

# HOSPICE

## Hospice Times

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### *Kind hands that bring the touch of peace*

**S**he enters the room as quietly as she'd walked down the passage to the ward. She bends over the bed and puts a warm, caring hand on the small, cold, clasped ones of the patient who lies quietly with half-closed eyes. Though Babette has slipped into that semi-comatose state indicative of being near to death, she



*Irene with patient Jacky in IPU*

can hear and recognise the soothing, kindly voice that speaks softly to her. The Caregiver's words are acknowledged with an almost-imperceptible squeeze.

A smile of relief flits briefly across the faces of the family member and a friend sitting at the bedside; they'd felt helpless, not knowing what to say, and are clearly glad to see the Caregiver. Somehow, her calm presence brings reassurance, even normality, to a bewildering situation, and they're grateful. Babette's dignity is acknowledged here. Death, at Hospice, is recognised as normal, neither hastened nor prolonged. Her comfort is paramount.

At 43, Babette's strength is ebbing away, her life drawing to a close. She hears what is being said, but she is not in pain. Sadly, she will soon leave behind three sons – the youngest only 12 years old – and a loving husband.

**Irene Lopes** is an In-Patient Unit Caregiver. Warm and friendly, Irene has about her a natural sense of peace and grace. Working at Hospice helped her develop that rare skill so characteristic of mature and balanced people: an ability to 'live in the moment'. That's where she is now: completely

there, focused, available to patient and family, who intuitively recognise that she's concentrating on them and their needs, without distraction.

Friday mornings find Irene slipping quietly into the Unit, before visiting each ward to spend time with patients and family members, to talk to them and

offer them emotional support.

Caregivers are a vital link in the holistic care offered by our Hospice. They're taught to be aware of what's important to patients and loved ones, that their presence should be unobtrusive; that it's necessary to be able to read between the lines. They need to be sensitive to the nature of the relationships between patient and family, and know that human touch means a great deal.

And they never forget that, when a patient has a terminal illness, *it is not only loved ones who experience grief*. In fact, alongside the process taking place within the family, there is always *another* mammoth struggle that takes place in the heart and mind of the **patient** him- or herself: that of *inner grief, emotional pain and loss*. In some ways, this may be the greatest loss of all: the loss of his or her *own* life, and all that that life has meant over the years. He or she may grieve for a spouse, children or grandchildren they will never see again, they may grieve the loss of the sound of laughter in their lives or the waves that pound the seashore; they'll never watch the seasons as they change, hear the birds in the trees, or watch the sun slip out of sight in a bright orange glow.

Please turn to page 4/...

# Finding joy in everyday living... survivors tell us their stories of hope

*This is the story of three remarkable women, each diagnosed with a life-threatening disease. Each made a decision to live, to find joy and personal growth in their lives.... and each one has done just that. That's what makes this a story of determination and hope.*

In April 2008 Estelle Bal shared with *Hospice Times* her courageous story in the face of terminal cancer. She was 42. Since then she has faced the spread of cancer in her spine and pelvis, a broken femur due to the fragility of her bones, a hip operation and an op to "cement" a collapsed vertebra, plus radiotherapy and chemo. Today the indomitable-spirited Estelle continues to live her life as normally as she possibly can, meeting friends for coffee (top right, facing camera), and working each day at the job she enjoys. She knows it's so important to be positive, in spite of having "down days" when the pain is just too much. But then, she says, "something always happens" to change how she feels: a friend phones, or perhaps her children (Vicki, 12, and Jean-Pierre, 15) write her a special note.

She's at peace within, and says regular visits and calls from Hospice's Sister Sheila help. Together these two women have explained the situation to the children; she believes they'll cope with whatever happens in the future. Recently, when her husband Dirk took a huge truck to Cape Town for his company, Estelle went too, just for fun – she wanted him to always remember their happy trip together.

Typical of her, is her ability to acknowledge the good in others. Of Sister Sheila she says: "It's very reassuring to know she is available; her knowledge and experience is invaluable in providing courage and hope." *And these two things Estelle Bal has in abundance.*

Having worked at Hospice for many years, Lucille Hagemann feels she should have recognised years ago the symptoms of her brain tumour – like being off balance and dizzy, headaches, and depression from her

serotonin being destroyed by the tumour. Then, a few months ago, she had a total blackout. Just days later, she and Michael, her husband, sat in the doctor's rooms and heard the awful diagnosis; how they could only sit in shock and say nothing! And how, as they drove home, she said "This is something that happens to other people." Within two days she underwent 12 hours of surgery to remove a tumour behind her ear, between the brain and the skull. Though it would have brought about her death if left in place to grow and increase its pressure, the tumour fortunately proved to be benign. She's made a full recovery and visits her good friends at Hospice – Lucille (second from right in centre photo) is seen with (l to r) Margaret, Brenda, Sheila, Caroline and (back) Maureen.

"Having the brain tumour turned out to be the beginning of a *miracle* for me," she says. "I believe this was destined to happen, that I had lessons to learn. Today I see life and living in a whole new light. Life is infinitely more precious now, and I feel blessed to be given the opportunity for a new beginning. I've grown as a person, and grown in my relationships, especially the one I have with God. I feel alive, strong, whole and filled with hope."

Coincidentally, the April 2008 issue of *Hospice Times* also featured Hospice nurse admin co-ordinator **Lyndsey Prinsloo** who, at that time, had just had her partial mastectomy and undergone chemotherapy. Today, Lyndsey (above) is looking and feeling good and is as bubbly as ever. She found her own ways of coping: while undergoing her chemotherapy and radiation treatment: for instance, she set herself a goal of visiting her sister in the USA... so she and her husband did just that. They spent a wonderful family time in Connecticut and New York. "I've learned a lot from having cancer," says Lyndsey. "It's a great teacher. Material things, like a bigger house or new car, are unimportant to me now. What's important is that I have a 'brilliant' relationship with my husband, and that my family has drawn closer. *These things matter.* I've learned to live in the moment..." *She smiles: I've grown a little wiser!*"



**Hospice East Rand extends a warm and grateful THANK YOU to the following individuals and companies for their kind and generous support:**

- Anzac Primary School • AON Benfield, for volunteering to paint our pallisade fence on 'Do It Day' • Bhula Donation Fund • Burg Family Charitable Trust • Conveyor & Plant Services • Gill Henning School of Ballet: teachers and Les Ballcrinas • Grade 9 Girls of Benoni Muslim School • Keith Price • Mercedes Benz, for their amazing support by way of the Annual Golf Day • RNE Pumps • Scott Ewing • Silver Springboks • St Andrews Community Church in Benoni • TRC Conveyor Belting

**AND although, sadly, we were not able to thank them personally, we are deeply appreciative of the bequests received from:**

- The Late Eddie Collins • The late Mrs EM Palmer • The Gibson Family

# Lest we forget our humanity: the children of Vosloorus



*For most of these young visitors to Hospice's Vosloorus Children's Club on Saturdays, this is their only outing – and they walk, alone or in families for an hour and more just to come and play games and have a hot meal.*

Ragini Naiker, Auxiliary Social Worker at our Hospice, has a date at our Vosloorus Centre every Saturday of the year – and she never misses it. *Nor does she want to!* This is the place where up to 35 or 40 children come to play games, read books, have breakfast and a cooked lunch together. It's where they come, in fact, to **just be children** for a few hours of the week. They also have the opportunity to talk to Ragini or her new assistant, Gladys Mkhonza about their problems, and find that an ear that truly listens and a heart that understands are a great help.

The Vosloorus Children's Saturday Club is over 18 months old now, and the young visitors who come here are children of our patients. They have all been affected by the illness or death of one or both parents.

If anyone ever imagined that young black children are not affected by the chronic illness, the poverty through job loss and the death of a parent, and that they simply get on with their lives through it all, they should visit this Centre. Some of these youngsters – as young as 2, 3, or 4, have had to walk between 4 and 6 kilometres to get here. Many of these little ones are in foster homes because they are now orphaned.

Some of the older girls are in tears as they speak of their lives: of never being able to own a nice pair of shoes; of how ill their Mom is and of how they look after her as well as do all the washing, clean the two-roomed shack they call home, cook the meagre food in the house, and look after two or three siblings. Heading a household in extreme poverty is a tough burden for **anyone** to bear. Tragically, though little more than young children *themselves*, the youngsters who take on these burdens will **never** know the kind of happy childhood we all like to give our children.

**YES, YOU** can help us by attending these social events

**16 AUGUST**

**VOLUNTEERS TEA at Hospice East Rand**

**27 OCTOBER**

**Edge Insurance GOLF DAY**

**6 NOVEMBER**

**Christmas FETE & TOY FAIR**

**27 NOVEMBER**

**Annual TREE OF MEMORIES Ceremony**

*For more information please watch the press nearer to the event date, or call us on 011 422-1531.*

It makes Ragini and Gladys sad that the Centre really has so little to offer these eager children. Yet, for them, this is their special time, and they love it... sharing the two or three books at the Centre, chatting, laughing and playing catch outside, and having two nourishing meals. For every one of them, it's their **only** 'fun' outing of the week. Ask Ragini or Gladys what their wish is for these children and they're quick to answer: **they'd love a company or individual to sponsor these Saturday Club mornings, or perhaps arrange an outing for these children now and again, with transport, so that they can see the Zoo or go to a movie, for the first time ever! They ask so little.**

The Centre needs children's books, puzzles, and games, something on which to play some music or watch a DVD. They need beads, needles, and wool to learn some craftmaking. But here, in the heart of Vosloorus township, is a place where they're welcomed, where they're enough hugs to go round, where smiles abound, and where, for a short while, they can forget the problems of hunger, cold and hard work that they live with every other day except Saturday. **What a world of difference your gift of something they need, of sponsorship, or of your practical help and kindness, would make!**

*Right: Gladys Mkhonza with some of the hats and scarves she's teaching Vosloorus Day Care's adult patients to make. She loves her job and is keen to teach the children to knit on Saturdays, too. The mural on the wall behind her was donated by an aspiring artist; here the Club kids can sit and talk about their problems with Ragini and Gladys on Saturday mornings.*



## Launch of Patrons Project is set to support Hospice

Hospice East Rand Board member and local businessman, **MARK SHEA**, has just launched his new **PATRONS PROJECT** whereby East Rand companies and individuals make a monthly pledge to Hospice (starting from R100 upwards), for a year or more. Participants receive a beautifully decorated **Nomination Bracelet** to wear – Mark believes it will trigger questions and increase awareness about Hospice and the Project. The income from the Patrons Project, he says, would mean that Hospice could depend on a stable monthly income to enable the organisation to budget and to plan ahead, to make improvements to the building, or buy new equipment. "Since being appointed a Board member of Hospice, I've realised just how many people there are who really don't know what Hospice does – often it's only when a family member is diagnosed with a terminal disease," says Mark. If anyone is interested to make a monthly pledge and join the Patrons Project, or want to discuss it with Mark Shea, please contact him on **083 302 8717**. He'd love to talk to you.



This search for inner peace may include an acknowledgement of what *could* have been, of lessons learned in retrospect, of hasty words that cannot be changed, and past mistakes impossible to retract. A kaleidoscope of their lives, with its joys and unresolved issues, dances before them; it can be overwhelming. And Hospice Caregivers like Irene are trained to be acutely aware of these things.

"If a patient's able to communicate, I ask them if they have any special needs; I listen to them. I talk to family members about how difficult it is for them, too," says Irene. **"My work here is my passion."**

There are times when all that's needed to bring comfort is her hand placed gently on a patient's hand; and other times when a listening ear is enough.

Irene now visits 68-year old Jacky, who comes from Primrose. Jacky, who has advanced colon cancer that has spread to his lungs, is huddled on the bed, his legs over the side. She sits on the chair at the bedside, sensing right away that there may be other, unspoken problems. Her hand is gentle on his thin shoulder, letting him know he can open up, that she will listen. Jacky tells her that he's in pain, that he can't sleep; Irene reassures him. She will pass this on to the staff. Visibly, Jacky's distress begins to diminish; he relaxes his hunched shoulders.

Irene realises that Jacky's afraid of what's ahead – his illness makes him feel helpless. It is hard for him to take care of his family and himself. He wants her to know the *real* Jacky, the one before his 2007 diagnosis, when he was a husband and father providing for his family, when he was a supervisor moulder in the steel industry for 35 years. He's sad that his life is not like it was. He speaks of his daughter and of his

wife who had a stroke a few years ago. He feels better now: **"They're trying to get me back on my feet here,"** he smiles. Irene agrees. **His trust in her is restored.**

Now Irene visits cheerful Mr Tuckey, whose osteoporosis keeps him in long-term Hospice Care. They smile and chat about everyday things. The family has hung a bird feeder outside the window and it's busy with noisy garden birds. Mr Tuckey glances at the door: his wife, who spends every morning with him, will arrive at any moment, although it's difficult for her to find a lift each day.

Patients are referred to the 24-hour care In-Patient Unit by a Hospice Community Nurse, who may see that the patient is in need of respite care, or that symptoms, like pain, require close management. Sometimes a patient is admitted here because the family can no longer cope with the demands of 24-hour nursing and they're in need of a break. Many patients return home, while others die here in peace, their loved ones at the bedside.

Irene's role as IPU Caregiver is important. When she retired from her job a few years ago she wanted to give something back for her many blessings – like her 'soulmate' husband, two caring daughters, and her adored granddaughters. Her face speaks of a good life, well-lived. Yet perhaps her expressive hands speak loudest of all: capable, gentle and mature, their lines of kindness also tell of many years of household chores, of loving care of babies and holding children's hands, of wiping away tears, of helping friends, and making dinners and companionable cups of tea. Today those hands bring a touch of peace, comfort and kindness into the lives of terminally ill patients and their families.

Caregivers like Irene Lopes are invaluable to our Hospice – able to stretch personal boundaries, share a journey of trust and understanding with the dying patient and loved ones, and extend the understanding of life, living and letting go. In doing so, they impart to patients **that they matter, that they matter till the very last moment of their lives.**

**Your support for our very special kind of caring would be deeply appreciated: our envelope is enclosed. Thank you.**

## Shops need stocks!!



There's something important that Michele McKenzie (*above right*), our Hospice Charity Shops Co-ordinator, wants *Hospice Times* readers, their friends and their families, to know:

### OUR SHOPS NEED MORE STOCK!

**"Right now there's a HUGE demand out there for second-hand goods,"** says Michele. **"We're short of stock for our Shops, and struggling to have enough to sell. We NEED your donation ... please clean out cupboards, basements and garages! We'll happily collect from you."**

There is an urgent need for donations of **CLOTHING** for children and adults, **CROCKERY** and **CUTLERY**, **LINEN** like curtains and bedding, **FURNITURE**, **ELECTRICAL GOODS** in working order, **BRIC-A-BRAC**, **TOYS**, and **BOOKS**.

Michele joined Hospice four-and-half years ago and has a great eye for the perfect place for a new shop. She works closely with Carol Simoni (*left above*), who started nine years ago as a volunteer, and recalls many funny and interesting moments of her job.

On one memorable occasion, Carol says, she turned a bag out onto a table because she'd felt something strange when putting her hand in, and found several sets of false teeth!

Carol makes the best of toy donations so they can be sold at our annual Toy Fair. She cleans and dresses dolls, makes blankets, and paints tiny cradles so that some little girl will receive a beautiful baby doll to treasure!

The Charity Shops – now 10 in all – are a major source of income for our Hospice.

**PLEASE REMEMBER:** Call the Hospice Shop, 011 422-1531, and arrange for us to collect your unwanted items on **TUESDAYS**. *You'll be raising funds for Hospice's services while the things you no longer need are being enjoyed by others.*

**OUR NEW SHOP:** Shop 7, Chalu Place, Nigel Rd, Selcourt, Springs.

**Our next fête will be a Christmas Market on 6 November.**