

Euthanasia should be option for those unable to travel, says widow Angelika Elliott



James Robertson

It was ten years ago on Sunday that Angelika Elliott left Sydney for Switzerland with her terminally ill husband, John, so he could end his life on his own terms.

John Elliott, a medical doctor, was suffering multiple myeloma, or bone marrow cancer. The 79-year-old was in excruciating pain, his hands shook, he struggled to walk and swallow.

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Final journey

Dr John Elliott was in pain and wanted to end his life. He also wanted to make a statement about the choice to die and so invited James Button and photographer Kate Geraghty to document his final journey.

"My husband was terribly sick with bone cancer; he was allergic against morphine," she told Fairfax Media. "He'd scream in pain if you touched his back. He could not pour a glass of water."

The Rose Bay couple chose to go to Switzerland, where assisted suicide for altruistic reasons is legal. Dr Elliott successfully ended his life in a Zurich hotel room on January 25, 2007 with the support of assisted suicide group Dignitas.

In his final statement, which formed part of Mrs Elliott's submission to a 2008 federal Senate inquiry into euthanasia laws, Dr Elliott explained his decision.

"Just as in my life as I have been an independent and capable person, so I want the same in my death," Dr Elliott wrote. "I want to exit this world free with my head held high."

"I am sharing my story in the hope that others may not have to endure what I have endured in coming to Switzerland, as grateful as I am to this country for making my death possible. I am sharing my story to help our politicians understand why people must be allowed control and responsibility in dying, just like they had in living. My life is my choice. Goodbye."

Mrs Elliott said her late husband was deeply concerned the choice to die was not available to everyone.



Angelika Elliott with her husband John in Zurich, where Dr Elliott chose to end his life in 2007. Photo: Kate Geraghty

"That's what's so unfair," she said. "He could pay but thought it was totally unfair for everyone else in his situation who couldn't afford to."

"We should copy the Swiss model with all its controls; there's no slip-ups. He just took a sip [of the drug Nembutal] and said 'I can't wait'. He did not suffer at all."

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