

HOSPICE TIMES

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Too much water has gone under the bridge in just a handful of years. *Too much water, too few years!*

It's how it is right now for young East Rand couple Natasha and Albert Berger (right). It feels like yesterday that they met at a karaoke party when she was a quiet but self-assured 17-year old. It feels like yesterday that he

went to her home to visit her, and that they began dating. Within a couple of years he'd organised both families to meet at a restaurant where his flamboyant gesture of getting on one knee and publicly proposing marriage was met with a surprised, but happy, "Yes".

Today, at just 25, Natasha is terminally ill and very frail – aware that she has only a short while to live, unable to accept it without a courageous fight. She has lung cancer and it has spread, even to her liver. Albert has taken on the running of the household, cooking, caring for his three year old son and ensuring his wife takes her medication and has her injections. He has to work, and knows how lucky he is to have the support and help of Natasha's Mom and Dad, Linda and Blackie, who live nearby.

Talking to Albert and Natasha in the lounge of their modest home in Marlands was like lifting the dark, heavy curtain away from their life today, to reveal the carefree days of their yesterdays... days full of the kind of happy promise that is the prerogative of the young and in love. But those carefree days are gone, along with their promise. What remains now, and will remain to the end of Natasha's life and beyond, is their love – *mutual, visible and abiding*.

Back in those happy times, the couple were delighted when their son, Bradley, was born in the following



May, 13 months after they married. Today this bright, engaging three-year old will explain to you that his Mommy is very sick, and that his baby sister died. He helps his Dad give his Mommy the medication she doesn't always want to take, he's gentle and tender when he's with her, and says "cheese" with a big grin when his photo is taken. As his Mom says, he's had to grow up quickly – maybe even *too* quickly for one so small – and is coping well.

At the end of January last year Natasha gave up her work as an insurance claims administrator to await the imminent birth of their second child. Her pregnancy had masked the symptoms of cancer in her body but, right after their little daughter Zanita was born, she began to experience severe pain in her side near the top of her ribs.

A non-smoker all her life, she was diagnosed with cancer of the lung. "Albert and I were shocked. We sat and talked it over: we decided to fight it together with everything we had and beat it!" she says. The fight includes the high costs of her treatment: it's put severe financial strain on their resources, and their medical aid has now stopped reimbursements.

When baby Zanita was just three months old, Natasha was admitted to an East Rand hospital to drain the fluid on her lungs before undergoing a delicate operation on her trachea (windpipe). *turn to page 4/...*

Every patient is special, each one is unique in personality, individual circumstances and needs. Each one has something to teach us – we learn something we never knew before. And each one, young or old, finds his or her way into our hearts. Each nursing sister at Hospice knows that and experiences it. Yet, sometimes, a patient comes along who changes the life of a carer in some way, so that they are never again quite the same!

Sometimes in life you meet someone
And the impression made on you
Will surely be a lasting one
And there are only just a few...

People who can be described
As angels on this earth
For it is not the things they do
But who they are that give them worth.

Debbie, you are one of those
And you were sent to me
You help with all my questions
And you've helped to set me free.

From the constraints that cancer brings
I have gained so much just knowing
That you are there to see me through
For the love that you keep showing.

So glad I'm strong to fight this fight
So glad you're on my side
And in my darkest hour
I know you'll help and guide.

Not only me, but those I love
My friends and family
Will take comfort from just knowing
That it's you we're going to see.

Your presence brings great confidence
So today, while I still can,
I want to thank you very much
For being part of my living plan.

When Sister Debbie Joubert (right) recently met a patient called Jeanette Mackenzie she felt an immediate kinship; it was as if they'd known each other for years. "Jeanette is 53 and has a great lust for life," says Debbie. "Her determination to live every moment of every day has seen her through even the bumpiest moments." Having been a trauma counsellor herself for years, Jeanette was realistic about her illness and ready to talk about her feelings. She also had a sixth sense about others and knew intuitively if something was worrying Sister Debbie, too. "She was at a really important point in her life when diagnosed with breast cancer which spread to her liver and lungs. Although on oxygen, she decided to do many things she wanted to do, while she could still do them... like going down to the sea. Visiting the daisies in Namaqualand was another goal – but her condition had deteriorated and it was simply not possible. So her friends stepped in and put dozens of pots of daisies around the trees in the park near her Benoni home. Then they took Jeanette to the park as a surprise, and she was thrilled. "Jeanette still loves surprises, enjoys her children and grandchildren, has masses of friends and will truly live her life to the very last moment. She's a wonderful example to us all," says Debbie who is deeply touched by the beautiful poem (left) that Jeanette wrote for her. "It means a lot to me, especially as Jeanette is very ill right now," she says.



When Sister Fikile Nhlathathi (below) was asked to visit Nonhlanhla, a 14-year old patient in Kaitlhomg, she never dreamed that the child would have such an impact on her own life. When



Nonhlanhla's aunt contacted Hospice it was because of the child's extreme pain from bone cancer which had spread. What Fikile found was a child from a deeply divided family, who had as much emotional pain as she did physical. She lived with her father's family – rarely seeing her mother. It was the inability of one side to talk to the other, and their continued bitterness, hatred and anger that made Nonhlanhla tearful and increased her distress. "She became like my own child," says Fikile. "I brought her chips and fruit juice, and then a big teddy bear that had been donated. She named it 'Fikile'! I spent lots of reassuring time with her and got to listen to her problems."

Sister Fikile knew what Nonhlanhla was hoping for, and organised auxiliary social worker, Ragini Naiker, to bring the family together to talk about their problems, which delighted Nonhlanhla and improved her home situation. But New Year's eve 2010 was a turning point for the girl: she was at home and the laughter and games of the children in the neighbourhood made her sad. "Why can't I do things other children can do?" she sobbed. It was then that her condition deteriorated and, after a short stay in hospital, she was admitted to our Hospice In-Patient Unit for 24-hour palliative nursing. The best thing about being there, Nonhlanhla told Fikile, was that her divorced Mom and Dad visited her at the same time and even communicated with each other! Nonhlanhla died in the unit in March. She was 15. Fikile says Nonhlanhla taught her a lot about how important emotional issues are to all children, especially when they so ill. "Families should sit and talk, and make compromises to bring harmony into the life a terminally ill child," she says.

SISTER FIKILE

I MEET YOU IN THE NAME
OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

I LIKE TO THANK YOU VERY
MUCH FOR TAKING CARE OF ME
THIS MUCH LIKE YOUR OWN
DAUGHTER. I APPRECIATE
EVERYTHING THAT YOU HAVE
DONE FOR ME. WHAT YOU HAVE
ALREADY DONE IS BIG. IT'S LIKE
PUTTING MY LIFE BACK ON TRACK.

FROM
NONHLANHLA

We'd like to say Thank You to you all...

HOSPICE EAST RAND extends a warm and appreciative **Thank You** to:

- Kempton Park Country Club & organiser Amanda Matthee who made us the recipients of their Golf Day
- Balwin Properties who gave us a substantial donation raised from their Fun Run
- RNS Golf Committee for the useful icemaking machine
- Benoni Aurora Rotary Club for the microwave they gave us
- Benoni Lake Club who gave us the proceeds from their Golf Day
- C.A.R.S. Transport
- and St Dominic's School for their gifts in cash
- The Thursday Club for their ongoing support
- Kendal Franks Lodge who held a Golf Day in aid of our Hospice
- East Rand Funeral Directors
- Rotary Club of Germiston
- Germiston Central Methodist Church
- Philip du Preez for his cash donation
- Erin-Go-Bragh Lodge
- and our twin hospice in the USA: Hospice of the Calumet Area.

Sadly, although we are also deeply grateful for, and benefitted from, the bequests unexpectedly left us by the Late Mr Delport and the Late Mrs F H Swanepoel, we are unable to tell them personally how much we value their kindness.



Team members integral to the awarding of our accreditation by COHSASA are (back from left) Ragini Naiker, Lyndsey Prinsloo, S'ya Lebetle and Brenda Bisschoff; (front from left) Sindisiwe Muzalose and Rena Kessa with the certificate.

Being awarded full accreditation from COHSASA (Council for Health Service Accreditation of Southern Africa) is a real feather in our healthcare cap! COHSASA is not awarded lightly: it involves investigations and interviews, report preparation, implementation and upkeep of systems and much teamwork. It puts our Hospice under the closest scrutiny to ensure that we meet the highest possible standards for health care. The 11 criteria we had to meet to ensure that we are given a 5-star rating are:

- governance and leadership
- human resource management
- administrative support services
- risk management
- quality management and improvement
- patients' rights
- an interdisciplinary team
- access to care and admissions
- holistic patient care
- medications management
- support services.

Accredited health care organisations like ours receive a Certificate of Acknowledgement and the accreditation itself is valid for three years. With such high standards in place, we know we can cope with just about anything that comes our way, and plan to maintain these high standards in order to be accredited again in three years' time.

Accreditation is more than important to our Hospice: it's vital, and helps put us in the forefront of comparable services in our country. Well done to all who worked together as a purposeful team in order to achieve this coveted award!

Gerda opens her Heart for Hospice



Gerda Baverstock loves her life, she enjoys meeting people, and going to work each day, organising campaigns and helping others. With these attributes, it's no wonder our Hospice has welcomed her as our new Public Relations Officer. To kick off national Hospice Week 2011, she's launching her **Hearts for Hospice** campaign (Gerda and poster above). This will be an ongoing effort, Gerda says, and it came about when the owner of a local hairdresser asked Gerda what she could do to help Hospice in some way. The hands on the logo symbolise helping hands, and Gerda has used them to make stickers, rubber stamps and other items that people can buy. She's also involved many other keen hairdressing salons on the East Rand and will be visiting businesses to get them to participate, too. "I want this campaign not only to be a constant reminder of Hospice East Rand and the wonderful work that is done by our staff and volunteers – it is also a tribute to our patients past and present. So, if you'd like to participate, put up a poster, or buy stickers or rubber stamps to show your support or involve your company, club or school, please contact Gerda on 011 422-1531 (office hours). She'll be delighted to hear from you.

Join us for our annual Hospice East Rand Winter Golf Day on 8th June...

Companies, clubs and individual golfers are invited to join in this fundraising event at Benoni Lake Club by entering a four-ball that includes green fees and dinner, or sponsoring a four-ball, a hole or prizes. Sponsorships offer great opportunities for advertising. Bookings are already underway, so please **contact Gerda Baverstock on 082 492 0302** soon.

Easter fun was had by all

Our Day Care Centre at 218 Kemston Avenue, Benoni West, is where you'll find many of our more mobile patients each Wednesday morning. Here they enjoy crafts, like making Easter eggs, (right), have tea and a nourishing meal together and enjoy the company of others in situations similar to their own. There are lots of laughs and there's lots of fun to be had and, for most of these Day Care visitors, it's the highlight of their week.



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Albert took charge of the household and children. He'll never forget the morning he'd planned an early hospital visit with the children to see Natasha.

Zanita awoke at five o'clock; he fed her a small amount as he usually did at that time, and she settled back to sleep. When he awoke at half past six and went to pick his daughter up, she'd

stopped breathing. Amid panic and turmoil, Albert raced with the baby to a nearby hospital. But all attempts at resuscitation failed... their little daughter had died tragically of a cot death.

Devastated and in deep shock, he and Natasha's doctor told his desperately ill wife what had happened. Even now, Albert says, he's afraid to go into the room when Bradley wakes up in case something has happened to him, *too*.

Sister Lorraine Lombard provides practical and nursing support and visits the family regularly. She describes the communication and tenderness between these two as "truly amazing". They agree totally: "We still love each other very much!" says Albert.

But life is short now – short and very precious. They know they've been given some special time since December when Natasha's doctor told Albert that his wife had only a couple of weeks left to live. But Natasha's very tired and sleeps a lot in the daytime. Somehow, the family's lives inch forward a little at a time. Hospice continues to provide support. Albert continues to be a lifeline and a rock to his wife. And Natasha continues her brave fight against cancer.

Though expectations and future plans are thin on the ground these days, Albert lives one day at a time. And each day, with patience and love, he makes an effort to normalise his son's everyday life and support a fragile Natasha as she clings to life even as she faces the finality of her illness.

We're *all* faced with challenges in our lives, and most of us know it's not the things that *happen* in our lives, but what we *do* about them, that really counts. Young as they are, Natasha and Albert Berger are real examples of that. It is heartwrenching to think how much this young couple have had to deal with, and of what *might have been* if even a few of their dreams for the future had come true.

Hospice cannot change facts and realities, but it *can* offer some precious gifts that make *such* a difference to the lives of our terminally ill patients: the best possible quality of life, understanding and compassion, unhurried time, the ability to truly listen and hear, and the management of pain and other symptoms. And, for their loved ones, Hospice also offers practical help and bereavement support.

Your support today, as in the past, means so much to us. We depend on your kindness and generosity.

Thank you sincerely.



Bradley (3) with his Granny, Linda, who is always willing to help where needed.

Man with a Mission

Hospice East Rand welcomes David Seruto to our management team. David has a broad range of work experience – including working for the blind, for Life Line and in human resources at Absa. He's familiar with community outreach programmes and structure, which make an excellent combination. Having got his BA Social Work degree in 1986 from the University of Zululand, in 2009 he also completed an honours degree in Industrial Psychology. "Death and dying bring lots of challenges," he says. "In my work at Hospice East Rand I have found job fulfilment. I enjoy working in harmony with the people here."



David is already making his presence felt at Hospice East Rand, and is introducing new innovations, especially at Vosloorus, to enhance structure in this sprawling area where much work is being done with terminally ill patients and with children. "I know I can't do everything, at once or be everywhere at once: our area of work ranges from Bedfordview to Nigel," David says, "so I have to work smart!" And, for this enthusiastic 52-year old, 'working smart' means formulating and introducing accountability systems, so that staff members understand their roles and responsibilities. In addition, he will be talking to traditional healers so that they are not alienated but rather encouraged to work together with hospice instead of as an alternative to hospice care. Also on the cards is the devising of structured programmes for the children affected and infected by HIV and AIDS. For adults the plans include developing their own vegetable garden and making crafts like cushion covers and crocheted goods, as well as baking.

"I have a special interest in relationships between people, and in coping behaviours. I enjoy counselling patients and family members and experiencing their responses as they develop coping skills and begin to come to terms with their situation... it's very rewarding. There can be tragic circumstances like families fighting about a dying person's house and possessions: I try to get families to work together. This is all part of my job fulfilment at Hospice."

Books, books, and more books!



It makes *such* a difference to go places where you're welcomed and where nothing's too much trouble! Our HOSPICE BOOKSHOP at the end of Victoria Street in Benoni West is that kind of place – stacked with books and staffed by friendly volunteers, including manager Julie Evans (front). "We're always looking for more book donations and can never have enough books!" she says. So, if you have any books to donate, or want to browse to find a great buy at unbelievable bargain prices, the library is open Monday to Friday 09h30 to 12h00. **And, every first Saturday of the month, the books go at half price. Come along and see for yourself what a find our bookshop truly is!**