



Elaine taking part in the Twilight Walk

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## Elaine Ritchie: The grief of losing my mother was something I couldn't have prepared for...

*"ellenor may not have been able to save my mum, but the charity has certainly saved me. The journey is still not yet over – but I do know I'm not alone."* - Elaine

16 months ago, Val lost her battle with cancer. Here, her daughter Elaine describes the depth of her grief at the death of her mother, and how she is

learning to heal.

“I have had days when I have been so overwhelmed by my sense of loss that I thought I would completely fall apart. I nearly have. The intensity of missing mum is indescribable, a deep sadness that has left me feeling lost and alone. My Mum: She was my best friend and I loved her.

My mum died last March aged 78 years from advanced pancreatic cancer, four years after my father Colin's death. Her cancer was fast-growing and aggressive and as no treatment was available, she agreed to be referred to **ellenor** having volunteered at the hospice for ten years and knowing it well.

I'm an ex-palliative nurse, but of course I didn't want to be a professional with my mum, but her daughter. What's more I was terrified at the thought of losing her, so I needed someone to hand over her practical care to, just so that I could cope. From the moment the **ellenor** palliative nurse, Tracy, walked through my doors, I felt as if Mum and I had been scooped up. Mum loved her and Tracy took away the burden of our stress, allowing me to be Mum's daughter and us to enjoy our time left together in a loving, happy way.

Tracy focused on my mother's needs and wishes; planning, involving and always communicating with me. We discussed the course of care that we felt would best support Mum during her remaining days. Three months later, Mum died peacefully at home with me by her side and, however traumatic it was at the time, it was the right thing for her. She wouldn't have wanted it any other way.

**ellenor** supported me with funeral arrangements, with the charity's chaplain, Ben, organising the sort of beautiful, peaceful service that Mum deserved - and which I know she would have loved. Ben still supports me now - my world changed when Mum died leaving a huge hole and I felt very alone, but he has been there for me.

Although there were some very good friends and colleagues who rallied round, it was the **ellenor** team that provided the most care and became my heroes. Sally, the **ellenor** family-support worker, and Joanna the **ellenor** volunteer counsellor, were the ones who provided a listening ear, practical advice and that all-important hug after my mother's death.

Not a day passes when I don't remember my Mum and think of the beautiful times we shared. The difficult times are still there - I will never stop yearning for my Mum - but they ebb and flow, and **ellenor** has been with me every step of my journey. I can never repay my debt of gratitude to **ellenor**, but I can donate to help the charity help another individual or family like mine.

Dr Russ Hargreaves, **ellenor** Head of Wellbeing says: "For far too long, we have been led to believe that bereavement is something you simply "get over". It isn't, and many of us do better with the help and support of friends, family and professionals. At **ellenor**, we have a holistic approach to care. We offer spiritual and pastoral care as well as bereavement support to both patients and loved ones at a time that is often difficult and challenging. I am delighted that we were able to support Elaine through her difficult journey".

In honour her mother's memory and to celebrate her mother's life Elaine will be taking part in **ellenor's** 10<sup>th</sup> Twilight Walk on Friday 20 September - to thank **ellenor** for all they had done for her. Last year the walk drew over 1,100 walkers for what was a beautiful evening of fun, friends and family, coming together to make memories and remember loved ones. This year **ellenor** will be inviting everyone to join the Twilight Walk 2019, turning the streets of Gravesend orange in support of families, like Elaine's, facing terminal illness.

If you're inspired by this story sign up to **ellenor's** [Twilight Walk](#), as a team or individual, on Friday 20 September at the Cyclopark in Gravesend. If you would like to find out more about our services and how **ellenor** can support you during difficult times please contact our Homecare and Wellbeing team on 01474 320007 or email [info@ellenor.org](mailto:info@ellenor.org)

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We are **ellenor**, a charity funded by the generosity of our local community, offering the best care and support to families facing terminal illness in Kent. We are the **only** charity in the county that provides hospice care for people of all ages – babies, children and adults - and their families. This includes pain and symptom relief, end of life care, respite, bereavement support and emotional and spiritual care.

Our Children's Hospice Care, formerly known as chYps, is provided in the comfort of the family home and spans across North and West Kent and the London Borough of Bexley. Adults living in Gravesham, Dartford and Swanley,

receive care in their place of choice, including their own homes, at our Hospice in Gravesend and in local care homes.

## Contacts



**Basia Wilson**

Press Contact

PR Manager

[basia.wilson@ellenor.org](mailto:basia.wilson@ellenor.org)

01474320007

07932601517