idea of 'a perfect death'. What does she see this as being?
- What are her daughters' responses to their mother's crusade to both legalize euthanasia and have the

means available to control her own death?

- Why does Mary reject her daughter's statement that 'life to me is precious in any shape or form'?

Scene 3

I wish that I had more powerful people in my family that would be able to absolutely reassure me 100 per cent that I can die in peace and dignity.

- Mary is present at the Dying with Dignity meeting chaired by Dr. Syme in Melbourne. What percentage of the community does this organization claim supports voluntary euthanasia?
- How many replies has Mary had to the 130 letters she has sent to Members of Parliament?
- Do you think the reply rate would be similar in response to letters on other issues? Why or why not?
- What is Mary now embarking on as part of her pro-euthanasia activities?
- What does the new bill before Parliament make illegal in relation to euthanasia?
- What words does Mary have tattooed on her chest?
- Do you think there is a difference between a request to doctors to *not resuscitate* a very sick patient and voluntary euthanasia?
- Mary's sister Joy does not think the same way as her sister. Describe the differences in their views about 'end of life' matters.
- Where is Mary planning to go to pursue her campaign for controlling how and when she dies?

J (Judy)

Scene 1

'I wish to take control at all times because it's my life'.

- How do we first see Judy Bayliss? Describe her appearance.
- What sort of daily assistance does she need?
- What did Judy attempt to do fifteen years ago? Describe the

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method she used and explain why she was unsuccessful.

- When she married Brian, he made her a promise. What was this and does he still stand by it?
- Why did Judy and Brian separate after six months of marriage?
- What is Judy thinking about doing in an attempt to help her better deal with her multiple sclerosis?

Scene 2

‘As I get older I’ve grown pretty desperate’.

- What is Judy considering doing in an attempt to change her situation?
- What does Dr. Huang Hongyun’s controversial treatment involve?
- What is Judy’s mother’s response to her daughter’s plan and her living arrangements?
- What reasons does Judy give for refusing to consider living in a hostel where there would be more on-going assistance available to her?

Scene 3

‘It might be a partial cure for me but I desire to find out about it first’.

- What is Judy planning to do next?
- Whose assistance does she need to make the trip possible?
- What are her Australian doctors’ views about what Judy is considering?
- What are some of the difficulties and uncertainties involved in the trip for Judy that will make it both physically and emotionally very demanding?

At the end of Episode 1 three questions are posed by the narrator about what these three people will do next.

- Will Steve kill himself?
- Will Mary smuggle Nembutal into Australia from Mexico?
- Will Judy find the help she is looking for in China with Dr. Huang?

Student Activity 3 – Following the journeys.

EPISODE 2

S (Steve)

Scene 1

‘If I can have any beneficial effect on any poor bugger who’s suffering, then it gives my imminent death some meaning’.

- Two weeks after going on radio, how has Steve’s physical condition changed?
- Are these physical changes mirrored in his mental state?
- What does Steve tell Dr. Syme when he visits him at Point Lonsdale?
- How does the music used in the film at this point create an emotional impact?
- What are John and Andrew’s feelings at this point about their brother’s imminent death?
- Does Steve Guest have any belief in an afterlife?
- As he connects the feeding tube to his stomach, undresses and gets into bed, what is implied to the viewer in these scenes?
- Is Steve alone at this point in the film? How do we know who is or is not in the room at this time?
- Steve Guest’s death overnight is announced by Jon Faine on his radio program. It is in the newspapers and has re-opened the debate on euthanasia. Is this what Steve wanted?
- Why has his death been referred to the State Coroner to determine the cause of death?
- What does Dr. Tonti-Filippini, the bioethicist opposed to euthanasia, have to say about Steve’s death?
- What did the State Coroner find to be the cause of death?
- Why is Steve’s death referred to the police for investigation?
- Who is to be questioned and why?
- How does Dr. Syme respond to many of the police questions in the record of the interview?

M (Mary)

Scene 1

‘I feel like I’ve been controlled all of my life, one way and another’.

- Why is Mary preparing to travel to Mexico?
- While her family, including her sister, seems to know why Mary is making this trip, why do they appear to be unable to persuade her not to go?
- What is the annual Festival taking place in Mexico City on the day Mary arrives? Explain the meaning of this festival.
- What is Mary’s major quest in Mexico City?
- How well prepared is she for successfully achieving her goal?
- In allowing her trip to be filmed, how would this complicate her task?
- The T-shirt Mary is wearing as she goes to pharmacies says *Your Choice in Dying*? Can this be seen as either provocative, foolish or brave, or is it irrelevant in a country where English is not commonly spoken?
- As her search becomes more frustrating, what does Mary realize about the information she found in Australia, mostly through the internet?
- How does her engagement of an English-speaking driver, help in her search?
- Finally when she takes the faked prescription to a veterinary pharmacy, what does she discover?
- Having secured what she came for, what is Mary’s next legal and moral dilemma shown to be?
- Mary claims that:
It is ironic that someone from a first-world country like Australia has to go to a third-world country like Mexico to get the means for a peaceful death.
Do you agree?

Scene 2

‘... death itself is defeated by love and memory.’ (Mexican explanation of the

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annual national Festival of the Dead)

- Explain what Mexicans believe happens at the annual *Festival of the Dead*?
- Mary describes the way death is regarded in Mexico as ‘not an enemy to be feared ... but more a partner in the dance of life’. Does she find this idea comforting?
- What does Mary tell us about her childhood as she prepares to return to Australia?
- When Mary describes how she believes she has been controlled all her life, what light does this shed on her adult wish to be in control now?
- In what sense is the acquisition of Nembutal symbolic to Mary of achieving control?
- What does she eventually decide to do with the Nembutal, and for what reasons?
- When Mary says, ‘I’m not alone in the world’ who else’s feelings is she acknowledging?

J (Judy)

Scene 1

‘In the future I won’t be prepared to live any more when I’m no longer independent.’

- What is the controversial treatment for multiple sclerosis Judy goes to investigate in China?
- Why is such ‘treatment’ controversial?
- Are her Australian doctors supportive of this action?
- What are Tom’s (Judy’s Chinese speaking companion and carer) concerns about the questions Judy is intending to ask Dr. Huang?
- Do you think it is reasonable that people ask these questions of doctors before undergoing medical treatments?
- What is the financial cost of Dr. Huang’s treatment?
- What level of possible improvement does he claim that patients of this treatment can expect?
- Why is Judy unable to supply the requested medical history to Dr. Huang?

- How does the trip to China end for Judy and Tom?

Scene 2

‘As long as I stay in control I’m going to cling on like grim death’.

- Back in Australia, Judy is re-united with Brian, having decided against going ahead with the treatment in China. How does she appear to be coping mentally with this disappointment?
- While Judy is in hospital for some speech therapy, she suffers yet another physical complication of her illness. How does she deal with this?
- What do you think she means when she says, ‘I’m on the edge the entire time ... I feel dangerously alive’?

Final images and endings

STEVE

- Steve Guest’s brothers, John and Andrew, say this about their brother at his funeral ‘his early end was his early end ... courage, dignity and strength’.
- The police enquiry into Steve’s death remains open for more than a year after his death.
- Steve’s ashes were scattered at sea near where he lived, in accord with his wishes.

MARY

- Mary is still in remission from her cancer and continues to campaign for legal changes to voluntary euthanasia legislation.

JUDY

- Judy is still seeking a way to end her life when she feels the time is right.

Student Activity 4

STYLE AND PURPOSE OF THE FILM

It may be useful to look back at the Director’s statement before responding to the following questions.

1. Why make a documentary film on this subject?
2. Why take part in a documentary film on this subject?
3. What would be some of the particular difficulties for both filmmakers and participants in making this film?
4. How do the filmmakers present their material?
 - a. Is the position of the filmmakers apparent either explicitly or implicitly in the way the film is constructed and developed?
 - b. What part does music and silence play in this film in shaping our responses?
 - c. How do the frequent close-up shots of individuals position the viewer in responding to the lives of the individuals?
 - d. How important is the involvement of family and friends in telling these stories?
 - e. Is the title of this film – *Do Not Resuscitate* – an accurate reflection of its emphases?
 - f. Why do you think the director chooses to move between the stories of the three people rather than focus on each story through to its conclusion?
5. Has your understanding of what euthanasia means changed after watching this documentary?
6. Look back at the chart you filled in earlier about the similar and different characteristics of the three people in this documentary. Write a paragraph about each one describing how you responded to them emotionally.

Student Activity 5

INVESTIGATING THE EUTHANASIA DEBATE IN AUSTRALIA TODAY

Students and teachers could select from the following activities.

1. Both those who advocate and work in palliative care and those who support voluntary euthanasia

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use terms such as 'dying with dignity' and 'a good death'. How can these terms be understood within the principles and practices of each group?

2. Consider how the media, on radio, through newspapers and on television reports issues related to euthanasia. Look at how Steve Guest's situation and death is reported in the film through the media, especially through newspaper headlines. Is reporting on this issue more difficult than other topics?
3. 'We are a death defying society and many of us are very uncomfortable talking about death, particularly the certainty of our own death.'
Do you agree and if so, why might this be so?
4. At a recent Youth Parliament forum held in Melbourne, the issue of euthanasia was one of the big issues of life discussed in the Parliament chamber. One of the student participants in this debate reported that 'Although everyone had their personal values on this controversial topic, there was still an incredible mutual respect for everyone in the chamber'.¹
The wording of the Bill introduced by the Eltham students is set out below.

Legalizing Voluntary Euthanasia

This intensive Bill written by the Eltham YMCA team aims to legalize voluntary euthanasia in the State of Victoria and is based upon the official standards adhered to in Holland.

The team strongly believes that euthanasia should be allowed in the following circumstances:

- i) *A person who suffers from a consistent and severe pain over a prolonged period of time.*
- ii) *When the sufferer is in a continual vegetative state.*
- iii) *When the sufferer is incapable of making a sound conscious decision the next of kin inherits the right.*

Their Bill also proposes the implementation of a board, consisting of ten trained medical professionals to authorize and approve applications, as well as provisions covering the application process, which includes compulsory counselling for the next of kin.²

- Conduct a debate on this Bill in your class group, along either formal debating principles or in a less formal discussion.
5. Research the views of Dr. Phillip Nitschke, an advocate of euthanasia and director of the Exit Research Program that investigates improved ways of obtaining a peaceful death.
 6. With the best motives in the world and no lack of compassion, many people are strongly divided about euthanasia in our society. Read the following views of two doctors appearing in this film.
 - a. Dr. Rodney Syme – President of Dying With Dignity Victoria. *The predominant issue for him [Steve Guest] was the lack of control over his life. That was why he had rung me; he wanted to have control over the end of his life ... And so after talking to him for a considerable period of time and going in great depth into his situation, I determined that I would give him advice.*
It is not humane to deny anybody the wish to die ... in the manner that they will choose, simply because their circumstances are not what somebody else might think was perfect.
 - b. Dr. Nicholas Tonti-Filippini – Bio-ethicist and influential Roman Catholic. *The very last people I would want to see when I was ill or dying would be people like Rodney Syme ... because they wouldn't be giving me the kinds of supports that are now available and I've seen given to people who are dying ... what they're aiming about is produc-*

ing death, not providing the support of the person.

There are choices that are not freedoms at all. If you destroy yourself you take away your freedom. You need your existence to be free.

What are the differences and similarities in their approaches to life and death? Consider both what they say and how we see them in the documentary.

7. The poet John Donne wrote: *No man is an Island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the Continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friends or of thine own were; any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankind.*
(Meditation XVII, Donne, English clergyman & poet (1572 - 1631)
How might this idea relate to the choices people make about the manner and time of their death?

References

OTHER FILMS ABOUT THIS SUBJECT

Mademoiselle and the Doctor (Janine Hosking, 2004), a documentary by iKandy Films, produced by Janine Hosking.

A study guide for this film is available from the ATOM website at <http://www.metromagazine.com.au>

A transcript of an ABC *Media Watch* discussion about this film can be accessed at <http://www.abc.net.au/mediawatch/transcripts/s1390968.htm>
Accessed 24 October 2006.

The Sea Inside (Alejandro Amenabar, 2005), a Spanish film about a euthanasia activist. Winner of Best Foreign Film at the 2005 Academy Awards.

BOOKS AND ARTICLES

Much written material on this issue

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tends to be strongly pro or anti euthanasia, as are many of the websites. These references try to offer a balanced selection of materials.

Nitschke and Stewart, *Killing Me Softly*, Penguin, 2005.

R. Magnusson, *Angels of Death, Exploring the Euthanasia Underground*, Melbourne University Press, 2002.

WEBSITES

<http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2004/05/26/1085461836101.html?from=storylhs>

Transcript of a report on the trial of

a man who assisted his elderly sick mother to die in 2002. Accessed 24 October 2006.

<http://www.answers.com/topic/euthanasia>

A useful general site with an overview of the issue, including definitions, practices throughout the world and links to a range of sites where ethical issues are explored. Accessed 24 October 2006.

<http://www.pallcare.org.au/Default.aspx?tabid=301>

Australian Palliative Care Association website outlining the principles of

Palliative Care. Accessed 24 October 2006.

<http://www.dwdv.org.au/AboutUs.html>

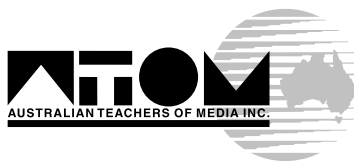
Website of Dying With Dignity Victoria, outlining their objectives and activities. Accessed 24 October 2006.

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Endnotes

¹ Reported in *The Age* newspaper. Education Supplement, 16 October 2006, p.15.

² <http://victoria.ymca.org.au/index5.php?O=programs&T=V&AID=271>



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