

## “The hospice staff were angels. We wouldn’t have been able to carry on with mum’s care at home without them.”

Our mum, Christina, was a passionate lady and family meant everything to her. She had eight grandchildren and one great-grandson who she doted on – and they absolutely adored her. She was feisty and strong-willed, but above all, she was the most loving person.

For over thirty years, mum lived with a condition called diverticulitis, which is where pouches in the intestines become inflamed. But the last seven years her condition became so severe, that she underwent major surgery that required her needing a temporary stoma. This had a huge impact on her life. She was so self-conscious that she stopped swimming, she couldn’t eat her favourite food, wouldn’t travel or go on holiday abroad – it put her life on hold.

In November 2019, after mum had turned 70, her stoma was reversed. She was able to start planning for the future and all the things she’d missed out on – the holidays, travels, adventures. She finally felt like she’d got her life back. But soon after, mum started experiencing awful pain at the same spot her stoma had been. Just before we went into the first lockdown, mum was diagnosed with incurable liver cancer. We all were completely heartbroken.

From the get-go, mum was adamant she didn’t want to go into hospital or into a hospice. Her wishes were to stay at home with her family, making the most out of the time she had left. We contacted the hospice where Donna had been volunteering for 16 years, knowing they were the best people to turn to for support for mum.

Their Hospice at Home nurses and occupational therapists visited mum at home, making sure she had everything she needed to be as comfortable and as safe as possible. The staff were amazing, always there at the end of the phone, day or night, for any advice or help we needed. It really was a lifeline for me and my sister Nicola – knowing that if mum needed anything, they’d be straight over, no questions asked.



*Please turn over...*



Christina holding her great-grandson

Mum was scared and angry with her diagnosis and lockdown; she really struggled to come to terms with what was happening. The hospice organised for her to chat with Liz, one of their counsellors every Wednesday on the phone, giving her that dedicated time to express how she felt – to vent, cry, offload everything. Mum built up such a lovely relationship with Liz and she was always so much chirpier after their sessions. It was like a huge weight had been lifted off her shoulders as she didn't want to 'burden' us and it was a time for her to speak freely – just having a professional person to talk to made such a difference at such a difficult time.



Leading up to Christmas 2020, mum's health deteriorated, and her symptoms got worse, we were supported by the 24-hour care line. Mum always loved Christmas. She usually did all the cooking and organising; even if another family member hosted, she'd always get involved, bustling around the kitchen, telling us how she'd cook this or that (which, of course, was always the best way!). We felt that mum was holding on for that one last Christmas.

The nurses came out on Christmas Eve to help us make sure she was settled and comfortable. In the early hours of Christmas morning, we felt her slip away. We were overcome with emotion. We rang the hospice and they answered as soon as they could. On the phone, they were incredible, so reassuring. They calmly talked us through what to do, and in just over an hour, two of their nurses were at home with us – spending their Christmas morning with us. They were so lovely and caring, supporting us throughout the whole process. We were able to get mum dressed; she looked absolutely beautiful. The pain that had been in her face for so long was finally gone. She was completely at peace.

The support the hospice gave mum and our family, even after her death, was exceptional. They treated her with dignity and respect, going above and beyond at every step. Without them, we wouldn't have been able to carry on caring for mum at home – the way she wanted. They really are angels.

This Christmas, we will be thinking about Mum and how much love she brought into our lives. And even though this time of year now feels bittersweet, we will never forget the warmth and kindness that the hospice gave to our family through our hardest time. So, this Christmas, please help another local family get the expert care they desperately need.

Thank you and Merry Christmas.

**Donna & Nicola**

