

Widow's anger at assisted suicide

Lucy Bannerman

A grieving widow has revealed how she felt "abandoned" by her husband after he chose to end his life through assisted suicide at a Swiss clinic.

Deborah Binner's husband Simon, 57, died at the Swiss Eternal Spirit clinic in Basel in 2016, ten months after a fast-moving form of motor neurone disease was diagnosed.

Her teenage daughter, Chloe, had died of cancer three years earlier. While Mrs Binner praised the "deeply compassionate" palliative care received by her daughter, which left the family with treasured moments of joy, she said that the "abrupt" nature of her husband's death had left her "fuming".

Mrs Binner, 55, a former Sky News presenter who has written a book about her experiences, *Yet Here I Am*, said she felt she had no choice but to support her husband's wishes. She reluctantly agreed to go with him to Switzerland after he twice attempted suicide at their home. They were accompanied by a BBC film crew and his last moments were broadcast as part of a documentary, *How to Die: Simon's Choice*.

She wrote: "Typically, here was

Simon going out in a flash of glory, surrounded by friends and family and the star of his very own TV documentary. Only somebody with the flamboyance, flair and bloody-mindedness of my husband could orchestrate their final moments like this. And he seemed really happy and at peace."

However, she has refused to become an advocate for assisted dying because of the traumatic "after-effects on the family and friends left behind".

She said: "Simon was not a cruel man and was hugely dignified. But — and I seek only to show a truthful picture — his death felt very much like abandonment and like it wasn't a collaborative act. It was so much less about us as a loving couple than it was about an audience. I think he needed this, as the intimacy of a private death would have been too painful for him.

"While Simon's turmoil had ended, in some ways mine was just beginning. I didn't want Simon to suffer, but I didn't want him to die, either. Watching him plan his own death, while I still wanted more time, was overwhelmingly traumatic."

She added: "My head understands the intellectual arguments and I find it



Deborah Binner's husband, Simon, had MND and travelled to a Swiss clinic

hard to disagree with them. But my heart still says no. Should we not be kinder, more patient, more respectful of human life?

"Isn't how we support the dying so central to who we are as human beings? And there's a part of me that believes it's better, if a person has the best possible care, to let nature take its course. Personally, I am absolutely fuming that my husband left me to fend in this world alone. That was not the deal."

Mr Binner, a former broadcast journalist, had been diagnosed with progressive bulbar palsy, the fast-moving

form of MND, a disease involving degeneration of the nervous system and wasting of the muscles. His life expectancy was six months to three years.

His widow compared the "abrupt" nature of his death with that of her 18-year-old daughter's. "That felt like somebody had reached into my body and wrenched out my heart. Yet a certain closure slowly arose in me; I knew I had left no stone unturned in an almighty battle to save her. And in the end, her death was soft, gentle, supported and at home. When she lay dying, I sat with her in my arms, stroking her little head with tiny tufts of hair.

"She told me she was happy. Unbelievably, for that moment, I was happy too. I touched on love at its very deepest level. In contrast, Simon's death feels unresolved. To me it felt angry, rejecting and abrupt. It felt a lot like a suicide. I think he genuinely thought that taking his life was courageous and that it would save us a lot of heartache seeing him spiral into full disability.

"I know that his intentions were entirely pure. But surely it is equally brave to live with an illness, a disability, to embrace vulnerability and to accept that none of us really has that much control."

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