

#15 6/13/16
Grand Rapids Home¹

Thank you for allowing me to speak to you all this morning. It would have been terrific if Richard could have been here but that isn't possible. Everyday of my life, Richard is with me and it is because of this, that I am here today. I am looking for accountability for his death as he was murdered the 21st of May, 2014. I am Cheryel, Richard's wife of over 25 years. I hold the Grand Rapids Home for Veterans accountable for killing my husband.

When Richard entered the Home in August 2010, he was a 100% service connected disabled veteran. He suffered from many health issues which forced me to place him there. A mistake I will take to my grave.

To my horror, the Home contacted the Kent County Court where an application for a court appointed guardian was filed. It didn't matter to the Home that Richard had two adult children or a loving wife. In January, 2011, Richard was given Cynthia Thornbury as his court appointed guardian and conservator. I think you need to know that Mrs. Thornbury has also been appointed to represent many other veterans at the Home as well. She is well acquainted with the Social Workers at the Home and uses that to her advantage when dealing with the veterans.

Within a year, I fought to keep us married as the guardian wanted us divorced. She sold my husband's car to help pay for the divorce that didn't happen. My husband didn't want a divorce but yet the guardian used his money to pay over \$16,000 for a divorce lawyer. Medical records reveal that Karen Fuji, Social Worker, repeatedly asked my husband if he wanted this divorce and he consistently replied with a resounding NO.

As Richard didn't want the divorce, he was constantly asking his guardian to stop the proceedings. The guardian felt that I was behind this so she convinced a judge to keep us apart. This no contact order lasted 14 months. I approached Gary Davis and Sara Dunne with this, begging for their help. They refused.

My husband wanted this guardian removed and asked me to petition the court to be his guardian. I did as my husband asked. He approached Karen Fuji asking for her help. She refused. FYI. The guardian used my husband's money to hire an attorney to keep her job. The court denied my petition to have her removed. Again, my husband lost and Judge David Murkowski of the Kent County Probate Court approved the guardian using my husband's money for this purpose. For my husband, he was now a prisoner at the Grand Rapids Home for Veterans.

My husband was very angry with everything that was happening to him. The Home decided to drug him so he wasn't so upset. They put him on several different drugs until they decided on the drug Depakote. Depakote turned him into a zombie. He couldn't carry on a decent conversation with anybody. He developed further signs of dementia which is a side effect of taking this drug. He also developed a persistent intestinal problem which turned into C-Diff. This drug was prescribed by Dr. Mark Bates, and approved by the guardian.

In January 2014, my husband decided to stop taking the drug. He knew he had to be careful doing this as he was threatened with losing his electric scooter if he didn't take it as prescribed. He would give the medical staff the impression he was taking it and then go to his bathroom and spit it out.

In March of 2014, at a routine care conference, his guardian and the medical staff commended him on how much he had improved, that his episodes of anger were gone. Nothing was said to the staff at this time that he hadn't been taking the drug.

Towards the end of March, Richard developed a bad case of pneumonia and was hospitalized for 10 days. At that time, I discussed with Richard the need to "let the cat out of the bag" about the Depakote not being taken. He agreed and all parties involved, including those at the Home and at Metro Health were informed of my husband's actions.

Richard returned to the Home where he was forced to again, take the Depakote. It was ground up and put in his applesauce. There was no way he could refuse taking it. When he asked why after he was told he was doing so good at his March care conference, he was told that it was because of his "history of anger". He either take the drug or lose his electric scooter.

Richard developed a persistent case of diarrhea, a side effect of the drug. A mattress that I had purchased for him so he would be more comfortable, had to be disposed of as he had an accident in his bed.

On Saturday, May 17, the Home was concerned about a low oxygen saturation and had him transferred to Metro Health. In the ER that morning, it was discovered that he still had a slight case of pneumonia. They treated it aggressively with antibiotics. No mention was given to the staff at Metro about the intestinal issue. Richard and I were told that he would be there over the weekend as they were confident that the pneumonia would be reversed.

On Monday evening, I went up to see Richard and his abdomen was severely extended. Metro had him on a no food or liquid intake, hoping to solve this problem. That night, Richard aspirated. His colon had shut down and everything was backed up into his abdomen and now was in his lungs.

I received a phone call from his guardian Tuesday morning that it was decision making time. Either he be allowed to die in peace or they remove the colon. I insisted on talking with a doctor as I made preparations to go to the hospital.

She wanted me to tell her my decision which I couldn't do until I talked with a doctor.

I arrived at the hospital. I talked with the doctor who admitted him. I talked with his doctors in the ICU and a surgeon. It was decided that we would give Richard a fighting chance and all parties involved agreed on the removal of his colon.

The surgery was a success. From all signs, Richard was going to be okay. Everybody was optimistic.

I left the hospital about 9:30 that Tuesday night with hope.

I received a phone call at 12:13 Wednesday morning to inform me that after 90 minutes of trying to revive my husband, he was gone. My husband of over 25 years of marriage, was dead.

On his death certificate, the cause of death is C-Diff. This is a direct result of the drug Depakote. A drug that the medical staff at the Home insisted he take. Demanded he take. Who is accountable for this?

Over the past four years, I have tried many times to contact members of the State legislature about all that has happened to my husband and family. My phone calls and e-mails were ignored, repeatedly. I am hoping now, that this Committee, as a whole, will use their power and their ability to make significant changes at the Grand Rapids Home for Veterans.

The Home killed my husband. No doubt in my mind or the minds of our sons as well as many others that this is what happened here. You can't save my husband. He is with God. What happened to my husband is also happening to other veterans at the Home.

My questions to you are this.

Can you are you willing to save other veterans from the same fate that killed my husband? Are you willing to do something to ensure this does not happen to any other veteran in the future?

My sons and I are demanding that somebody be held accountable for the murder of my husband and their father. .

As members of our State Legislature, you have the power to make changes in how our veterans are being treated at this Home. You have the power to stop guardian abuse. The Court has only added to the problem by appointing guardians who are abusing our veterans. This needs to stop. Can we count on your help?

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