

A Beautiful Exit for a Wonderful Man

“Sometimes in your worst moments, you have the greatest memories”...

shared Fannie, Peter’s daughter, reflecting on their time spent at Chatham-Kent Hospice.



It was a late November evening when Peter and his family moved into Hospice. Peter had been fighting cancer for several years with numerous hospital stays. His wife, Catherine, had been his main caregiver with his daughters, Elaine and Fannie helping out, especially in the last year.

“With the support of home care, we were able to keep Dad at home as long as possible, but we knew his time was getting closer and Mom was exhausted, we were all exhausted” shared Fannie. Once they made the decision to go to Hospice, the move happened very quickly. Elaine shared that her image of Hospice was a cold, sterile environment, but when she arrived at Hospice what she found was the complete opposite.

“The staff and volunteers were warm and welcoming. The room was beautiful and comfortable. It felt calm and peaceful – it felt like home.”

The family were so relieved that Peter’s ongoing care was taken care of and that, as a family, their role was now to be there to share their love with him and with each other. “I had been taking care of my husband for quite a long time with his illness. When we finally made the difficult decision to move him from our family home to Hospice, it wasn’t easy for me. But when I arrived, I knew we made the right decision and I could finally be his wife and spend the last hours with him without worrying about the stress of caregiving.

“I was able to hold his hand, talk to him and give him all my love,” shared Catherine.

Even though Peter was unconscious, the staff made a point of asking about his favourite things. The family shared a bit about Peter, including his musical tastes. The next day when they arrived, the staff had put on the television playing his favourite music. They even encouraged the family to bring Juno, Peter’s beloved dog, for a visit.

The staff were very aware of the strain that caregiving had taken on

the family and how difficult these last days with Peter were, so they were always there to provide support. Bridget, the Supportive & Spiritual Care Provider, spent time with the family, talking about Peter and the many memories they had of their life together. They knew that the man lying unconscious in the bed was more than that. He was a husband, a father, a grandfather, a friend.

Peter had moved to Canada from Greece in 1971 and Catherine came a few weeks later. They arranged to get married shortly thereafter and scheduled it for October 31. They had no idea it was Halloween as this was not a custom in Greece, but soon realized why the date had been available. From then on, they spent their wedding anniversary trick-or-treating with their daughters and handing out candy.

Peter and Catherine ran a family restaurant for many years and enjoyed interacting with their customers who were like family to them. Peter was a very outgoing, social person who loved people. He was the unofficial mayor of his neighbourhood and would take daily walks with Juno, coming home an hour or two later after having visited with the neighbours.

His greatest joy was his grandson, Jimmy. He loved spending time with Jimmy and teaching him new things. They had a very close and special relationship.

The morning Peter died, Jimmy was travelling from Windsor to Chatham to see his “Papou” but got stuck in traffic. The Hospice staff knew Peter’s time was short so they suggested that Jimmy Facetime with Peter. Jimmy was excited to share with his Papou that he had aced his science test. Peter would be so proud. Peter died before Jimmy could make it to Hospice but having connected by Facetime was very meaningful for Jimmy.

We knew that the staff dealt with families and death all the time but, they made us feel like we were the first family they had ever cared for. They provided such a beautiful exit for our dad. At the moment, it wasn’t painful for him or us. It was peaceful and calm.

After Peter died, the family were encouraged to stay with him as long as they wanted.



As Peter was escorted out the front door, the staff formed an honour guard to share their support with the family.

“It was these little gestures that were so important. We felt like we were not alone” shared Fannie.

“Even though we only spent 36 hours at Hospice, the time spent there was so valuable. It allowed us to just be a family, it helped us come to terms with what was happening and it provided us with a feeling of calm knowing that our Dad was comfortable and peaceful to the end”.

-Shared in loving memory of Peter by the Vavoulis Family



Photo: Hospice RPN- Jen, Direct Support Volunteer- Lauren and PSW- Misti-Blue

“ All of the volunteers at the Hospice give up time in order to assist us in our daily tasks because they all have a heart of GOLD. I have volunteers offer to assist me with any task and I am thankful each and every day for that. Volunteers are beneficial every day in order to help the Hospice run smoothly. Whether it is the food they serve, the comforting hands of a DSV or the receptionist helping family find their way to the room, I know the residents are thankful for all of the help received from volunteers. Thank you for all that you do and know that you are very appreciated. ”

Have you ever thought about becoming a volunteer but weren't sure how? The process to become a volunteer at Hospice can take a few months because we want to ensure you feel confident supporting residents and their families. Here are the steps to take so you can start making a difference!

Fill out an application - The first step to becoming a Chatham-Kent Hospice Volunteer is filling out an application. This application can be found online at www.chathamkenthospice.com/volunteer.

Meet with the Volunteer Coordinator - Our Volunteer Coordinator will be in touch to set up an interview to determine if volunteering at Chatham-Kent Hospice is the right fit. We ask that those who have had a close personal loss and are still in mourning to wait at least 12 months to volunteer. It can be difficult to be of service to others when one is still healing from their own loss. A discussion regarding loss is conducted during the interview to determine if someone is ready to volunteer.

Complete Screening - If a mutually agreed upon position is found, two personal reference checks will be completed, followed by a Vulnerable Police Information Check and a Health Screening Check.

Training & Orientation - Volunteers will be enrolled in a 34-hour comprehensive training and orientation program to ensure they have the knowledge they need to provide outstanding care to our residents and families.

Start making a difference

Self-Care, Self-Compassion & Self-Talk Through Grief

While listening to an excellent podcast recently by Jodi Vlasman, who hosts *Healing and Hope Through Grief*, I was reminded of several themes we talk about often in grief therapy.

Our Supportive Care team would like to share these concepts in the hope they will be helpful in coping with any losses you may have experienced.



Self-Care means caring for yourself in a way that nurtures your physical, mental and emotional wellbeing. When we fail to take good care of ourselves it can be difficult to function and it is also challenging to take care of others.

Grief is exhausting, so small self-care strategies can make a significant impact.

Self-care may include replenishing your health habits, including eating healthy foods, drinking plenty of water and getting exercise. It may mean developing a better sleep routine in order to help you get as much sleep as possible to help you cope with your grief. It may also look like replenishing your mind through reading, journaling or quiet reflection. It can include spending time with people who you feel comfortable with and who replenish your spirit. Exploring activities to re-ignite passion in your life can also be helpful as a form of self-care. Other examples of self-care are going to the doctor or a mental health professional and asking for help, setting boundaries or saying 'no' when you need to and forgiveness towards yourself or others.

Self-compassion should be no different than having compassion for others. So why is it so hard? Many people we speak with who are dealing with their grief criticize themselves for things that happened before their loved one died. These criticisms may be for not doing enough for their loved one, not advocating hard enough, not realizing how quickly their loved one would decline. In their grief, they also can be hard on themselves for not being ready to return to work, or ready to socialize or not being able to be there for others in the way that they want to. Self-compassion means treating yourself as you would others that you care about. It is difficult to give yourself the same kindness and understanding you extend to others but it is important in your grieving process. Acknowledging how difficult it is and asking what it is that you need in the moment to care for and comfort yourself can positively impact your grief experience. Though it is hard not to judge yourself for struggling, it is nonetheless important to healing.

As part of self-compassion, how we talk to ourselves is critical. *Self-talk* is something we all do and how we speak to ourselves can make a big difference in how we view ourselves as well as the world around us. Our internal dialogue can be both negative and positive as well as encouraging or distressing. While facing grief, people often feel overwhelmed with emotions and may say to themselves that they don't believe they can get through their grief. Self-talk of this nature is common, however it can increase stress and cause doubt in one's ability to use coping strategies and manage waves of grief. It may feel intolerable, but how we talk with ourselves about how we can cope with these feelings impacts how we actually do cope.

Self-care, self-compassion and positive self-talk are all challenging when facing a loss however they can be essential tools to living through grief.

For more information on these concepts or to inquire about Supportive Care grief and bereavement services please contact Sally Reaume at 519-354-3113 ext. 2406.

A Gift that Keeps on Giving

Shared by Lyn & John Rush, Gift in Will donors



We believe that no matter your situation, you can help others and share what you can. Throughout our life, we volunteered as well as financially supported several local charities and saw the ongoing need ourselves. That's why when it was time to update our Will, we included a future gift to the Chatham-Kent Hospice Foundation.

We hope that our gift will make the lives of future residents and their families a little better in some way by providing a comfortable environment where they can live their last days with the supports they need. Although we will have left this world when this gift is made, it makes us feel wonderful right now knowing that we will continue to help others after we are gone.

The idea of supporting charities after we are gone started when we made our funeral arrangements and included our favourite charities as "charity of choice" for memorial donations. This was also a great opportunity to talk to our children about our choices. We started by sharing our funeral plans and then, when we updated our Will, we told them why we included gifts to our charities. Our children and grandchildren are well aware of our love for these charities and were pleased to learn of the gifts in our Will.

Before we met with our lawyer to update our Will, we met with Jodi from the Chatham-Kent Hospice Foundation and learned more about options to consider and what to ask our lawyer. It was a very comfortable and relaxed visit and made us feel more confident that we were making changes to our Will that benefited both our family and our favourite charities.

We encourage everyone to consider what you can do to help others after you are gone – your family as well as your community. Talk to your loved ones while you can and let them know what you're thinking. Talk to your favourite charity to understand the ways your future gift will make a difference and the options you have for setting it up.

We hope by sharing our story, others will consider such a gift. Knowing that we have arranged for a gift that keeps on giving after we're gone is very comforting – very good for the soul!



We are grateful for your support of Chatham-Kent Hospice. If you would no longer like to receive a copy of this newsletter or wish to receive an electronic version, please let us know by emailing: foundation@chathamkenthospice.com or calling 519-354-3113 extension 2403.
Charitable Status #: 809001597RR0001

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