

Better Off Dead

Transcript for season 2, episode 2: The Fire or the Fall

DISCLAIMER: A heads-up: this episode of Better Off Dead contains references to suicide and self-harm. These include discussions about how some terminally ill people have tried to end their lives in the absence of voluntary assisted dying laws. We are aware of the Mindframe guidelines on appropriate language around the discussion of suicide and self-harm, and we have endeavoured to limit this detail.

If you are likely to be distressed by this material, we recommend that you proceed with caution. Please have a self-care plan in place and let others know that you may be upset.

If you or someone you know needs support, please contact one of the following 24/7 support services: Lifeline on 13 11 14, The Suicide Call Back Service (1300 659 467), MensLine Australia (1300 789 978), or Kids Helpline (1800 551 800).

If you are at risk of harm to yourself or others, contact emergency services immediately by dialling Triple 0.

Finally, for legal reasons, the words of Parliamentarians spoken in this episode are being performed by actors.

[PRAYER BELL CHIMES]

Ethereal female voice: Death is the last intimate thing we do.

[NEWS THEME MUSIC]

Newsreader: Now to some breaking news just through, and CNN is reporting tonight that a plane has crashed into the World Trade Centre.

Andrew: September 11, 2001. Two planes fly into first the North, then South, Towers of the World Trade Centre. Exploding aviation fuel starts fires which soon reach temperatures of 1000 degrees centigrade. Workers trapped on the floors above the flames stand on their desks to avoid the heat, unaware that the very steel holding up their building is starting to melt. More than a thousand feet above street level, they start to crowd at open windows, signalling, phoning, frantic. But they are beyond help. Within an hour of the first plane hitting, people begin to jump.

[BEAT]

Such is the carnage of that day that, nearly 20 years on, the number of people who jumped remains unknown. Some say 50. Others 200. What is known is that none of the deaths was classified as suicides, but as homicides, because – as New York’s Chief Medical Examiner explained – these desperate people were forced from the buildings.

The city's Chief Fire Marshall, Louis Garcia, understood as few others. 'If you put people at a window and introduce that kind of heat,' he said, 'there's a good chance most would feel compelled to jump.'

Throughout Victoria's parliamentary debate to legalise voluntary assisted dying, opponents repeatedly used the word 'suicide' as a line of attack.

Male MP: We do not want Victoria to become the suicide capital of the nation.

Andrew: Their core argument: that it is a contradiction to legalise suicide for some, while working to prevent it for others.

Female MP: We do our very best to prevent suicide, and I am uncomfortable with any bill that encourages people to view suicide as a compelling option.

Andrew: But is offering a person who is already clearly dying a choice about how they die the same as suicide? And if it were you facing the flames, would you want that choice between the fire or the fall? I'm Andrew Denton. You're listening to Better Off Dead.

[OPENING TITLES. VOICES OVERLAPPING]

Andrew: Hello, can you hear me?

Andrew: My conversation with Lisa Hogg started like a million others in 2020.

Andrew: Lisa, on your bottom left hand is a microphone.

Lisa Hogg: Yes. Thank goodness, I'm so sorry. Oh my god.

Andrew: Honestly, Zoom is a world unto itself and it happens sometimes.

Andrew: Lisa Hogg is in her late 50s. Born and raised in rural Victoria, she lives in Switzerland now with her husband. Lisa wants to talk to me – really wants to talk to me – about her mother, Margaret.

Lisa Hogg: Mum was always a person who did things on her terms. If she did something, she always did 100%, whether it was cooking, whether it was driving, organising stuff for the family. And she was really the glue that held the family together.

Andrew: Margaret spent much of her working life as an enrolled nurse, a lot of that in aged care. The experience left an indelible mark.

Lisa Hogg: I remember her saying, 'Never ever, ever let me end up in a place like that.' She was always someone with very strong ideas about how she wanted to live her life and also how she wanted to die.

Andrew: While her husband, Earl...

Lisa Hogg: He said if anything happened to him, he wanted us to put him into a boat, push him out into the ocean, and just walk away. And so I think, for the three of us, we always grew up with this idea that neither of our parents wanted to live in a situation where they didn't have control of their destiny and their death.

Andrew: Earl was 65, and six weeks off retiring, when he had the heart attack which killed him. While Margaret? Fate dealt Margaret a very different hand.

Lisa Hogg: Mum's illness was very insidious. She had a neurological condition called Corticobasal Syndrome. It's a slowly progressing, loss of your muscle tone, muscle control and your ability to move, so your body basically just starts to seize up one limb at a time. So, they had to move her into a nursing home. My sister would go in some days and Mum would just be crying and distressed, and just, 'Get me out of here. I want to die, you know. I can't stay here.'

Andrew: Think of all the things that make you, you. Now imagine them being taken away, one by one.

Lisa Hogg: Her world got smaller and smaller and smaller. And what she was able to do for herself got less and less, just about every day. In the end, she got to the stage she couldn't feed herself anymore... she could use a cup, like a feeder cup. She was everywhere she didn't want to be.

Andrew: It was early 2017 when Margaret moved into the nursing home. Victoria's Parliament didn't legalise assisted dying until November that year, with a further 18 months before the law came into effect. Terrified that lawful assisted dying would come too late for her, Margaret began to search for other ways to take control.

Lisa Hogg: Mum would say, 'I'm just going to throw myself off the toilet chair onto the hard floor and try and kill myself,' and my sister kind of half seriously would say, 'Well, you probably would just end up breaking your other hip, you know, it's probably not gonna do what you're hoping it will do.'

Andrew: The more her body faltered, the more desperate Margaret became.

Lisa Hogg: They were out in the car, and she said, 'Oh, I've worked out how I'm going to kill myself.' And my sister just said, 'What are you going to do?' And she said, 'I've got some scissors,' and she said, 'I'm going to just keep cutting until I die.' And I think it was at that point, my sister... it really drove home to her how desperate Mum's situation was.

Andrew: For Lisa, in Switzerland, the sense of helplessness was profound.

Lisa Hogg: It was extremely distressing for the whole of the family watching her suffer like that, and we knew that none of us would legally be able to assist her to do it. So, until the

VAD laws got passed, there was always this kind of, 'Well, there's nothing we can do.' And the last method she came up with was that she decided she was going to starve herself.

Andrew: There will be people listening to this who would conclude that what your mum needed was some psychiatric or some counselling support. Were these things considered? Were they tried? Would they have helped in any way, do you think?

Lisa Hogg: They wouldn't have made any difference to Mum at all because no amount of psychiatry or psychological support was going to alleviate the suffering, you know. Mum had got to a stage where she was virtually unable to do anything for herself. She was hoisted up in a sling with no pants on being transferred from her chair into the toilet, in front of staff. She had some movement in one arm and poorly controlled movement in the other. She was finding it increasingly difficult to swallow and to eat and she was starting to choke on her food, and particularly on drinks. She got to the stage, she couldn't even turn herself over in bed, so she couldn't make herself comfortable at any point. There was no drug, there was no treatment, there was no surgery that would make her condition go away. There was nothing they could give her even to postpone the progression of her condition.

Andrew: Suggesting the next option was palliative care. Except, in Margaret's case, it wasn't.

Lisa Hogg: In terms of palliative care, there was really nothing that they could offer her apart from, you know, occasional painkillers. Mum was depressed, for sure, about her situation, but that wasn't the reason she wanted to die. She wanted to die because she was frightened of what the progress of her condition was going to bring for her. She was unable to do any of the things that gave her joy.

[SOMBRE MUSIC]

Andrew: Perhaps no single testimony more influenced Victoria's parliamentary debate on assisted dying than that of the State's Coroner, John Olle. And a further warning, you are about to hear descriptions of suicide. If you are likely to be distressed by this material, we recommend that you proceed with caution.

[BEAT]

On a chill Spring Melbourne evening in 2015, the snowy-haired Olle appeared before the cross-party Parliamentary Inquiry into End-of-Life Choices. What he had to say left the room in silence. How he said it – three times, having to collect himself as he gave evidence of cases that had come before his Court – left even seasoned politicians shaken.

He spoke of a very particular group of people: older Victorians with no history of mental illness and with loving family relationships, who were taking their own lives in what he described as 'desperate and violent ways.'

What these people had in common, he said, was that each was suffering an 'irreversible decline,' either from a terminal disease, or multiple chronic illnesses, or permanent physical pain. All people of rational mind, he stressed.

John Olle spoke of the 'lovely lady' who stepped off the platform directly into the path of a train; of the elderly man who tied a hessian bag full of sand around his waist, then walked off a pier; of the 90-year-old man with chronic pulmonary disease and recently diagnosed brain cancer who ended his life with a nail gun.

He estimated the number of elderly Victorians dying this way at close to one a week.

'To my knowledge,' he testified, 'the people we are talking about have made an absolute clear decision. They are determined. The only assistance that could be offered is to meet their wishes, not to prolong their life.'

[PENSIVE MUSIC]

Andrew: Few words in the English language carry such dark freight as the word 'suicide.' We agonise over how – or even if – to talk about it: RUOK? Day, Beyond Blue, The Black Dog Institute. Good people groping towards a response to Australia's high suicide rate.

While few of us can ever truly know the details of why someone chooses to commit suicide, what we do know is it does not belong in a discussion of voluntary assisted dying. Not legally, not morally.

Lawrie Daniel: I think we need a word that's the opposite of suicide but refers to terminating your own life. Like instead of 'suicide,' 'compassionating.'

Andrew: Lawrie Daniel, husband and father of two, has given this matter a great deal of thought.

Lawrie Daniel: Imagine the two different discussions if two people meet on the street and they say, 'Did you hear about Bob? No, what happened? Poor bastard. He topped himself. He committed suicide. What happened? His Missus found him. He was hanging in the shed. She started screaming, the kids rushed in, and it was terrible. The police were involved. They took him off to the coroner, had to do an autopsy, blah, blah, blah.'

The other conversation would be, 'Did you hear about Bob on the weekend? No, what happened? He compassionated. Oh, really? Tell me about it. Oh, it was wonderful, all these mates from the army flew in, and relatives from overseas, they all gathered around. There was a ceremony. It was beautiful. There were cards, flowers. He got to say all the things he wanted to say to people and then he just quietly and peacefully went. It was lovely,' and we're talking about a completely different way of looking at this.

Andrew: Lawrie's way of looking became clear to me when, back in 2015, I visited his home in the foothills of the Blue Mountains. The sun was glinting off the escarpment and kangaroos nibbled lazily in their lower paddock. But the handrails and wheelchair ramps pointed to another, uninvited, visitor to Lawrie's house, one that wouldn't be leaving: Multiple Sclerosis.

Lawrie Daniel: The first obvious sign was in 2007. My left foot started to snag in the carpet when I was walking around.

Andrew: Two years later, on his 44th birthday, Lawrie was diagnosed.

Lawrie Daniel: From left foot drop I then started to develop this incredible fatigue, so after a little bit of walking I would no longer be able to move my muscles. So you just grind to a stop. The problem with MS is there's no known cause or cure, and you can't predict at the beginning how it's going to go for you.

Andrew: For Lawrie, it went fast and savagely. Within a few years, he couldn't go to work.

Lawrie Daniel: Sitting at a desk for seven to nine hours a day was just excruciating. It felt like my spine was on fire, all the muscles in my neck and head, basically right down to the base of the spine. And then eventually I just couldn't walk.

Andrew: Think of all the things that make you, you. Now imagine them being taken away, one by one.

Lawrie Daniel: I was a very active man, so, you know, my thing was gardening and home development and I just can't do that. I couldn't do the wonderful things that I'd hoped to do with my kids growing up. So, you know Darcy, for example, loves camping. You can't drive anymore. You can't go out. You're pretty much housebound.

Andrew: And in the grip, constantly, of a uniquely awful pain.

Lawrie Daniel: Neuropathic pain is, it's not like normal pain. It's pain that arises in the central nervous system. You can get burning or tingling or numbness. So, it's in my fingers and I'm sitting here, and you want to scream inside because of what's happening in your hands, but you've got to carry on a normal conversation and you can't be screaming all day long.

Andrew: You're feeling that now?

Lawrie Daniel: Yeah, it never lets up, not for one second, and the only time it does is when you're asleep. Sometimes it's like a bruised sensation in your muscles, like you've been cooked, or you get the sensation like little ants crawling through your skin and muscles. Waking up in the morning and it all just hits you, you remember who you are. You remember the circumstances of your life, and, you know, this is another day to face. Through MS, I've pretty much lost my fear of dying because sometimes, you know, I think there are things that are worse than death.

Andrew: This, remember, is 2015. Before Victoria's legislation had even been drafted.

Andrew: What do you see as your options?

Lawrie Daniel: In the absence of voluntary euthanasia? Well, they're pretty bleak. In order to terminate your life, you can't involve anyone else, so it's got to be lonely. There are no really easy ways out without the use of someone with medical knowledge. The single car accident is out. I was lining up gum trees along the side of the road that I thought I might be able to use but I can't even drive a car anymore. But the other thing you've got to think about it is what if it goes wrong? What if it doesn't work? What would be the repercussions

then? Because Becky would have to call the ambulance and then potentially the police are involved. It's just a nightmare.

Andrew: Do you have a sense of helplessness about this?

Lawrie Daniel: Yes, and anger too, that we still, in this day and age... this just isn't a regular human right.

[CHANNEL NINE NEWS THEME MUSIC]

Newsreader: Well, in a historic move, Victoria today becomes the only state in Australia to legalise Voluntary Assisted Dying. The laws, which will be implemented under strict guidelines, have attracted criticism...

Andrew: Four years later, in June 2019, the human right that Lawrie spoke of became law in Victoria. Now, Lisa Hogg's mum, Margaret, had a choice. But it was never going to be – never intended to be – an easy process. With its 68 safeguards, Premier Daniel Andrews described Victoria's law as 'the most conservative in the world.' And to be eligible, it required that Margaret be:

VO: Diagnosed with a disease, illness, or medical condition that is incurable, advanced, progressive, and will cause death, is causing suffering to the person that cannot be relieved in a manner that the person considers tolerable, and is expected to cause death within weeks or months, not exceeding 6 months.

Andrew: Recognising that some illnesses cause profound suffering lasting longer than 6 months, Victoria's Parliament allowed that, for neurological diseases, the expected time to death could be as long as one year. Margaret was suffering from a rare progressive neurological disorder. It started in 2011 with a bit of wobbliness in her feet and deteriorated over six years to needing full time care in a nursing home. Yet the exact nature of her illness remained a mystery, which was problem number one.

Lisa Hogg: We'd never really had a definitive diagnosis of what mum had. And we didn't think she'd be eligible, to be honest. We didn't think that she'd meet the criteria.

Andrew: The next challenge would be to establish that she was mentally competent.

Lisa Hogg: She knew exactly what she wanted to say, but she was losing her ability to find the words. Mum was very fearful that the process would take too long and she wouldn't be able to voluntarily say what she needed to say.

Andrew: The crucial decision on eligibility would be made by the doctors who assessed Margaret, one of whom, as required under the safeguards, must be a specialist in her disease. And if that specialist is unsure, Margaret can be referred to another specialist.

Lisa Hogg: She had a consultant appointment with a neurologist she'd seen once previously who had seen a marked deterioration in her in the two years since he'd first seen her, and because it was not clear – her prognosis – he gave the approval for her to go to the next stage which was then to have a second neurology consultant's appointment.

Andrew: And so it went. She was sent for a CT scan.

Lisa Hogg: To be sure that she hadn't had a stroke...

Andrew: Adding to Margaret's challenges, there were delays.

Lisa Hogg: ... It's Christmas, people are on holidays...

Andrew: And because the law was new, there were relatively few doctors trained up to do the vital assessments – certainly none that lived close to her in country Victoria.

Lisa Hogg: So, it was either get your mum to Melbourne on the 24th of February or wait for another few weeks for someone else to come. And we just felt that we couldn't make Mum wait any longer.

Andrew: So, on the 24th Lisa and her sister helped 82-year-old Margaret into the car, a slow, painful trip with frequent stops. They got to the neurologist's office just 15 minutes before deadline.

Lisa Hogg: She was already exhausted because it was three and a half hours since she'd left the home. We knew that Mum was of absolute sound mind, but her ability to express that at the best of times was difficult, but when she's exhausted, it was even more difficult. But the neurologist had to ask her a lot of very specific questions and the concentration for her was pushed to the max, basically. We thought, 'Oh my goodness, can't he see that she's old? Can't he see that she's tired? Can't he see that she's hungry?' But actually, despite all of that, he went through his process and he did very rigorous testing.

Andrew: Three days later, a long and detailed report came through.

Lisa Hogg: He found Mum to be of sound mind. She knew about current affairs, she was able to tell him about COVID, that it was a disease in the lungs that came from China.

Andrew: Having first applied in November of the previous year, Margaret was found to be eligible for an assisted death in March 2020.

Lisa Hogg: For Mum, it was four months and every day seemed like a month. You know, if that's how things need to be for people to feel confident that this law is not being abused, then so be it.

Andrew: Now, finally, Margaret held her destiny in her own hands. Her alternative to fire.

Lisa Hogg: The day we got the news that Mum had been deemed as eligible, my sister, brother and I went up to the nursing home with a bottle of champagne, which mum loved. It was the most enormous relief that she knew that this... this wish of hers had been fulfilled.

[GENTLE MUSIC. MAGPIES WARBLING]

Andrew: For Lawrie Daniel, five years earlier, there was no alternative. But sitting in the kitchen, eating Rebecca's fresh-baked lamingtons, he spoke of how he'd like his dying to be.

Lawrie Daniel: Just being able to apologise for anything that you may have done wrong – if someone harbours any grudges against you, to ask for their forgiveness, to tell people what you mean to them, and have them, if they wish, to say what you mean to them. But mainly just to be able to know that when it's too much, you can go. That's beautiful in itself. Being generous enough as a country to say well, 'We're not going to force you to stick around against your will.'

Andrew: For Rebecca, this was everything she didn't want to hear.

Rebecca Daniel: My gut reaction was to have this wave of terror: 'Don't talk about that. It's awful.'

Andrew: But she realised there was no light at the end of the tunnel for her Lawrie.

Rebecca Daniel: The tingling, the numbness, the burning... I think there comes a point that when the realisation is that you are constantly being eroded – who you are and what you can do – and through thinking about it from his perspective, I've realised that the fear of living is actually greater for him than the fear of dying.

Andrew: As we speak, looking over that shining escarpment, Lawrie tells me how, as a young man, he went to an exhibition of Australian landscape paintings called 'Golden Summers.' 'Wouldn't it be nice to live in one of those paintings?' he remembers thinking. Now he does. But increasingly, all he can think of is how to get out.

Lawrie Daniel: I just want the option. I'm not saying, you know, I would avail myself of it immediately. I would just love to know it's there. And I think just knowing that it was there would be palliative in itself. It would be such a comfort, Andrew. I can't tell you.

Andrew: I put to Lawrie a phrase I'd heard from opponents of assisted dying: that people who wish to die ahead of God's appointed hour do not value their own lives.

Lawrie Daniel: Crikey, no, there's not a suicidal bone in my body. I'm married to the girl of my dreams. I got two wonderful children. I'm living in that Heidelberg school painting, a house I designed myself. It's like life: it's the best of times, it's the worst of times, but no, it's just... that's all I can say.

Andrew: The end of Lawrie's story came in late September 2016, more than a year after my visit. A message came from Rebecca. Three days earlier, while she and the children were out on a day away that Lawrie had encouraged, he took his own life. Lawrie didn't die as compassionate as he had wished, with those he loved around him. He died alone, taking sleeping pills he'd saved up over weeks. A suicide, police said. In a letter he left for Rebecca, he wrote.

Actor: Dear Rebecca,

If you are reading this it is probably because I've made an attempt at voluntary euthanasia and I sincerely hope I have been successful.

I am so sorry for putting you and the children through this, but it's been nine years of Multiple Sclerosis, and you know what I have been living with all this time, and what will happen in the next horrifying stages of the disease.

If I was just dealing with incontinence, or just paralysis, or just my feet and legs feeling like they are burning with cold fire all the time, or just the crippling muscle & bone pain, or just the shocking nerve pain, or just the weakness in my arms and hands, or just the tremors and spasms, or just the total mind-and-body exhaustion - I think I may have had a fighting chance. But I am dealing with this all at once, and it is unrelenting. Every day is a fresh kind of hell and I am losing the battle.

I love you, I love our children. I am so sorry I've had to leave you all and end my life this way, but I could see no other option available to me in the circumstances. I ask for everyone's compassionate understanding, and I ask you all to please forgive me. You and our children helped me every day through nearly a decade of my life with this illness, with infinite loving kindness. Thank you for everything.

[PEACEFUL MUSIC]

Andrew: Lisa's mother, Margaret, by contrast, got to say goodbye in person to the people she most loved. Firstly, at her son's house, surrounded by her full tribe.

Lisa Hogg: There were about 15 of us, and we took mum out for the day to his home and put her in a big recliner chair, and before we went there, we said, 'Do you want people to feel free to talk to you about it, or do you want them not to say anything?' And she just said she's happy for it to be an open thing, not this big secret. So, she spent the afternoon surrounded by her children, her grandchildren, her great grandchildren. And we all sat around and we chatted, we laughed and everyone in their own time went up mum and just had a quiet moment. And we played music, we watched back over old videos of different family events that we'd had from, you know, 20 years ago. It was kind of like her life in a microcosm just there in that, that one afternoon.

Andrew: An afternoon where Margaret was bathed in love.

Lisa Hogg: We kept saying to Mum, 'Look at you, you created this, you know. If you and Dad hadn't met, this... none of us would be here. This is, this is your legacy.' It was just such a lovely thing to be able to have the opportunity to know that, yes, I'm going to die, and I want to have everybody I've loved to be with me just for one more time, all together, and it was perfect.

Andrew: And this is what a Catholic Bishop had to say about the extraordinary process those like Margaret go through to find release.

Bishop Tim Harris: It is false compassion to literally and deliberately bump people off or put them down, like we put down animals. We are not in the same category. We are created in God's likeness and image, and God alone has the last word in our lives.

Andrew: His name is Bishop Timothy Harris, delivering a Homily to the Catholic Archdiocese of Townsville on 'No Euthanasia Sunday,' an initiative of the Catholic Church in Queensland. In his world, the love Margaret's family showed by supporting her final choice was to be compared to putting down an animal. And in his world, despite a law – despite overwhelming public support – there is no dignity or respect to be offered that choice, just that same cruel and false label.

Archbishop Mark Coleridge: If an individual wants to commit suicide, he or she can, but to sanction that in law at a time when it's recognised, even by governments, that suicide is a national problem, strikes me as an extraordinarily poor piece of timing.

Andrew: That's Queensland's most senior Catholic cleric, Archbishop Mark Coleridge, speaking at a webinar on end-of-life care. And here's West Australian Liberal and conservative Christian, Nick Goiran, who led the unsuccessful fight against assisted dying in his State's parliament.

The Hon. Nick Goiran MLC: Even though it's not a choice that we encourage, or that we endorse, suicide is a choice that is available for Western Australians. They have the liberty to take their own lives.

Andrew: It's a revealing kind of Christian thinking that can rationalise suicide as an available choice for the terminally ill, let alone a liberty. It's not how most of us would describe the terrible deaths outlined by Coroner John Olle. Or the last, lonely hours of Lawrie Daniel.

Now, in Victoria, and soon, Western Australian and Tasmania, there is a legal alternative, far more humane. It's not suicide. It's assisted dying, and this is how it was for Lisa's mother, Margaret.

[GENTLE MUSIC]

Lisa Hogg: My brother rang me about three in the morning to say that Mum's going to take it any minute and she wants to FaceTime.

Andrew: Because of COVID, Lisa had made the agonizing decision to return to her family in Switzerland before borders closed.

Lisa Hogg: She reached up towards the camera as if to try and give me a hug, so I said 'Goodbye,' I said, 'I love you. I'm so pleased that you got to do this your way and say hi to Dad,' basically. So, my brother and sister, after they hung up for me, she took the substance in three sips and closed her eyes, and she had my brother on one side holding her hand and my sister on the other, and they were just telling her they loved her. And just, very quickly, she went into a deep sleep. But she was still breathing, and she had chosen Rod Stewart's 'Sailing' as the music she wanted to be playing. And then I got a message from my brother 12 minutes after I spoke to her to say that she'd gone.

[BEAT]

I ask myself the question, 'Would I be able to do what she did?' And I don't know the answer. All I know is that Mum was very determined. She was a little bit nervous about the process of what would happen as she was dying, but not as frightened as she was of what would happen if she didn't have assisted dying. That was terrifying for her. But I do think having that cup in your hand, and taking that first sip knowing that you're going to die... it took enormous courage. And I just so admire that.

[GENTLE MUSIC. MAGPIES WARBLING]

Andrew: At the beginning of this episode, I described how Lisa Hogg really wanted to talk about her mum. As our conversation wound up, it became clear why.

Lisa Hogg: Because, for me, her having the right to choose how she wanted her end to be, and seeing what it was like for her, and knowing what it could have been like, that was the most important thing. And I've heard about some of the people who didn't have the choice Mum did and, and how they chose to take their own lives. It seems so cruel that people who are in other states don't have those same choices. It's like the Twin Towers, you know: when you're faced between something that's slow and painful and awful or something that might be quicker and of your choosing, I know which one I would take as well.

[MUSIC: 'LOYDIE'S ANGEL' BY JORDAN LASER]

Andrew: If you'd like to support the work of Go Gentle or find out more about us, go to our website at gogentleaustralia.org.au.

Next episode of Better Off Dead: The Sixth Commandment says 'thou shalt not kill.' But can breaking it ever be an act of mercy?

Cam McLaren: I knew that Phil was dying, and I knew he was suffering, and I knew he wanted this dearly.

Andrew: What does it mean to be asked to end someone else's life?

Cam McLaren: I remember thinking that I honestly don't know how I'm going to react to this.

Andrew: And what's it like when the person asking is your father?

Katie Harley: Till the day I die, it'll be the most courageous thing I've ever seen anyone do.

[CLOSING CREDITS]

Credits: Season two of Better Off Dead is created, written, and presented by Andrew Denton, with Beth Atkinson-Quinton, Martin Peralta, Kiki Paul, Steve Offner, and production assistance from Alex Gow. It is a co-production of Go Gentle Australia and The Wheeler Centre. Follow wheelercentre.com/betteroffdead to learn more about the people and ideas from each episode.

['LOYDIE'S ANGEL' CONTINUES]