

Dear friends,

I just attended the cremation of Adelbert Josephus Jitta, (24-09-1938 30-06-2008) well known by many of you.

He was one of the most important protagonists of our law on euthanasia as a member of D66, a liberal/democratic party.

When he was a prosecutor in Alkmaar, we met each other during a meeting about reporting euthanasia cases in our hospital. Fortunately the board of the hospital was not against euthanasia, because they said that it was a medical decision with legal aspects. This was in the early eighties.

It took us some time and sometimes a keen struggle to get a standard formal procedure, after some prosecutions in one of which he had to prosecute me!

When he informed about that, he said that he had asked one of his colleagues to handle the case and that he already had asked Eugene Sutorius to defend me.

After two years of uncertainty and the expense of 40.000 guilders, first paid by the NVVE, later by my insurance company, I was cleared. And so by trial and error, we succeeded in the end to lay the foundation for our law in 2002.

It was not an easy period for both of us, working in our totally different disciplines. The good thing of it was that from then on we could openly speak about euthanasia.

When I started as a surgeon treating patients with cancer, we, the head nurse of the department and I, gave the last medication behind closed doors on explicit demand of the patient. It was tricky but we had a good feeling about it, because in this way we could carry out the last wish of the patient.

After Adelbert and I started working on a new hospital euthanasia protocol, we once had a patient in the hospital who wanted euthanasia. But alas, it was during the weekend and he and his family were out sailing and since this happened before the mobile telephone era I could not reach him. Half an hour after we had reported, as agreed, the euthanasia to the local coroner, the police came bursting in the department. I think, you can imagine the dreadful shock this created on all the nurses, patients and family around us. Adelbert had not yet informed all his colleagues and other people concerned. I was completely overwhelmed and very angry, but after an ample discussion and a good glass of wine, we could continue and refine the protocol.

He also was a speaker at the Maastricht conference in 1990 and at the WF meeting in Melbourne. When he stepped down as a prosecutor, he strengthened the board of NVVE. After his retirement he went on with his activities on euthanasia in the member support group of NVVE.

He was a widower for about two years now, which he found hard to accept.

When he fell ill, he could take advantage of his own success for which he fought for years in the end.

He will be missed not only by his family, but by many others, opponents and like-minded people.

Aycke Smook, July 6 2010