

Hospice bereavement services help those left behind

This is the third of a four-part series on Northumberland Lakeshore Hospice, a United Way member agency which provides services to those who have been diagnosed with a life-threatening illness, and to families before and after the death of a loved one.

Today's story looks at bereavement-support services available after the death of a loved one.

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Cobourg resident Alan Brown found that the bereavement services offered by Northumberland Lakeshore Hospice helped him find his way after Bessie, his wife of 56 years, passed away in 2005.

Plagued with a number of problems that included diabetes and high blood pressure, Mrs. Brown was in her husband's care — and he took up the responsibility gladly.

It was a demanding schedule of testing her blood sugar and administering the appropriate insulin twice a day and ensuring she took the proper dosage of her other pills. And Mrs. Brown always looked forward to the time her husband could spare to read aloud to her — and he usually managed to grab her favourite Danielle Steele book twice a day to oblige.

To put it simply, he was devoted to his beloved wife. He was glad to do what he could.

Mr. Brown began to need help with her care when his bothersome hip needed replacement. He had to be away for several weeks, and his daughter and daughter-in-law stepped in. Eventually, he accepted occasional help from community-based agencies (including hospice volunteers),



PHOTO BY TED AMSDEN

Alan Brown and Hospice program co-ordinator Libby Bailey visit recently at the Hospice offices on Division Street in Cobourg.

until Mrs. Brown's increasing pain led to her hospitalization.

"It kind of broke my heart that I had to let her go," he admitted.

She went into palliative care November 21, and he visited her — and read to her — every day

until she died on December 30.

Mr. Brown recalls that his house seemed so empty after that, and he felt so lost. But he knew the people at the hospice office were his friends, and that's where he ended up dropping in

two or three times a week.

"They were there with open arms and made me really welcome — especially Libby," he said, referring to program co-ordinator Libby Bailey. "Whenever I was upset and

didn't know what to do with myself, I could come here for a chat or some encouragement.

"I was still grieving a great deal," he recalled.

"I was grieving every day for seven or eight months. I would visit her at the columbarium every day with flowers from the garden, no matter if it snowed or rained."

Mr. Brown thinks now that he began to turn the corner after Ms. Bailey suggested their eight-week grieving support group in Port Hope.

He had attended one group through the funeral home, but it was a large group. He found the smaller gathering in Port Hope just perfect for him — a half-dozen people in mourning and two hospice volunteers.

By the end of the session, everyone felt so much better that they chipped in on a gift for the two leaders.

And Mr. Brown came away with a longer-term benefit — a new companion he met in the group, a lady recovering from the loss of her husband of 50 years.

"A wonderful person," he said. "She has helped me in so many ways, and I am very fortunate I met her."

Mr. Brown also gives credit to the hospice people for pointing him toward the future. Ms. Bailey even suggested that his soothing, melodious reading voice would be appreciated at a school or library, if he was interested in volunteering his time — and he has taken her up on the suggestion.

"Hospice has been there for me all the time," he said. "I could always come here and be welcomed with big smiles — it has been marvelous. They are just completely marvelous people."