

It's the interview you must read. The mother cleared of murdering her ME-stricken daughter talks to the Mail



Kay Gilderdale: 'I've never had any regrets'

I held her arm as she fell asleep for the final time. How can they say I murdered Lynn when I just loved her so much?

ONLY after her daughter drew her last breath, says Kay Gilderdale, did she finally collapse sobbing, flinging herself across Lynn's body as she clung to the only thought that brought her any comfort: this is what my daughter wanted.

Three decades after giving birth to her, Kay had just helped to release her beloved daughter from a life which had become intolerable. The process had taken an agonising 30 hours.

Today — 13 months later — after being charged with attempted murder and a trial which ended in a not guilty verdict on Monday, Kay is worn thin by the strain. She is still clearly overwhelmed by a profound sense of grief. But despite the reservations of many that what she did was terribly wrong morally, she retains an inner serenity which comes from her belief that she did the right thing by Lynn.

'I have never had a moment's regret,' she says. 'If I had, I don't think I would be able to cope. I know I did what Lynn needed and now she is at peace. I never wanted her to go. I wanted her to stay. By helping her, I was going against what I was feeling and doing what I knew she wanted. The hardest thing that anybody can ever do in life is to watch their child die, when all you want to do is keep them here and make them better.'

Lynn, who was severely stricken with the chronic fatigue disease ME, had been talking about suicide for two years, but 55-year-old Kay had no idea she had settled on a day to do it. It began at 1.45am on December 3, 2008, when Lynn pressed the buzzer of an intercom, set up so she could summon her mother any time of the day or night.

Acutely tuned to all her needs after nursing her for 17 years, Kay woke instantly and hurried along the corridor of their house in Stonegate, East Sussex, to Lynn's room.

As her daughter's eyes found hers, Kay saw immediately what had happened: Lynn had removed the syringe of 210 milligrams of morphine (it helped her cope with the constant pain she was in) from the syringe driver which pumped it under her skin at a steady pace over 24 hours, and had attached it to a Hickman line used to take drugs into the body — which meant it would be fed straight into her veins.

'She was crying and she held up the Hickman line with the syringe attached to it. I knew she was trying to kill herself because she had been telling me, as gently as she could, but persistently, every day: "Mum, you know I don't want to be here." She used to say to everyone: "You can't fix me any more."

'I sat beside her. I was shocked and I thought I must talk her out of it. But I also accepted that it was her right to finish it if she wanted to. The one thought that hurt the most was that, if I accepted her wishes, I was going to lose her when I loved her so much.'

Lynn, who was 31 when she died, fell ill on the day of her BCG vaccination in November 1991, when she was 14. She was sent home sick from school that day and again the next day and never returned.

In the first horrifying months, she suffered violent convulsions lasting hours, fainting fits, searing pain in her throat, head and stomach, and cognitive problems.

Kay says: 'Before her illness Lynn

EXCLUSIVE by Gill Swain

was very intelligent, popular, pretty — everything you would want your daughter to be. We were always outside together as a family, going to the beach or sailing or cycling. We had a happy life. We didn't realise how happy it was until we lost it.'

Lynn's father, Richard, 56, a former policeman who works for the police in a civilian role, recalls taking his daughter home from hospital soon after she was diagnosed with ME. 'I wheeled her to the car park on a bright sunny day. She couldn't see very well because she was becoming light sensitive. She said to me: "Daddy, what's a car?" I remember my heart missing a beat.'

'I put her in the car and told her to put her seat belt on and she stared at me blankly, she didn't know what the seat belt was. Then I was driving home and I suddenly looked at her and she had flopped sideways, unconscious, strapped in the belt. It was terrifying.'

By May 1992, Lynn was paralysed, and by August she could not speak or swallow and had to be fed through a tube. For the rest of her life, she remained horizontal because sitting up made her lose consciousness. She had to lie on a sheepskin rug to prevent bedsores and felt constantly nauseous.

Though sufferers share a set of

symptoms, there is no diagnostic test for ME and no cure.

By the time Lynn decided to die, she had lost 50 per cent of her bone density and suffered numerous micro-fractures. Her major organs and hormone system were breaking down and she was often in severe pain despite her daily morphine.

Her abiding dream was to have a baby even though, after years of being on steroids, she went through the menopause in her early 20s.

When I first met Lynn in 2006 — I went to interview her and Kay about their situation — she was lying in her silent and shrouded room on a sparkling June day. I remember her making a rocking motion with her arms, to signify her desire for a child, and she wore an expression of infinite longing.

'I used to tell her there were other ways of having children, like surrogacy or adoption, if only the virus would go away,' says Kay.

'But after she turned 30, she lost all hope of finding a man in time, even if she had recovered. 'I don't believe anybody could go through what she did and not get to a point where they'd had enough. But that night, when I found her pumping morphine into her veins, my heart was breaking.'

About a third of the syringe of morphine had gone by the time Lynn called her mother that night, and as the rest dripped into her veins Kay tried to persuade her daughter to live.

With only Kay's voice sounding in the room and Lynn replying in the special sign language they had developed, she begged her to delay until after the Christmas of 2008, when her

brother, Stephen, 35, was coming with his wife, Sarah, and their two little boys, aged two and three.

'But she told me she couldn't put up with the pain any more. She said it would never be the right time and to please help her.'

'She wanted to say goodbye to her cats, Willow and Shadow. I found Willow and brought him for her to stroke, but I couldn't find Shadow and I didn't know how much longer Lynn would be conscious. She told me she was frightened, not of the

Every day she told me, 'Mum I don't want to be here'

unknown, but of the overdose not working and she was frightened of what might happen to me.'

It was an agonising dilemma for any parent. Should Kay have called for help and tried to save her daughter's life? Or was she right to stand back and respect her wishes and, when she feared that her daughter might be in pain, give her additional morphine doses, knowing they might end her life?

'She connected both syringes to the two inlet tubes of the Hickman line and put a hand over each. At that moment, the lights in the house went out. It was just incredible. We

thought of snatching the syringe away because I knew that would have made her more determined, and I respected her as an adult with the right to choose.

'And she had already convinced me that she couldn't go on any longer. She had lived in hope for so many years until she had finally lost it. I had known that a point would come where she would find her escape.'

'I had never given up hope that there could be something just around the corner to help her. But even as I tried to talk her out of it, I knew that what she was saying was right. It wasn't attention seeking. It was a considered decision she had made over a long period of time.'

So it was that Kay went to fetch two more syringes of morphine for Lynn, enough to provide a huge overdose.

'When I handed her the syringes she had a look of absolute determination. It was saying to me: "I want to do this. I have to do this." I tried to stay calm for her. I thought, if she could be strong and stay calm — as she was — how could I make this terrible thing even harder by going to pieces? I never spared a thought for what the law might say.'

'I bent over her to lift the Hickman line, and she pushed me away and took the syringes. She had kept up with the law on assisted suicide and she was telling me that she wanted to do it herself so I would not be implicated in her death.'

'She connected both syringes to the two inlet tubes of the Hickman line and put a hand over each. At that moment, the lights in the house went out. It was just incredible. We

looked at each other. There are different circuits in the house and there was still light from the fish tank, but I said: "Wait while I flick the fuse switch." She shook her head and started to press both plungers together.

'I went to hold her hand and she let go of one syringe. She pushed my hand away because she did not want me to touch the syringes. So I held her arm as she fell asleep almost straight away, then I lay across her body, sobbing.'



Lynn Gilderdale: Her precious pets helped to make her life tolerable

to safeguard their interests. It should have people like the consultant in charge of their case, a nursing sister who took care of them, their GP, more than one member of the family and an independent person.

'The panel could visit over a period of time, speak to the person and make absolutely sure this is what they really want and they are not under any pressure. This kind of system could have helped Lynn.'

'If the law had been different, she could have had her dad and brother and other people who loved her there as well, in the room that was her world.'

'They could have told her how much she was loved and she could have said goodbye to them in the way she wanted and we could have supported each other through the agony, instead of it having to be me alone.'

'I don't call it a "mercy killing". That is somebody deciding for someone else that their life is not worth living, rather than the person deciding for themselves, as Lynn did.'

Kay's case comes a week after that of Frances Inglis, the mother convicted of murder for giving her

'The hardest thing you can ever do is watch your child die'

severely brain-damaged son an overdose of heroin to end his life. Kay says she has deep compassion for Inglis.

'I feel very sorry for her. It wasn't that she was murderous. What she did was out of love and compassion and I feel terrible that she has been sentenced to nine years. I certainly would not condemn her.'

While awaiting trial herself, Kay kept herself going by continuing to fulfil Lynn's wishes, particularly by holding a sale of her things to raise money for ME research.

Among the make-up boxes that had never been opened, the jewellery never worn, the craft materials lying untouched in their boxes, Kay discovered audiotapes of Lynn playing with her friends before the ME silenced her.

'I hadn't heard Lynn's voice for 17 years. I had actually forgotten what she sounded like,' she says. 'She was pretending to be a presenter of a radio programme and played a bit of piano and clarinet and giggled with her friends.'

'It was lovely to hear her enthusiasm. She sounded so happy and full of the joys of life. But it was also terribly upsetting to be reminded of everything that ME took from her.'

On Lynn's birthday in September last year, she read about the Director of Public Prosecutions' controversial plans to publish guidelines about when he would prosecute in cases of assisted suicide.

'I cried when I realised that all the circumstances where he would not prosecute applied to me and all those where he would die did not apply to me. I felt confident then that they would drop the charge. But they were determined to stick with it. I don't understand why.'

'In court, the prosecution tried to make it look as if I acted independently of Lynn, but when you look at the whole thing you can't support that because it was Lynn's actions that night which made me do what I did.'

'It's bitter that UK law, as it stands, forced her daughter to make such a painful decision alone.'

'The law should be changed. I believe that if someone who is seriously ill expresses the wish to die, there should be a panel set up

though I thought she was dying, part of me was hoping that she would wake up. But I was panicking about what damage might have happened to her brain or her liver.'

'If she didn't die, would they put her on machines and keep her alive for God knows how long, which is exactly what she didn't want to happen?'

'I didn't want her to go. I wanted to call for help. I wanted my son Steve there. I wanted Lynn's father Richard there. I wanted her to find peace. I had been crying solidly all that time. I thought I was acting OK, but when I look back I see the longer I went without sleep and food, the more distressed I became. I was in turmoil.'

The end finally came at 7.10am on December 4. Kay had been out of the bedroom when she felt a sudden urgency to return.

'I sat beside her and she just stopped breathing. That's when I completely collapsed.'

Several times the previous day, Richard, whose marriage to Kay broke up in 2002, had sent texts asking how Lynn was and, not wanting to compromise him by involving him directly in her death, Kay had replied that she was 'still sleeping.'

Now, as soon as she had recovered enough, she sent him a text asking him to come over from his home in Eastbourne, where he lives with his second wife.

Richard, who remained closely involved in Lynn's care, says he knew instantly that the end had come. 'I just felt profoundly sorry, though also glad that Lynn was at peace,' he says. 'Deep down, I had

She was scared, not of the unknown but of staying alive

she also phoned the suicide help group, Exit, and that she injected Lynn with three syringes of air to cause a fatal air embolism.'

The scientific evidence, however, showed no trace of Sertraline, and Kay now thinks she must have been mistaken about that. And she says she cannot remember injecting Lynn with air or being on the phone to Exit.

'As the hours went on, I got into a state of panic,' she says. 'Lynn had said very clearly that she didn't want to be resuscitated and

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