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Euthanasia: Natacha Tells her Story

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Her father François Bogaert, decided in Belgium to speed up his death, after knowing he suffered from an incurable illness.

She tells flashes of her life with a composed posture. The memories made her relive once more the final scene of her father's existence François Bogaert—a Belgian who discovered Cuba in the early 80's —and who decided to undergo euthanasia \* out of his own will after learning he suffered from a progressive supranuclear palsy, best known as PSP \*\*.

Much time has passed and though people say time heals all wounds of the soul, I feel his daughter Natacha can't get rid of those painful moments when next to her kin (mother, brother, husband, sister-in-law) she said good-bye to the man who taught her to love this island of the Caribbean.

He had made his mind after knowing that —gradually, due to the illness—he would lose skills important to the human beings, such as seeing, walking, tasting, with great possibilities of suffering Alzheimer.

At first we thought he had Parkinson disease, although his hands were steady —Natacha explained—. He didn't want to go to the doctor's, he said he was alright. In

The spring of 2014, while he was driving, the car died on him and he hit the curbs.

“He drove since he was 18 years old, he was a good driver, and that called my attention. My mother said it was his sight, but I thought it was associated to a neurological difficulty. Then we convinced him to seek professional help with a doctor.

“In May 2015 he came to Cuba; he knew it would be his last trip to the country he fell in love with. Back then I don't think he had thought about the euthanasia, but at the airport we had to ask for a wheelchair to carry him

because he could not walk well, neither move his eyes, he had to turn his head to look, and he lost balance and had frequent mood changes. He either laughed or cried a lot.”

A few months later, over a telephone call, Natacha’s mother told her of her

father’s decision: he would undergo euthanasia; it was the only path to avoid so much personal and family suffering. That determination made Natacha planned a trip to Belgium accompanied by her husband and her two children.

The news—obviously—put her very sentimental. “I cried a lot, but I understood. If in the end the illness will leave him deaf, blind, unable to walk, suffering from Alzheimer, being a vegetable, why cling to life?

“He didn’t want to be a burden for his family and he was aware that everything would fall on my mom’s shoulders—who also has her own share of sufferings common of her age—. He had difficulties to keep his balance, he fell frequently, and she wasn’t strong enough to help him.”

### **The moment arrived!**

On November 2, 2015 the euthanasia became effective. Three doctors had already certified that the illness was incurable and François wrote his consent.

Then the family arranged everything. That night, before the family doctor arrived, he asked his children to turn on the television to watch his customary series, as if he could watch it the next day. Around eight o’clock the door bell rang. The time has come!

“My dad started to cry when he had the doctor in front of him, then the doctor told him: ‘It’s not mandatory you know, if you want you can say no’. To what he answered that he kept his intentions.

“In full capacity of his mind he organized the funeral ceremony. He said farewell to his friends and acquaintances, and he asked not to invite those who didn’t give him the last good-bye.”

Only her wife, her husband and her sister-in-law stayed in the room when the doctor injected him. The family suffering had reached its top. Then came the due paperwork, the mortuary, the cremation, the toast (it’s customary in Belgium).

### **Epilogue**

Natacha has lived many years in Cuba. Her children are Cuban and in this land she has found happiness and love. To her father, precisely, she owes all that. François Bogaert arrived in Cuba in the early 80’s being part of a solidarity brigade.

The two-month stay in the international camp Julio Antonio Mella, located in the municipality of Caimito, south of Havana, ever since he was fascinated by this people and its citizens.

That great love was passed to his children, therefore a few years later Natacha (with 14 years) and her baby brother (with 12) visited Cuba for the first time.

Hence the ties between her and her father are deep. Natacha always pleased him, for that reason for many years she sent him the Cuban newspaper. It was a way for him to keep the ties and stay updated on what happened here in Cuba. François died as he wanted, in his home, next to his family, after saying farewell to everyone, also his friends, and close relatives.

In the final ceremony—on his own request—three songs he loved were played. One of them, the last one, was Girón: La Victoria interpreted by the singer and songwriter Sarah González. Somehow, the Belgian had also won and had cheated death.

\* The Euthanasia is the practice of intentionally ending a life in order to relieve pain and suffering.

\* \* Progressive supranuclear palsy (PSP) is a degenerative disease involving the gradual deterioration and death of

specific volumes of the brain. Males and females are affected approximately equally and there is no racial, geographical or occupational predilection. Approximately 6 people per 100,000 population have PSP. It has been described as a tauopathy.

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