



Media Release

Last Cab to Darwin

Re-Writing history damages euthanasia cause

Max Bell's epic journey from Broken Hill to Darwin to be the first to use the newly established NT Rights of the Terminally Ill euthanasia legislation changed history. Although dying from disseminated stomach cancer, his Darwin doctor Philip Nitschke could not get the required signatures from a specialist surgeon, or a psychiatrist needed for him to use the law.

NT Chief Minister Marshall Perron visited Max in Darwin Hospital, but no doctors would see him. The medical profession was boycotting the new euthanasia law, and for Max, it was just bad luck. After three weeks of rejection and with his health deteriorating, he signed himself out of hospital and began the gruelling journey back to Broken Hill.

As he left Darwin, his words to Dr Nitschke were,
"Why didn't you warn me, you didn't do your homework, boy!"

Max' trip north and his miserable time in Darwin was accurately covered by journalist Murray Maclaughlin for the Four Corners report "Road to Nowhere". This film is now available on YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cU4ZsXFrd-s>

Back in Broken Hill, his slow and painful death in the Broken Hill Base Hospital was accurately portrayed by Janine Hosking for Witness. This film is also on YouTube:

<https://youtu.be/nPi8HU2weuk>

When film of Max trip and death was shown on television, the powerful reports prompted the first specialist to break ranks with the medical profession. Dr Nitschke was contacted and told that if there was to be another attempt to use the law, one doctor at least would be prepared to assist. Two months later, on 22nd Sept 1996, Bob Dent became the first person in the world to use euthanasia legislation to receive a legal lethal voluntary injection.

This could never have happened without the tragedy that was Max Bell's story, and this history has been lost in the re-writing of Max' story in 'Last Cab to Darwin'.

Commenting on the film from Edinburgh, Dr Nitschke said,
"It's not that actors Michael Caton and Jacki Weaver, or director Jeremy Sims don't do a credible job in telling an entertaining story, but the harm is that in re-telling the story as a comedy road movie the true significance of Max in the global struggle for end of life choice has been lost. Max was a true pioneer and martyr for the euthanasia cause, something 'Last Cab' has completely overlooked."

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