

Derek and Maria's Story

I was only 17 when I met Derek and he was 16. We were together for a very long time and married for 42 years.

Derek had previously had problems with his bowel which turned out to be a Bowel Cancer. He had treatment for this and he got over this very well. A few years went by and he then developed a cough that didn't seem to go away. Derek went to the Doctors and they gave him antibiotics which didn't work, so he went back again and they gave him another round of antibiotics but these still didn't work. He eventually went back to see our main Doctor who said the cough should not be carrying on like this and suggested that Derek have a chest X-ray. About a week later we got a phone call asking if we could both go to the surgery. The Doctor said she was very sorry but Derek had got Lung Cancer. We were in shock!

We went to Northampton Hospital who organised for Derek to have chemotherapy at home. Staff came to the house and gave treatment, a drip and everything in his arm every four weeks. The treatment was ok to start with but then it made Derek very sick. I remember we spent the whole of Christmas Day that year just lying on the bed together because he was so poorly. He was being continuously sick, had difficulty in swallowing and couldn't eat or drink much at all.

This is when he was admitted to Cransley Hospice for about a week. They got on top of his symptoms and gave him nice drinks which built him up again and seemed to help his system get a little bit better. In order to help us manage at home Cransley Hospice organised for their Occupational Therapist to visit our house. She showed us things we could have installed in the house like toilet mechanism, and thing on the side of the bed which helped Derek if he was struggling to get out of bed. I didn't know you could get any of this help until Derek went into Cransley Hospice.

Derek came home but he was still going backwards and forwards to Northampton Hospital. At one point he asked the Doctor the question about how much time he had. The Doctor said it was likely to be months or a year. Again this news was a bit of a shock as you always think there is light at the end of the tunnel.

At one point I asked Derek if there was anything he wanted to do that he hadn't done. He said he wanted to go back to Majorca, that's where we used to go a lot. I got the holiday booked and organised a wheelchair. This meant I could take Derek up and down the promenade. He was able to sit and enjoy the sand and the sea that's all he wanted. It wasn't easy but I wanted him to have every last bit of what he wanted in his life.

The second time he went into Cransley Derek was much more poorly. Cransley was so good I can't praise them enough, they were so kind and patient. I was able to stay with Derek and slept next to him on a fold up bed. My children came in and sat with him and there was no pressure that you had to leave at a certain time. It was very relaxed and calm. We were able to go down to the family room, sit and talk and be together, which is what you want.

The staff were very good at keeping us informed about what was happening. If we needed to speak to a Doctor, we would ask at the nurses' station. The Doctor would come down to the room where Derek was and talked us through about the medicine he was having or anything else. This made us feel better as we felt we knew what was happening.

That's what you gain from being in Cransley Hospice. There is someone to talk to about how the system works and what to expect. They know when someone is getting towards the end of their life and prepare you for that.

After Derek had died there were times when I did not think I was managing that well. I had been given the number of a Counsellor at Cransley Hospice so I contacted her. She was so understanding. You try to be strong but it's not that easy. It aches in your chest and you've got this ache for ages and you ask why does it not go away, you cannot sleep. I think it's because your life has turned upside down. Derek wasn't even retired. We had planned so much for our retirement and he didn't even reach it and that is something I have had to cope with since. Bereavement counselling was brilliant absolutely brilliant,

I now go the Memorial Evenings that are organised by the Hospice and have on occasions done some readings at these evenings.

I felt I wanted to give something back and help others. This led me to do work as a Volunteer at Cransley Hospice. I work on the reception desk and help with welcoming visitors and help the nurses with telephone calls and general enquiries. People coming in get to know your face, they ask you are you alright this week and I say yes fine.

I sometimes see visitors who are upset and because I have been in that situation you understand better what they are going through.

As a Volunteer I still see some of the staff who helped Derek, my family and I. They are so wonderful with so much patience, you couldn't price it enough, they helped us so much and were there for us when we needed it.