

A Personal Story - Billy Atkinson

Billy Atkinson was 84 years old when he died on 22nd May 2017 and he was my Dad!

As a family we had lived with Dad's diagnosis of Alzheimer's for 15 years! He was given the diagnosis at the age of 69 years after knowing that something was 'not right' as he kept forgetting things and not always remembering what he was doing. However, Dad was able to live a full and active life and if you had met him you would never have known he was living with Alzheimer's.

Luckily, for us as a family and as the Alzheimer's progressed particularly over the last 2-3 years, Dad was happy and content in his world. Dad had played the piano as a young man in a band and music remained prominent in Dad's life even up to his last few months. It was amazing how he could not remember my name but as soon as he sat at his keyboard he was able to play his favourite tunes! Dad attended a local Day Care for up to 4 times a week so that Mam could have a break and as a family we went to many music events for Dad to enjoy in that moment, as he always forgot he had been!

2 years ago my family met with a GP to discuss Dad's future care. We knew that Dad would never wish to be in hospital and recognising that Alzheimer's is a terminal illness and Dad's condition would continue to deteriorate, we wanted to make sure that Dad was treated appropriately in a place of comfort and familiarity. An Emergency Health Plan and Do Not Attempt Cardiac Resuscitation were put in place which stated that Dad was for 'comfort care' at home. He was not to be admitted to hospital under any circumstances, although he could be treated with antibiotics at home if necessary if he was able to swallow the medication. Having these discussions as a family was very sad and not always easy, but what the conversations did were unite us in making sure Dad had the best care possible to allow him to die 'a good death' with dignity, which is exactly what happened. On the 22nd May 2017 Dad died peacefully at home with us all there including my dog whose name, incidentally, Dad never forgot!

Being a Hospice nurse meant that it was an absolute privilege that I could do this last thing for my Dad, with the added support of some overnight care from the HospiceCare Hospice at Home team.

I wrote this poem for dad a few days after his death. It was read at his funeral and I would like to share it with you now! Sue xx

First published 2017