

## IN TERRI'S SHOES

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The great debate over Terri Schiavo's fate has involved family, friends, state and federal government, and the public at large. Everyone seems to have an opinion about what's 'right', what's 'wrong', who's the 'good guy' and who's the 'bad guy'. While this is all good and fine (after all, everyone is entitled to an opinion), what is conspicuously absent from the debate is anyone taking Terri's perspective.

I have always believed, in any situation, that, before you can take sides, you have to put yourself in the other person's shoes.

So, it seems most people have put themselves in the parents' shoes. We can all comprehend the difficulty of letting go of a loved one and of giving up hope. Instinctively, we want to believe that a miracle will happen and our loved one will come back to us. We don't want to have to 'make a decision' to 'let' them go. But let's face it. The Schindlers are in denial – just like they were (and still are) about the eating disorder that precipitated Terri's current condition.

Some people (although surprisingly few, in my opinion) have put themselves in the husband's shoes; most have preferred to condemn him. Yet this man has turned down the millions offered to him to give up his say and has continued to spend considerable time with Terri over the last 15 years. To me, this looks like quite a commitment, especially given they only knew each other for eight years prior to this tragedy. To fault him for seeking companionship or for needing someone to lean on in this most difficult of times is to ask him to be more than human.

Which leads me to the real question...why has no one put themselves in Terri's shoes? Is she purely a pawn for those with a political and/or religious agenda? Or is she an individual who has befallen a tragic fate that I purport not one of us would want to endure?

When I put myself in Terri's shoes and look in the mirror, here's what I see:

- A woman who has obviously been concerned about my physical appearance, so much so that I fell victim to an eating disorder in which I resisted feeding myself. Do I sound like a woman who would want to spend 15 years being more or less 'force-fed', much less having my current appearance blasted out over the airwaves hour after hour, day after day?
- A woman who was married and ended up in a vegetative state deemed irreversible by the medical profession, which has lasted 15 years. If I truly love my spouse and my family, do I want them to quit their jobs, quit their lives, and live only for me? Hell no! Life is short, and just because mine has

(more or less) ended so soon is no reason for the lives of my loved ones to end as well. I didn't want them to sacrifice everything for me when I was living my life; why would I want them to when I have nothing to give in return? In fact, I am happy to know that my husband found someone who will give him the love and compassion I no longer can – and I am devastated that my family cannot move on -- because these are the people I love and I want what's best for them. Living in the past is not in anyone's best interest, and that is all anyone who loves me can do at this point.

- A woman who is being held here by people who claim to love her. Question motives all you want, but sometimes the toughest thing about loving someone is letting them go when that's the right thing to do. Having already expressed what I want for my loved ones, I want the same for myself. I want my loved ones to be selfless and do what is best for me. I want them to know in their hearts that life in my condition is, in fact, no life at all – and that they are doing me no justice by sacrificing their lives as well. Life is about loving, giving, sharing, caring and so much more that I am no longer capable of. My soul begs for them to release me and let me find peace instead of holding on so tightly to someone they've already lost – the vibrant, beautiful woman they loved.
- A woman who has been waiting patiently for someone to put themselves in my shoes and bring the whole circus full circle. I have no desire to serve the political agendas of others, to create controversy or to have death threats issued in my name. I know my predicament is one of many equally severe or worse on the planet, and I also know the resources being used for me could be put to better use elsewhere. I do not want to be put in the limelight to serve others' ulterior motives. I simply want the privacy I deserve.

So today, I have spoken for Terri and can only hope you have heard her – loud and clear.