

# Mercy for the daughter who bought drug online to help ailing parents die together

## No prosecution for woman who acted out of 'compassion and love'

By David Wilkes

**AFTER 58 years of marriage, they decided they could not bear to face life apart.**

And so as they both battled increasingly debilitating illnesses, retired GP David Arnold and his wife Elizabeth made a pact to die side by side.

For this final act, having failed one previous suicide attempt, they enlisted the help of the person closest to them - their loving daughter Georgina Roberts.

The 59-year-old yesterday told an inquest how on the eve of her father's 82nd birthday, her parents decided 'today was the day'.

She was instructed by her father, a member of the right-to-die campaign group Dignity in Dying, to prepare a toxic drug, which he and his wife drank before slipping quickly into unconsciousness.

She then watched in 'stunned silence' as her parents passed away, the inquest

### 'The hardest day of my life'

heard. Giving evidence, Mrs Roberts said she was 'motivated entirely by compassion and love.' 'I'm a human being who loved my parents very deeply and wanted to help them when they couldn't help themselves,' she said.

The Crown Prosecution Service decided it was not in the public interest to charge Mrs Roberts with any offence.

The devoted couple, from Newbury, Berkshire, had decided to end their lives when Dr Arnold became a bed-ridden amputee and after 85-year-old Mrs Arnold was diagnosed with dementia and Alzheimer's disease, the inquest heard.

They had discussed this openly with family and friends for a number of years, and had even revealed their plan to doctors and psychiatrists, it heard.

All of their children, Georgina, Stephen and Simon, were aware of their father's wishes and supported him, the hearing was told.

The couple had approached the Dignitas clinic in Switzerland to end their lives, but were denied their wish because of the mental deterioration of Mrs Arnold, a retired teacher who also suffered from Type 2 Diabetes. Recalling their final hours on July 13, 2012, Mrs Roberts said: 'Dad had said





**Devoted couple: Dr David Arnold and wife Elizabeth made a pact to die side by side**

'mum seemed very lucid today.' She said her father maintained it was up to her mother when they would finally die. She said it was important it was on her mother's terms because of her dementia.

She told how the couple talked on and off for hours that day, about acting out the pact which they had agreed some five years earlier.

'Mum told me dad had talked to her. He had had enough and so had she. I knew then this was going to be the hardest day of my life.'

Mrs Roberts continued: 'I asked if they were sure today was the day. They said it was but they wanted to watch the Proms on TV first.'

She mixed the drug her father had instructed her to buy over the internet and another that would speed up its effect. 'I put it in a cup

on dad's bedside table and another cup next to mum. I said it would be bitter so they should have a chocolate afterwards. I gave them a chocolate each. Dad then had a whisky and mum had a port, I think. They quickly slipped in to a deep sleep.

'I stood there in stunned silence watching them. It was surreal. I went to the kitchen and came back after

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### **'They watched the Proms first'**

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about 30 minutes. I checked dad's pulse and he had gone. I checked mum and she was still there so I had to go back out to the kitchen.'

Mrs Roberts told how she then phoned her brother Stephen to





**Motivated by love: Georgina Roberts yesterday**

break the news, before calling 999. Her other brother Simon was informed an hour later.

Previously fit and active, Dr Arnold had developed the early stages of Parkinson's disease and was left bed-ridden after his right leg had to be amputated in August 2011 because of a septicemic ulcer.

Mrs Arnold had been diagnosed with mixed dementia in 2003.

Prior to his own incapacitation, Dr Arnold had been her full-time carer for nine years.

The inquest heard the couple had tried to kill themselves in 2011, two months after Dr Arnold's amputation. They failed because the tablets they took were out of date.

The attempt was known by their relatives, who did not tell the authorities because they feared

their parents would be split up and put into care homes. Assisting a suicide is a criminal offence in England and Wales and carries a maximum sentence of 14 years.

In 2010, guidelines from Director of Public Prosecutions Keir Starmer said action against friends or relatives who assisted out of compassion, not for personal gain, would be unlikely.

A post-mortem confirmed both died from taking a fatal dosage of a controlled Class B drug.

Recording a narrative verdict, Berkshire coroner Peter Bedford said: 'I fully accept from all the evidence I've heard that Georgina was genuinely motivated by compassion and a genuine desire to carry out her parent's wishes.'

*Stephen Glover: Page 17*

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