

NZZ

"You don't need your money anymore anyway":

The woman who was the first to die in the suicide capsule makes serious accusations
07/31/2024, 05.30 a.m.

An American sold her belongings in order to be able to climb into the Sarco in Switzerland. She was intended as an ambassador for the controversial capsule. But then everything went wrong. In this capsule, facing the sky, Jessica Campbell should have died. It turned out differently.

On the 17th of July, Jessica Campbell* turned 55. It should also have been the day she dies. The American was intended to be the first user of the suicide capsule Sarco - an invention that has triggered a huge media response far beyond the Swiss borders in recent weeks. But it turned out differently, the premiere was postponed and is to take place in Switzerland sometime this year. With another patient.

Now, in a letter available to the NZZ, Campbell makes serious accusations against the sarco inventor Philip Nitschke and his comrades-in-arms. It is the tragic story of a woman who had hoped for a dignified end. But she then became the plaything of various interests. And in the end felt exploited, commodified and left alone.

Perfect for Sarco

Jessica Campbell is from Alabama. Because of a kidney disease, she needs dialysis, and she also suffers from polyneuropathy, a disease of the peripheral nervous system. She is tied to a wheelchair and severely overweight because of her illnesses. She doesn't want to live like that anymore. She tries to kill herself, but that doesn't succeed. She comes across the offer of Exit International in the summer of 2023.

Philip Nitschke's organization is looking for people who want to commit suicide with Sarco, and Campbell seems perfect for it. She can express herself well and is therefore suitable as an ambassador for the capsule: She should advertise for it in testimonials in the media after her death, according to the plan. The first "passenger" is immediately taken with the idea of a quick and painless death in the capsule, with a view to the sky. She even gives Sarco a corresponding pet name: Celeste.

In May 2024, the plans for the first Sarco deployment in Switzerland become concrete, Nitschke also announces this to the members of Exit International. Campbell sells almost everything she owns and flies to Europe with \$40,000 in the account. In the Netherlands, she is received by Exit International people, who then accompany her to Switzerland.

Her caregiver is the euthanasia activist Peter,* who becomes a close friend. But at the end of May, Peter is suddenly gone. Fiona Stewart, the business and life partner of the Sarco mastermind Nitschke, tells her that Peter was overloaded and needs a break. But that is not true, as the NZZ knows from a reliable source: He has clashed with Nitschke and Stewart. Jessica Campbell also suspects that. And feels deceived and cheated for the first time.

\$7,000 for five hotel nights

The bad experiences she was supposed to have with the Sarco people in the following weeks can be divided into two categories: financial exploitation and media stress.

Stewart booked her a hotel in Lucerne that cost over 7000 dollars for five nights, writes Campbell. "I was completely taken by surprise." As a simple southern "girl" she felt completely out of place in the luxury accommodation. She soon got a new supervisor, Florian Willet. He used to be a media spokesman for Dignitas Germany and now leads the Swiss Exit International offshoot called "The Last Resort" together with Fiona Stewart, who are to organize the Sarco premiere.

Willet and Stewart insisted on debiting their own expenses - groceries, restaurant bills, tickets, even toys for Stewart's dog - from her own credit card, writes Campbell. Stewart justified this by saying: "You will die soon anyway, so you don't need your money anymore."

All the money wasted

According to Campbell, the climax of what she perceived as exploitation came when she traveled to Scotland to fulfill her parents' last wish: to scatter their ashes in the place where the Campbells came from. Stewart really wanted to accompany her. "And I bore all the costs." So Campbell was practically penniless in the end. This is in stark contrast to the claim of the promoters of Sarco that its use is free - up to 20 dollars, which costs the nitrogen that leads to death in the capsule. When she hears that, she has to laugh and cry at the same time, says Campbell. "I finally know how fraudulent this statement is." Made by Florian Willet and Fiona Stewart at the presentation of Sarco in Zurich mid July. The two had had all expenses paid by her, Campbell accuses them.

Faced with the accusations, Florian Willet denies everything. He doubts that the "insinuations" come from the "right" Jessica at all. They had always had friendly contact with their interested party and met all their "travel wishes", including personal accompaniment that had been requested.

"Our considerable own travel costs were borne by none other than ourselves. When our interested party insisted on buying our dog a toy (a squeaky duck), we did not stop her from this friendly gesture," writes Willet.

It is "not obvious" that Exit International should exploit the trust of a member or an interested party. "To rub under the nose of people willing to die for our part that they will soon have died

anyway would be a rudeness and unappetizingness that could not be more strange to us," explains Willet.

Exposed to a whole media circus

Even more violent is what Campbell reports about the public relations to which she was encouraged. Fiona Stewart recently claimed that no one who uses the Sarco would be drawn into a media circus. "That couldn't be further from the truth," Campbell replies.

From the moment she arrived in Europe, journalists were buzzing around her - summoned to document her death, and then to write benevolent articles about the sarco, according to the obvious wish of Nitschke and Co. The NZZ also received the offer to speak "exclusively" with Campbell. However, this only on the condition that we would not publish the article about the planned Sarco premiere. This newspaper rejected such a deal.

For Campbell, the Scotland trip was also a pain because of the forced public relations. The solemn act of dispersing the ashes of the parents should have been a private farewell, she writes. But Stewart persuaded her to turn the moment into a media spectacle against her will. "It was filmed, and as an overweight, disabled person, I was deeply embarrassed by this experience."

No time to think

Campbell also reports on a ride on the Glacier Express she took to gather her thoughts. She was accompanied by a documentary filmmaker who Stewart had hired. He should actually only film Jessica from a distance while she was enjoying the landscape. "Instead, the cameraman sat directly opposite me all the time and violated my privacy, even though I asked to be allowed to be alone."

The filmmaker also harassed her in Zurich and later in Lucerne, with the camera right in front of her face. Although she repeatedly told Stewart and the journalists that she needed time for herself, especially in view of her imminent death, Stewart insisted.

Campbell spent a few days in Zermatt, next to Schaffhausen one of the places that would have been eligible for the Sarco premiere. She was sick, and she coughed blood. Nevertheless, she had to endure eight hours outdoors and talk to journalists of a large American newspaper and a news agency. Stewart did not allow her to visit a doctor or at least a pharmacy.

"I could be manipulated"

"The media circus was always in the foreground, while I became more and more sick and weaker," writes Campbell. She felt exploited, as a mere means to an end. "Fiona believed that she could manipulate me because of my friendly nature."

Fiona Stewart: Did she instrumentalize Jessica Campbell for her media campaign?

Florian Willet states in his statement that Campbell had expressly invited the cameraman on the journey with the Glacier Express. She had "only one journalist contact as part of our support

along her trip," claims Willet. And immediately gets involved in contradictions by speaking in the next sentence of journalists in plurality: "She seemed to enjoy attention and conversations with journalists in general." A person who was in lively contact with Campbell tells the NZZ that she had to do with several journalists.

There are also completely different representations on the question of why the Sarco premiere with Campbell ultimately failed. She herself explains that she never doubted the functionality of the suicide capsule. But because of the manipulateness of Nitschke, Stewart and Willet, these concerns have become even greater due to the reports based on the NZZ revelation of the 3rd. July followed that the first use of the suicide capsule was imminent.

Various media and cantonal authorities pointed out that the use of the Sarco could have criminal consequences. Campbell learned about these reports and spoke to Stewart about them. But she turned this away and said that all this is not true, she should not worry.

The Sarco candidate felt lied to and, according to her own information, drew the consequences from it: It became clear to her that she could no longer continue with these people. "If I had known that the deeply heartless people who held my fate in their hands were mainly driven by their own media presence and marketing, I would never have faced this ordeal," writes Campbell.

Nitschke speaks of psychosis

In an e-mail to the NZZ, Philip Nitschke describes his version: Campbell was severely hit by the "uncontrolled and inaccurate" media coverage of the use of the Sarco. "Contrary to the previous review, I have seen episodes of cognitive derailments in recent weeks, which in one case bordered on psychosis," writes the former doctor. It is obvious that she should not receive suicide assistance due to her mental condition.

On Sunday evening, both Exit International and the Swiss offshoot The Last Resort sent out communiqués with similar content. In it, Nitschke explains that in view of the great media interest in the "Person X" (Campbell), future customers must be aware that every first use of the Sarco will be the subject of an intensive media interest - despite all efforts to treat their death confidentially.

The two organizations emphasize that Campbell's well-being has always been important to them. This is in sharp contrast to what the American herself reports: After she was no longer considered as the first user of the suicide capsule, the Sarco-people simply left her in Zermatt, desperately and without money.

"I sacrificed everything, used up all resources and broke off all connections, in the belief that Sarco will offer me a peaceful end," writes Campbell. A return to the USA was not an option for her, she was threatened with homelessness and poor medical care there.

Campbell died on Friday

That's why she was glad that a Swiss euthanasia organization took care of her - and fulfilled her long-cherished wish: Campbell died on Friday. A psychiatrist had still examined her on Wednesday, his expert opinion is available to the NZZ. Campbell presents herself with a clear mind and is credible in her desire for a Voluntary Assisted Death, which she took independently,

writes the doctor. And notes: "There are no depressive or psychotic symptoms noticeable during the entire time of the conversation."

* Name changed