Whose life is it anyway?

When I first heard about the theme of the play I thought it would be really depressing and hard to read. But when I started reading it, I realized it was quite all right, I even have to admit I enjoyed reading it. The humor makes it really enjoyable and it creates a strong contrast with the serious theme of the book. Ken Harrison is the main character in the story. It’s quite remarkable that he play’s the most important role because they mostly take an ‘active’ part in the story. In the beginning of the story we don’t know a lot about him or how he got paralyzed, this is a smart way of the author to keep the public’s attention. While reading we get to know a lot more about our main character. He got hurt in a serious car accident and he will never be able to walk again or ride a skateboard as he tells the nurses. Despite his physical injuries his intelligence is not affected, at least not yet. He talks very rationally to the doctors and the nurses and he realizes that he will live as a plant for the rest of his days. He then decides that it’s better to die with dignity then to be nursed for the rest of his life. I think he realizes that his last wish won’t get fulfilled that easily. But in the end, after many discussions, his last wish gets fulfilled.

I can understand Ken’s decision fairly well. I think it’s only logical that when you have to live on like he has, with such a low quality of life, it’s not worth all the trouble. Is it really worth it? It’s very nice when doctors try to save you and help you as much as possible, but I think when someone tells he doesn’t want to go on everyone should respect that decision and let the person die in peace and dignity. We can also discuss the fact that it really costs a lot of money to keep people like Ken Harrison alive while in Africa young children can be saved for a couple of dollars. This is even an argument of one of the doctors in the play but in my personal opinion we can’t compare these situations at all. I once read in an article about health care ‘where do we draw the line, and who does the drawing?’ Sometimes doctors should accept that a person can’t be saved or doesn’t want to be saved.

I think the play is very well written and has a good structure. The author, Brian Clark, is at the start very neutral about euthanasia but in the end his own opinion comes through. The book carries a message: ‘it’s the patient who should decide, not the person who has more knowledge or power’ although even this statement isn’t iron-clad. Before I read this book I hadn’t really thought of euthanasia so this book really made me think about life in general and life in hospital. Life and especially the human body are so fragile that it’s terrifying. Our bodies aren’t adapted to all the extreme sports we like to do and not even to a common thing such as a car accident. Life really hangs on a thread and in the end we’ll all die.

Life in hospital must be very dull if you have to be a lifetime patient especially if you have so little
independency as our main character. Ken makes his life even more miserable and lonely when he decides that his fiancée shouldn’t come and see him anymore. It’s a noble decision that he takes but by saying goodbye to his girlfriend, he says goodbye to the only thing that he has left that is worth living for. A relationship can get under serious pressure after an accident and surely when someone gets paralyzed for the rest of his life. Also Ken’s parents are shocked about his accident and his plans for the future. Especially his dad is really upset.

Some of the doctors can’t handle Ken’s sarcasm and his constant jokes about his vegetable-like-condition. Only John treats Ken as a real person with feelings and sometimes he even makes fun of Ken’s condition. This is a very strange thing that people tend to do, they try not to get too much involved with people who have a serious condition like aids or cancer.

After all, the play was a very good read with a good balance between humor and seriousness. It was interesting to read but in my opinion it could have been a bit longer so we get a bit more detailed background of the different characters