

**'My brother took his own life at Dignitas — his life was in torment'**- John Close - Times - 16-12-09

Memories of John Close's last day are etched on the mind of his sister, Lesley. John, a talented musician, had motor neuron disease diagnosed in March 2001 aged 53. It progressed rapidly and within 18 months he lost his ability to speak and walk, then move or swallow.

He learnt about Dignitas after publicity surrounding another Briton dying at the clinic, Reg Crew, and told his family that was what he wanted.

"In January 2003 he typed a message saying, 'That is how I would like to go'," Ms Close, who lives in Buckinghamshire, recalls. "I typed back, 'Of course we will help'. Rather typically, he responded, 'Not now. I want to watch *Lord of the Rings*'."

Within weeks Mr Close, who lived in Milton Keynes, had applied for membership of Dignitas and begun the process to get permission from doctors at the clinic to end his own life. The third Monday in May was offered by the clinic for his appointment. Mr Close, a fan of Samuel Beckett's dark humour, was eager to attend his own wake, so he organised a party for friends and family near his home the Saturday beforehand.

On the Monday morning Mr Close and family members flew to Zurich. They were met at the airport by Ludwig Minelli, founder of the clinic, and driven by ambulance taxi to his home to complete the paperwork, then on to the city centre flat for the drugs to be administered.

"At every stage it was made clear that turning back was an option. There was a 20-minute pre-med, but we had agreed we would leave him alone for five minutes so he could collect his thoughts. When we came back in, he had written what a shame it was to come to this fine city with its fine people to die. We all said goodbye. I thought I would be able to come up with something meaningful, but all I could say was that I would miss him. The nurse handed him the syringe, I fixed it into his feeding tube and he undid the clip to let it flow in. It has to be self-administered so that it qualifies as suicide. Within three minutes he was asleep, and then his breathing became more and more gentle until it stopped."