

Husband jailed for killing ill wife in an 'act of mercy'

Neil Johnston

An estranged husband has been jailed for murder after claiming that he killed his wife in "an act of mercy" when she had days to live.

Cornelius Van Der Ploeg, 64, asked his children if he could spend 30 minutes alone with Cherith, 60. He emerged from her room in Costessey, Norfolk, and said: "I throttled her."

Mrs Van Der Ploeg was dying of lung cancer that was diagnosed last year. She had mentioned ending her life at a clinic in Switzerland but said that she could not do it because she did not want to implicate her children.

She returned home at the start of the year and her husband continued to support her, though they had split. When he visited her on February 15 he

told two of their four children that he wanted time alone with her and suffocated her with a pillow.

Van Der Ploeg, of Telford, Shropshire, admitted the murder and was jailed for a minimum of five years and 187 days at Norwich crown court. He wept as Judge Stephen Holt described it as a "tragic case" in which Mrs Van Der Ploeg knew the "end of her life was inevitably coming".

Elizabeth Marsh, QC, said in mitigation that Van Der Ploeg acted out of love rather than hate.

Mrs Van Der Ploeg's daughter said that her father had robbed her of precious time with her mother. She said in a statement that he was not an evil person and admitted that he "would not have done what he did if mum had not been in such a bad way".

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