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Lifestyle

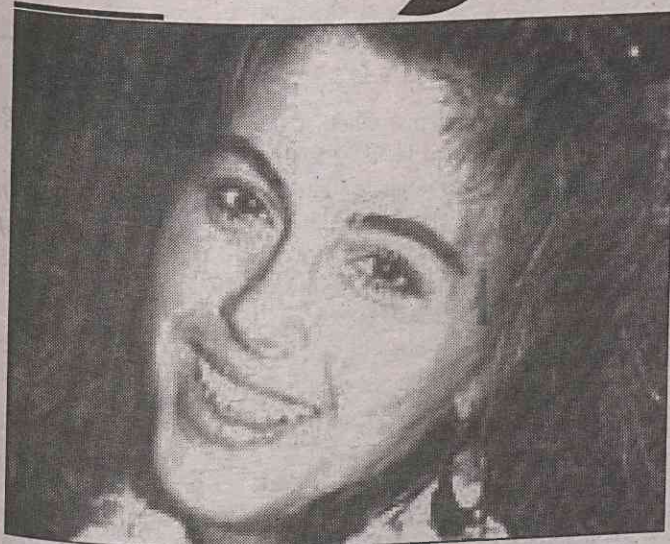


Photo courtesy of www.BBC.com

If Schiavo had written down her wishes before becoming severely brain damaged there would not have been a question whether to keep her alive by the feeding tube.

Leigh Ann Vanscoy
Features Editor

Terri Schiavo's life story has changed the way Americans think about death.

The story's popularity in the news has helped many people realize that they should start thinking early about having a living will.

If Schiavo had written down her wishes before becoming severely brain damaged there would not have been a question whether to keep her alive by a feeding tube or to pull it and let her starve to death.

After a judge ruled that her feeding tube could be removed, Schiavo's husband Michael, warned viewers of ABC's "Nightline" to "make a living will, talk about it. Death is going to happen. You need to write it down."



Photo courtesy of www.BBC.com

Schiavo's case has changed the way many Americans think about death.

The importance of living wills

Schiavo's case encourages Americans to legalize their final wishes

Many Americans are now realizing the importance of a living will. Lawyers and the other organizations report that more and more people are putting their wishes down on paper after hearing about Schiavo's case.

Most American adults, estimates are as high as 75 percent, do not have written directives for their families to follow.

Attorney Christopher Likens in Sarasota, Fla., reported to CNN this March that his clients almost always bring up Terri Schiavo when they come into make a living will. "Almost universally, it's 'that poor girl.' I don't ever want that to happen to me," Likens said, "People are much more informed about the issue."

A living will legally expresses what you want to occur if you are terminally ill or unable to speak for yourself. It also states who you would put in charge of making final decisions if need be. This would allow doctors to know whether to use artificial means to keep the body alive.

When should people start thinking about living wills? Should college students have something in writing?

Some students believe that precautions should be taken as young as college. "I think that college students should start thinking about what they want now," freshman Megan Long said. "They should start contacting a lawyer."

In most states citizens can start writing their own living will at age 18. Many people don't want to think about writing a living will because they don't like thinking about death. "Dying is a

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—Kelly Gallagher, freshman

scary topic, but people have to start thinking about it early," Kelly Gallagher, freshman, said. "Terri Schiavo definitely taught us that."

In order to go about constructing a living will certain steps must be taken.

To be valid, the proper form must be used for your state and be in compliance with the laws of your state. Some states require two witnesses to oversee your signature or that the form be signed in the presence of a notary public, or both. Two witnesses are required in the state of North Carolina.

States have different names for living wills. In order to find more information about how to go about making a legal living will, talk to your lawyer or visit <http://www.uslegal-forms.com> to find your state's form. Writing your own living will can now be done online.

Terry Schiavo died without having a say in her final wishes. Her legal battle has encouraged many people to start thinking about having their final death wishes on paper.

These final decisions should consist of legal documentation. A legal will is your new responsibility as a young adult. Let there be no more Terri Schiavo incidents.

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