

# Cruel past of 'mercy killing' divorcee

Life for churchgoer convicted of murdering terminally ill widower

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A CHURCHGOING divorcee who smothered a terminally ill friend claiming she wanted to end his suffering had previously been convicted of trying to suffocate a neighbour's dog.

Heather Davidson, 54, killed David Paterson, an 82-year-old cancer sufferer, by putting a pillow over his face as he lay in bed at the care home where he was being looked after.

She had earlier told a support worker at the Macmillan cancer charity helpline that she could not bear to see her friend in pain and wanted to end his suffering, adding: "If he was a dog he would have



Heather Davidson smothered her friend David Paterson



been put down months ago." But Mr Paterson, who was a devout Christian and vehemently opposed to euthanasia, had left specific instructions with his family that he wished his passing to remain "in the hands of God".

Yesterday, Davidson, a recovering alcoholic, was sentenced to life in prison, after previously admitting murdering the elderly widower.

While claiming to be a devout Christian herself, the court heard she had a dark past and was convicted in 2010 of causing unnecessary suffering to an animal after trying to suffocate a spaniel.

After a dispute with a neighbour she kidnapped the dog and tied it up, putting a plastic

bag over its head. It was only saved when police searched her house and found the animal under her bed.

Davidson had first met Mr Paterson when he volunteered as a helper at a group for people with mental health problems, to which she had been referred as a result of her alcohol problems.

The pair, who became friends, attended St Mary's Church in Thirsk, North Yorkshire, together, the court was told. When he was diagnosed with terminal cancer, following the death of his wife, she began visiting him regularly at the Sowerby House care home, also in Thirsk.

In February this year in a phone call to the Macmillan Cancer Support line she told the operator: "I just think it would be better if I just put a pillow over his head."

She went on to ask: "Would I be a murderer if I did that?" Despite being told she would be, she went on to suffocate Mr Paterson.

Davidson wept in the dock and members of Mr Paterson's family in the packed public gallery looked distressed as a recording of the phone call was played to the court.

Teesside Crown Court was told Davidson stripped away any hope of the dignified death planned by Mr Paterson who had told his family: "It will be God's decision and only God's when it is time to meet my maker."

Judge Simon Bourne-Arton said: "The decision to kill him was not yours to make. You decided what was best for him. You must have known from all you knew of David Paterson he would not have wished for his death to come from your hand."

In a statement, Mr Paterson's family said: "We are, and Uncle David would have been, horrified that someone he classed as a friend and who he thought shared his Christian values, would have acted in this way.

"She should have known he would have wanted it to be God's will when he died and allowed him to do so in privacy and with dignity. She had no right to do this to him."

Davidson, from Thirsk, was told she must serve a minimum of nine years before she will be eligible for parole.