

# How Garden House became Garden 'Home' for me

*Instead of me writing about Garden House, I thought it might be more helpful for you to read this personal account, which Kathryn Hares has so eloquently written - Trudy Bunday, Matron.*

Until December 1990 Cancer was something that happened to other people as far as I was concerned. Then my life was abruptly changed forever when my Mum, Maureen, was diagnosed as having ovarian cancer.

Suddenly this illness could not be ignored any longer. It had gatecrashed its way into the lives of my family. One of the first things we had to come to terms with was the reality of the cancer's very existence. We could no longer shrug it off. So we turned to face it and started to fight.

Today the chances of beating cancer are improving significantly. One day I feel sure that many, if not all, of the different types of cancer will be completely curable. However, as yet that is not always the case, as many of us know. How many of us don't know someone who has died of cancer? Very few, I suspect.

In December 1993 we began to try to take in the fact that Maureen was going to die. It is not something anyone can ever be prepared for. Even after three years of fighting we could not conceive the idea of Mum dying.

But she was. And now we had to rethink a few things. We felt that life must go on as normally as possible, for as long as possible. Which it did. Until it became obvious that we needed help. Mum's Macmillan nurse, Gillian, mentioned Garden House Hospice, we talked and, at that time, I didn't like the idea one little bit.

By January 1994 Mum was really a very poorly lady. When Gillian mentioned Garden House again my main concern, or rather fear, was that my place would be usurped by strangers. But Gillian assured us that would not be the case. I think her words were "they will understand". I can tell you now, they understood.

So now I come to a taboo word, "hospice". No one wants to have to face the fact that they may need a "hospice". In our society death, the process of dying and the word "hospice" are all too often pushed into a dark corner. We pretend, or hope that, if we can't see it then it doesn't exist.

Although I didn't know it at the time, Mum had already decided to die away from home, if possible in Garden House Hospice.

I have looked up "hospice" in the dictionary, which defines the word as "a travellers house of rest". Each and every one of us is a traveller on the journey of life. How long that journey will be none of us knows. Some of us have very short journeys. Maureen's sightseeing tour of life only lasted 50 years, interrupted and cut short by cancer.

We each must take the very final step into the mystery that is death, alone. But no one needs to be alone on the pathway there.



Maureen & Kathryn Hares

Maureen took her final steps surrounded by so much love and care. Gently, compassionately, with such tremendous tenderness and understanding, Garden House Hospice created a "house of rest" for this weary traveller.

Mum found peace there. She was, quite simply, more restful, at ease, relaxed, content - however you wish to describe it, at Garden House. Mum spent her last weeks in a building full of love, laughter, caring and sharing. She trusted the nurses, felt safe and in many ways enjoyed herself, "it's like a hotel in here".

For perhaps the first time in her life Maureen was put first and foremost. She was well and truly spoilt. No one deserved it more. Garden House and the people in it made that possible.

When we went to Garden House on 15 February we had no real idea that time was so short. Our days together were quiet, peaceful and, under the circumstances, we were very relaxed. Mum felt safe there, knowing she was amongst people who really understood what she was experiencing.

Then Mum died. Yes, Garden House is the place where I lost my Mum. But it is also the place where we shared many very precious moments. We were quite possibly closer there than we had ever been at home. Garden House gave us that space, provided the right environment, the right ingredients, for Mum and I to relax - to let go a little.

Garden House was a safety net of love and caring spread beneath us. Asking nothing, but giving so much in so many ways.

For me Garden House became Garden Home. How do you define "home"? Where the heart is? Well Garden House is full of heart. A place of love, a place of peace. Mum was more relaxed there than she had been at home for a long time. In the last weeks of her life Mum got the best.

Home is where you can be yourself. Garden House passes no judgements, understands all reactions. Mum is dead and Garden House is still there for me.