Ayrshire Hospice
Making today matter

THIS IS HOSPICE CARE

Alison's Story: John and May

Dad was a Galston boy through and through – a proud Ayrshireman. Mum was from Kilmarnock originally, so they always lived in Ayrshire. They met at the dancing at Grand Hall in Kilmarnock while Dad was doing his national service in the Royal Air Force in the early 1950s. They got married in 1958.

When Mum started to feel ill, she had a terrible time trying to get her problems diagnosed. It finally transpired that she had a very, very rare form of bone cancer, normally seen in teenagers and children. She was 67, so it was something that her local GP had never seen before in an adult of her age. By that time, things were so far advanced it had spread to other organs, so it was a horrible diagnosis.

Dad had never had any sort of dealings with hospices before, but he went to see Strathcarron Hospice – the one nearest to me – and they were very good to him. They explained that the Ayrshire Hospice worked in exactly the same sort of way, and he was very taken by the whole place – by the positivity and caring nature of the staff. He knew that a hospice would be the place for Mum.

She got into the Ayrshire Hospice and, from there, she was a changed woman. Almost overnight, she changed from being a person who was extremely anxious about everything to someone who had stopped worrying. Suddenly, she became this peaceful person who was much more tolerant of people – she took people as they were, instead of being fretful about what they thought of her. My brother felt the same; it wasn't just me who noticed the change. My husband thought the same – the whole family did.

She loved the little things that the Ayrshire Hospice seemed to pick up on with her. My mum liked things to be nice, so things like getting her afternoon tea on a tray, with a wee bud vase holding a flower in it, and some nice china – these were things that meant a lot to her. They must have noticed early on that she liked that kind of thing.

It's these little things for someone's mental wellbeing that make such a difference. The kind of care they give is so individual and empathetic. I don't think people realise that's what hospices can do, as well as the actual physical care for the patient. The care Mum received, and the ambience of the Ayrshire Hospice, was such that we could never be more thankful. Even my son, who was only nine at the time, can still recall that. Visiting Granny in the Hospice had a very positive effect on him. His cousins were really too small to remember, plus they lived down south, but he can remember it quite clearly.

I remember the last weekend she was home. There's a picture here of all the family standing outside the house. She had got out of the Hospice - she was allowed to - and could have stayed in her own bed, but she said "no, I think I'll just go home". And that was the Ayrshire Hospice. So she went 'home' that night, back to the Hospice, and didn't stay in their house. I think that spoke vast amounts to us as a family.

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My Dad was so thankful to the Ayrshire Hospice that, after Mum died, he became a volunteer driver there for a number of years. That was the way he gave back – it was something he could do. He had a suitable car, he could drive, and he went on training courses to get folk in and out of cars. It was a double-edged thing, in as much as he did it for himself, as it gave him a purpose and got him out, but it also gave back to the Hospice, as he felt so indebted to them. But there came a point where he couldn't help people in and out of cars safely anymore, and he finally had to call it a day.

He was very outgoing, very confident. Having worked throughout the world, dealing with all sorts of cultures and people who spoke different languages, he got on with everybody. He was a very organised person, and extremely smart – which goes back to his RAF days. He took pride in himself right until the end. He was still driving two months before he went into care, and he was still perfectly able to look after himself. A very self-sufficient man. He missed my mum right until he passed away. It was something that wasn't ever going to go away for him – not that it ever does.

When he peacefully passed away in January 2023, he was a month off his 89th birthday, and he was just done and ready to go. He had seen all his grandchildren grow up, seen his oldest grandchild get engaged and start planning a wedding. That is a wonderful thing. He made sure there was a legacy left in his Will for the Hospice - his "little bit", as he put it - to enable the good work of the Ayrshire Hospice to carry on. He had obviously considered it very much, and that decision had been written into his Will a long time ago. That was the ultimate, final thank-you from my Dad.

I think he just was so thankful to the Hospice. As I say, it gave us as a family so much reassurance, seeing that change in my mum. Things had been very bleak before then - bleak for my mum, and bleak for us as a family. The Ayrshire Hospice just took that away.

Hospices have definitely got a special place in local people's hearts, because we all know somebody who has been in a hospice, or in day care, or has been cared for by the nurses . There's a connection with every single person.

The gift John kindly left in his Will was one of the legacies received by the Ayrshire Hospice in 2024. He has helped to make sure the Hospice can continue to provide others with the life-changing care and support that May received.

Help the Ayrshire Hospice care live on – for all, for now, forever – by including us in your Will.