

Couple wrote 'depart' in their diary, then drank poison so they could die together

Katie Gibbons

The son of an elderly couple who died in a suicide pact gave them his blessing, then kissed them goodbye.

An inquest in Oxford was told that Raphael, 69, and Tamar Altman, 72, who had been married for 46 years and were both in poor health, had decided to end their lives together in a dignified way, marking the day, October 3, 2013, in their diary with the word "depart".

On the night of their death, they dimmed the lights and put on soothing music before drinking a toxic liquid. They were found dead in each other's arms on their bed.

Mrs Altman's head was resting on her husband's shoulder and her arm lay on his chest.

Tai Altman, 43, their son, said he knew that his parents would choose to die together because his father's cancer had reached its final stages and his mother had made it clear that she could not live without him.

"We spent two days saying goodbye — we got the chance to say everything we wanted to say," Mr Altman said.

"I told them they had been good parents and I felt honoured to have had them and the values they had given me would be passed to their grandchildren. I wanted to give them a feeling that they would

Tai Altman spent two days bidding his parents farewell



leave something tangible behind." Mr Altman Sr, a former religious education teacher from Cape Town, South Africa, had been diagnosed with Hodgkin lymphoma in 2006, but enjoyed his life until a few days before he died.

His wife, who was originally from New York, suffered from diabetes, neuralgia and muscular problems, and once it was clear that her husband's cancer was reaching the final stages, she decided to end her life with his.

Their son said: "When my father lost the motor control of his body, I knew it was close to the end. I did a lot of crying because I knew what was going to happen.

"We got him out of hospital on the Monday. He couldn't walk, he couldn't even feed himself. A few days earlier, he was able to get up and down the stairs and take care of himself.

"It was good that happened so quickly. Who would want to spend months and months in pain?"

The family spent two days together at their home in Oxford and Mr and Mrs Altman — who were campaigners for the right to die — told their son about their plans.

"They said it was the same stuff that Dignitas uses, which is a chemical compound. I didn't have any questions," he said. "I told them

there was nothing I felt I had missed out on in life; there was not a single bit of regret.

"I knew that this was the chance to give them what they wanted. This was what all the talk had been about."

At the inquest at Oxfordshire Coroners' Court on Tuesday, Peter Clark, the assistant coroner, recorded verdicts of suicide for Mr and Mrs Altman, saying: "It is clear that they intended to die together as they lived together." Lord Falconer, a

Labour peer, has drafted a Bill to allow patients to choose to end their lives and has called for Parliament to "resolve the mess" of current legislation that makes it a crime to help others take their lives.

The Assisted Dying Bill aims to enable competent adults who are terminally ill to be provided, at their request, with help to end their own lives.

The House of Lords will debate the Bill for a second time in May.

