Darling... please help me to DIE

The woman Syd Robbins adored was seriously ill and in pain. But would he be able to do what she was asking? Here Syd tells his story

Dot

Syd

Every time I spoke to Dot she blushed and giggled. This time was no different.

My sister-in-law's 13-year-old daughter used to follow me round like a puppy, not taking her eyes off me.

'I think she's got a crush on you,' a relative said.

'She'll grow out of it,' I replied, shrugging. She was 15 years younger than me.

Besides, I had other things on my mind. I was in an unhappy marriage and doing my best to make it work.

Years passed.

My wife and I moved to another town to be near her family. I thought it might help our marriage. But it didn't and we split up.

Days later. Dot, now a beautiful 25-year-old, arrived at the door of my home in Bolton, Lancashire.

'Now you're free there's something I've got to tell you,' she said. 'I loved you when I was a child and I love you now.'

She fell into my arms and we kissed passionately.

Then suddenly I thought I'd overstepped the mark and I broke free.

But Dot smiled. 'I've wanted that for so long,' she breathed. 'I know we can make each other happy.'

I couldn't help feeling an attraction. We began dating.

Soon I loved Dot as much as she loved me.

We moved in together and in time we married.

Years later, Dot developed arthritis and quit her job at a bank. She started working with me in the burglar alarm business I ran from home.

> *'There's something I have to tell you. I loved you when I was a child and I love you now'*

One day she sounded as if she had a heavy cold. 'Have you got hay fever?" I asked. ' I don't know,' she said.

as a young woman

Syd

Then she started to slur her words.

Worried, I took her to the doctor. He sent her for hospital tests. They were inconclusive. 'Come back in three months.' the specialist told us.

Weeks passed. Dot was having difficulty swallowing. So I took her back to the hospital for more tests.

The consultant looked grave. 'I'm sorry,' he told Dot. 'You have motor neuron disease. I'm afraid it's progressing very rapidly.'

I knew that was serious.

Tears welled up in my eyes.

Dot was being brave. I squeezed her hand.

'How long do I have?' she asked calmly.

I'd say two years at the most.' the doctor replied.

I held her tightly. I never wanted to let her go.

Later that night my feelings turned to anger.

'Why my Dot?' I thought bitterly. 'I love her too much. How will I live without her?'

Over the next few days I read up on motor neuron disease. Dot faced a dreadful future, becoming paralysed. Her mind would work normally but she would need machines to help her to breathe, eat and swallow.

She'd be stripped of her dignity and in constant pain.

Dot faced her illness bravely. 'I'm not scared of dying,' she said. 'I know that one day we'll meet again.'

'Of course we will,' I said, tears rolling down my face.

She was deteriorating fast. Soon she was confined to a wheelchair and then to bed.

I had to help her with everything. I bathed her and carried her to the toilet.

We knew we didn't have long left together.

One day Dot gripped my hand. 'When things get bad enough... I'll say when I want to go," she said.

My wife was telling me to end her pain when it became too much for her.

I had never intentionally done anything illegal in my life. But now I began to plot how I could stop my wife suffering. I thought about smothering her in her sleep. Or finding a drug dealer and giving her a fatal dose.

I knew I'd be committing murder. But I just wanted to save my beloved Dot from her suffering.

One day we read on the internet about an organisation in Switzerland called Dignitas. It offered a peaceful death for people who were terminally ill.

I phoned them.

We had to answer lots of questions, fill in forms and produce proof of Dot's condition. As soon as she was accepted, she looked so relieved.

Soon she had to go into a nursing home.

I visited her every day. She couldn't speak. She wrote me notes instead.

Frustration was written all over her face.

One day she passed me a scribbled note. *'I'm at the bitter end,' it* said.

Her eyes were full of sadness. I moved closer. 'Shall I get in touch with Dignitas?' I whispered.

Dot gave me the thumbs up. Then she wrote another note. *'Can we get out of here?'* she asked.

'Yes,' I said.

But it wasn't going to be easy. The nursing home wouldn't release Dot in her condition and there was tight security. I'd be kidnapping my own wife.

Soon afterwards two policemen came to see me. Someone at the nursing home had overheard me.

'I must warn you that you could go to prison for 14 years for assisting your wife's suicide." the detective said.

I was relieved. It was clear they didn't realise what we were planning.

Over the next few days I organised hiring paramedics, an ambulance and an aircraft, using my £7500 life savings.

I planned to take Dot from the home in the very early morning when there were few staff around.

I didn't sleep at all the night before.

Was I doing the right thing? A big part of me was horrified at the thought of helping the woman I'd loved for so long to end her life.

I just kept reminding myself how Dot had insisted that when the time was right she wanted to die. I had to put my emotions aside. I was doing it for her.

I crept out of the house at 5.30am and jumped into the waiting ambulance. An early-rising patient let me in. Paramedics carrying a stretcher were right behind me as I made straight for Dot's room.

> *'Part of me was horrified... but I had to put my emotions aside. I was doing it for her'*

I woke her with a kiss. She smiled as I removed her feeding tube.

Suddenly, a male nurse walked in. 'What's going on?' he demanded, eyeing me suspiciously.

'Dot's being transferred to hospital." I lied.

The paramedics were lifting Dot on the stretcher when a night supervisor appeared. 'I think you'd better come to my office while I phone the matron to check this is okay,' she said.

I waited as she dialled the number. Then I ran for the door. I sprinted to the ambulance and jumped in the back with Dot.

'Go - quickly!' I shouted to the driver.

I'd anticipated that the authorities might think we'd make for Manchester Airport. So I'd arranged for our private aircraft to be waiting at Liverpool's John Lennon Airport instead.

As we approached it our driver put on the siren and blue lights and we went straight through security.

The plane's engines were running and a nurse made Dot comfortable.

We'd decided that I would be less accountable for her death if I stayed behind.

I kissed her for the last time. 'We did it," I said. 'Don't worry, we'll meet again.'

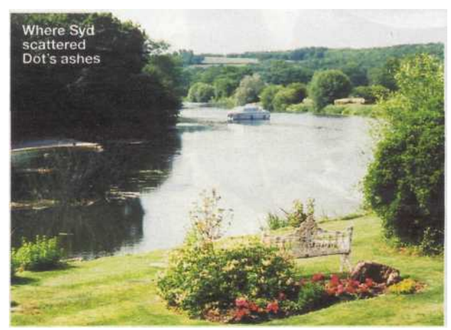
She smiled. After months of torture, she looked happy and relaxed.

Leaving Dot was so painful but I knew it was what I had to do. I went home.

At 5.30pm a fax arrived from Zurich. It was a note in Dot's handwriting. *'The Eagle has landed. Love you. See you again, Dot xxx.'*

Tears pricked my eyes.

A few days later Dignitas sent me several copies of her death certificate and an urn containing her ashes.



Where Syd scattered Dot's ashes

Confined to a wheelchair

I was also given a full report of Dot's final hours.

She was taken to the Dignitas flat in Zurich.

A doctor asked if she was ready for her drink.

'If you are, it will be the last drink you will have.' he told her. 'You will drink it and you will die.'

Dot gave the thumbs up and the doctor attached a syringe to her stomach tube containing the chemicals that would kill her.

She had to press down the syringe herself. Then she smiled and closed her eyes.

She was 64.

Days later I was contacted again by the police. 'I haven't left the country,' I told them.

Now I have been told that I will not face prosecution.

I'm angry that assisted suicide is illegal in Britain. We must change the law to protect our loved ones when they're terminally ill and in pain.

I have no regrets about Dot's end. I know that she's at peace and no one can take away the wonderful memories of the life we shared together.

Edited by Bill Davey andJanine Kelso

• Syd Robbins has donated his fee for this article to Dignitas.