

Gillian's Story...

Gillian and Clive had been married for 39 years. In that time Clive had always been fit and never complained of feeling unwell. He had a passion for music and amateur dramatics which he shared with their son, Andrew. When Andrew performed in theatre productions at the Alnwick Playhouse Clive always enjoyed watching. Clive had converted one of their garages into a 'Man Cave' so he had a special room where he could play his musical instruments, often accompanied by Andrew – Fred, their pet dog, was never far from his side. Music was also a joint passion between Andrew and his Dad - they actually played at three charity gigs raising over £2,500 for the Hospice back in 2004.

Last year Gillian noticed that Clive had started to become forgetful, so much so, that she felt she couldn't leave him on his own because he would forget he had left the tap running or the gas oven on. Being concerned Gillian made an appointment for Clive to see their GP for a professional assessment. The appointment was booked for 18th June 2021 and Gillian hoped the GP could help – in her words *"she wanted to get her Clive back!"*

The day before the GP appointment, Gillian was in the garden and Clive was busy working in the garage when she heard him scream out - he had fallen coming out of the garage and badly hurt the left side of his body. Although he was in pain, he didn't want to go to hospital because he was seeing his GP the next day and didn't think it was anything to worry about – *just a bit of bruising!*

Gillian said "At the GP appointment I raised concerns about Clive's forgetfulness because I thought it might be the onset of Dementia. I also mentioned his fall the day before because he had continued to complain of pain under his left arm and along his left side. After an examination, the GP diagnosed enlarged lymph nodes that she said needed further investigation. The news came as a big shock to both of us and after that, everything seemed to happen so fast.

Clive had blood tests on 21st June, then on the evening of the 22nd June our GP called to confirm the tests revealed that Clive's salt-levels were too low, so more blood tests and an MRI scan followed that week. A few days later we got the news that the scan had revealed that Clive had Stage 4 Lung Cancer – we were in such a state of shock because we never expected his pain to be something so serious. Clive was referred to the Wansbeck Hospital to see a specialist in the Palliative Care team who gave us the devastating news that his condition was palliative, giving him only around 8 weeks to live. He was offered a stay in hospital but Clive's wish was to remain at home, so I made him a promise that he wouldn't have to go into hospital.

During the next five weeks I managed to care for Clive on my own at home. The District Nurse came in once a week and my employer was really supportive allowing me to work from home when I could, but also take as much time off as I needed to care for Clive.

However, things started to become really difficult when Clive could no longer manage the stairs to get to bed and use the bathroom. It was at this time Clive suggested he should move into his 'Man Cave' - a space he loved and as it was on the ground floor it would also make it easier for me. It was at this point that I knew I was getting exhausted and struggling to look after Clive on my own. It was the District Nurse who suggested we ask HospiceCare for some help and support and that she could make the referral for us, which I very much welcomed.

We then received a telephone call from Caz, one of the Hospice nurses, who came to our home the next day to assess our needs. From that point, and for the next ten days, we had daily visits from HospiceCare. Initially it was one carer from the Hospice at Home team, then as Clive's condition deteriorated we had two carers daily. Their support enabled me to get some respite from caring for Clive – it was only getting a shower, or taking Fred, our family dog, for a walk but it meant so much to have that time for myself knowing Clive was being well cared for.

Clive was a huge fan of the actor John Wayne and one of my special memories was when Hilary, one of the Hospice at Home team, came to the house and spent a couple of hours talking with Clive about John Wayne – because she too was a big fan. He loved that time with Hilary because when I returned from my dog walk with Fred, I heard them laughing and I saw a spark in Clive that I hadn't seen for a while - that's a memory I will hold dear and I'm so grateful to Hilary. Clive died just three days later on the evening of Monday 6th September 2021 - seven weeks after his diagnosis. I was with him in his much-loved Man Cave, Fred was snuggled between us, it was quiet and calm and Clive's death was peaceful. I've been able to take comfort from knowing that I was able to fulfil Clive's wish to be at home to die - something that would not have been possible without the support from HospiceCare. Andrew and I want people to know that the nurses at HospiceCare are very kind, thoughtful and helpful and were there to support us in our darkest days.

After Clive died, Andrew wanted to honour his dad's life and say 'thank you' to the Hospice so last year he embarked on a huge challenge – to run 52 half-marathons – The final half-marathon, will celebrate what would have been his dad's 76th birthday. I know his dad will be by his side and I couldn't be more proud.” Gillian and Andrew Fletcher May 2022