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Mother who killed Down's son spared jail

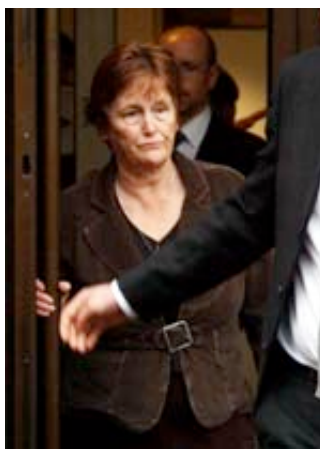
By ADAM FRESCO

Judge shows mercy after hearing parent was at her wits' end coping with autism and violent outbursts

A MOTHER was spared jail yesterday after she admitted killing her grown-up son, who had Down's syndrome, when she came "to the end of her tether" after caring for him for 36 years.

Wendolyn Markcrow, 67, had, to no avail, begged the authorities for help in caring for her son, Patrick, who also suffered from autism and behavioural difficulties.

After her son had listened to the same Elton John CD all day, shouting the word "Elton" repeatedly, Mrs Markcrow was "at her wits' end", Oxford Crown Court heard.



Markcrow suffocated her grown-up son, Patrick, after giving him tranquillisers (UNS)

She gave Patrick 14 tranquillisers before suffocating him with a plastic bag as he slept. She then went into the garden and attempted suicide by slashing her neck and arm with a kitchen knife.

She lay in the garden shed all night until she was discovered by her husband Paul, 70, the following day, March 29. Her husband died a few weeks later from natural causes.

When Markcrow was arrested she told the police: "Something in me snapped last night. I feel sad, desperate, defeated and ashamed." Mr Justice Gross told her that human life was sacrosanct, but said that he would not jail her, given the exceptional circumstances, and would show her mercy.

"You will be punished as long as you live, in the knowledge of what you have done and what you have lost. The pressures you faced were extreme.

"In the present case of quite exceptional factors, the merciful course and right course is to suspend the sentence. This case is indeed exceptional." He added that the risk of her ever doing anything similar in the future was "illusory".

Markcrow, who had earlier admitted manslaughter by reason of diminished responsibility, was jailed for two years, suspended for



18 months.

On the day that she killed her son, she had finally lost her mind, the judge had been told.

Sasha Wass, for the defence, said: "She was overwhelmed by feelings of despair and she wanted to die, but all the time there was the worry of what would happen to Patrick. She was exhausted beyond reason."

"Patrick had spent the entire day listening to the same Elton John CD, shouting the word 'Elton' repeatedly. She was at her wits' end."

Markcrow, from Long Crendon, Buckinghamshire, had looked after Patrick, who grew to 16 stone, since his birth and had always been determined that he would be at the heart of the loving family. However, after a happy childhood during which he attended college, his condition worsened and he started punching himself in the face, once so violently that he had to be rushed to hospital for surgery on a detached retina. He also started throwing unstoppable tantrums when asked to go to bed and kept his family awake night after night.

Markcrow cared for him at home but became increasingly physically and emotionally exhausted. Nicholas Browne, for the prosecution, told the court: "The circumstances are profoundly sad and this case can be characterised as a real tragedy."

He said that while most cases of unlawful killing ought to carry a prison sentence, he had never come across such an exceptional case and believed that a merciful sentence would be right. He added: "The picture the Crown paints of the household in the spring is of a mother plainly at the end of her tether, emotionally and physically exhausted and subject to long-term depression."

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