

Catherine and Jim's story



When Jim's mum, Catherine, became ill, Farleigh Hospice's care and support greatly improved her quality of life so she had more time to see her family grow up.



Catherine

"My dad died when I was seven so my mum, Catherine, raised me, my older brother and sister, Hannah, on her own. No matter how tough it was raising three children, she always did whatever she could to make sure we didn't miss out on anything.

Mum was bright, bubbly, sociable and fun and enjoyed walking our dogs, knitting and taking us on holidays in the New Forest. She selflessly put us first and was always there to give me advice or support, and in most cases knew me better than I knew myself.

In 2009, when I was about 15, Mum was suffering from breathing problems. She had never smoked and was told that she had chest infections, but we knew something wasn't right. She underwent some tests around Christmas time.

It was a huge shock for us and our stepdad, Matt, when she was told she had terminal lung cancer, with just six months to live. Mum was only 45.

After my dad passed, Mum had been determined to do all she could to help her three children become capable adults, standing on our own two feet. I think what upset her the most was that she wouldn't be alive to do that.

She was referred to the Royal Marsden Hospital and given chemotherapy. She also qualified for some clinical trials that they were running for new, experimental treatments that might extend her life.

Mum didn't like to show how the illness and treatments were affecting her breathing and

mobility. When a stair lift was fitted in our house, she would even put the washing on it and walk up next to it to prove that she could still do it!

She tried to carry on doing everything for everyone, but we could see that she was struggling. Two years after her diagnosis, she had defied expectations but was feeling burnt out and her health was deteriorating.

Mum was being supported by a clinical nurse specialist. They talked about her end of life care plan: she didn't want to die in hospital but didn't want to be at home and leave us with that memory. Her nurse arranged for her to visit the Inpatient Unit at Farleigh Hospice.

Straightaway, Mum felt at ease there because she could see the excellent quality of Farleigh's end of life care. The rooms were comfortable, with lovely views onto the gardens, and we could even bring in our dogs to visit



Matt and Catherine



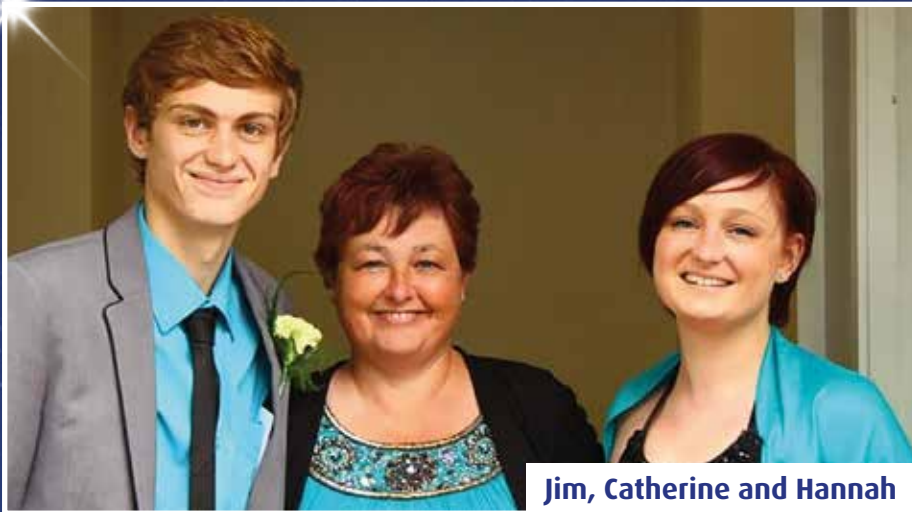
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Jim, Catherine and Hannah

her. The hospice also offered her help to improve her quality of life, including symptom management, physiotherapy and patient support groups.

Farleigh's care gave Mum a renewed sense of purpose. She had sessions in the hospice's gym to improve her walking and joined some of the support groups. This gave her something to look forward to - she made new friends and came home feeling that she'd accomplished something, with some of her artwork even going on display in Farleigh.

Farleigh also provided my mum and my stepdad with practical travel and care advice which gave them the confidence and reassurance to enjoy a few holidays whilst they could, including a trip to Scotland and a couple of cruises!

There were times when she would get really ill or have side effects when her medication changed, so she would stay at the Inpatient Unit for a short time while they managed her symptoms and realigned her medication. It was such a relaxing environment for Mum to be in. She loved watching the squirrels and birds in the garden, and even got to meet a wallaby during one of her stays.

The care team were really supportive of the whole family, and

this included providing counselling to us if needed. Mum found it massively helpful to talk to someone about the guilt she felt for being terminally ill after Dad had died, and not being there for her children in the future. The counsellor organised sessions to help us all understand how she was feeling, so we could cope with that together.

My sister and I also had counselling from Farleigh, and they even arranged for me to meet with a counsellor at my college which was really convenient. I was pretty depressed and miserable and these sessions helped me to accept and process feelings about my dad's death and Mum's illness. I was definitely better prepared for when Mum died and the counselling has helped shape who I am today.

Mum continued to receive treatment at the Royal Marsden with care and support from Farleigh for about six years. Her stays at the Inpatient Unit became more frequent as her health gradually declined.

On her final visit, Mum was very tired and I think she felt at peace being in Farleigh as it was the place where she wanted to die. Me, my siblings and our stepdad were able to stay over and be together with her as a family for the last time. Mum died there on 14 September 2017, aged 52.

Farleigh Hospice's specialist care and support gave my mum a better quality of life and extra time with our family that we didn't expect to have. She was there for my 18th birthday, saw myself and Hannah graduate as well her first grandchildren be born, which we never thought would be possible.

We have been supporting Farleigh Hospice to say thank you for Mum's care ever since. My partner and I volunteered at Farleigh's fundraising events until we moved from Essex to Wiltshire. Now we travel back every year to do Walk for Life, which my sister and stepdad also enjoy, and play Farleigh's Local Hospice Lottery.

I have also volunteered as a Trustee for Farleigh so I have seen first-hand how the hospice puts the needs of its patients at the forefront of everything that it does.

Farleigh Hospice is a brilliant charity that provides such a valuable service. It's hard to describe how much of an impact Farleigh's care had on our family when we were going through such a difficult time. I have no doubt that the care they provided gave us more time with Mum, giving her a better quality of life than we could have hoped for and allowing us to make many more memories together.

It's so important that people support Farleigh, so more local families can receive the same fantastic care in the future."

You can help Farleigh Hospice to care for more people like Catherine and Jim by making a donation.

Please go to farleighhospice.org/donate-lightupalife or call 01245 457351.