

Goulburn Valley Hospice Care Service executive manager Carmel Smith asked Pippa Wischart to create a book that could be given to carers.

A book to help carers



THIS WEEK THE COUNTRY RECOGNISES NATIONAL PALLIATIVE CARE WEEK, A TIME FOR THE COMMUNITY TO REFLECT AND TO RAISE AWARENESS ABOUT END-OF-LIFE CARE.

IT IS HOPED A BOOKLET RECENTLY PUBLISHED BY GOULBURN VALLEY HOSPICE CARE SERVICE WILL GIVE COMMUNITY MEMBERS INSIGHT INTO THE QUIET WORLD OF PALLIATIVE CARE. JOURNALIST **TAYLAH BURROWS** TOOK A LOOK AT THE BOOK AND THE STORIES IT CONTAINS.

Precious Time by Pippa Wischart gives the public a glimpse into the intimate experiences of 11 people who have looked after or are continuing to care for a loved one in palliative care.

"GV Hospice Care approached me and said they wanted to do something with me and they thought carers would be a good thing to focus on because there's a push on at the moment to actually look at who is supporting carers and how we can do a better job," Ms Wischart said.

Ms Wischart photographed each carer and composed their stories with empathy and care.

"I have the experience of caring for my mum when she was dying at home, that was about six or seven years ago now," she said.

"That gave me a more intimate understanding of what it's like and allowed me to connect with

the people I was speaking to."

Ms Wischart said most of the carers wanted to discuss the topic of the importance of end-of-life care.

"It is a tender topic but it's time for it to be aired, it's time for us to talk about life and death and what is a good death and how we facilitate that with the people we love," she said.

"I found it really intimate and a profound experience.

"It is such a privilege to be invited into someone's home and talk about such vulnerable topics."

Goulburn Valley Hospice Care Service executive manager Carmel Smith said she approached Ms Wischart for the book with the idea of creating something that could be given to carers to let them know they were not alone.

"Sometimes with our carers, with the work we do, they just need to talk to someone else going through what they're

going through," Mrs Smith said.

"We wanted to give them something to read in their quiet time to see people have got through it and they will be able to too — that was the momentum behind engaging (with Ms Wischart)."

Mrs Smith said it was not easy an easy task to look after someone you loved who was dying.

"They're on duty 24 hours, seven days a week," she said.

"We're in and out of the house but they're there all the time.

"It's a wonderful gift to be able to look after someone at the end of their life but it's not an easy stretch."

Mrs Smith said the service was absolutely thrilled with the end result and praised the carers who had shared their stories.

"It is such a brave thing to do, to allow people into their life," she said.

"I had to find carers and get them to consent and the ones that did consent found it to be a really positive thing they've done to be able to tell their story and honour the people they cared for."

One face that appears in the book belongs to Arja, who cared for her father John with her sister Teagan.

Arja was approached by Mrs Smith to share her story and said she and her sister saw the book as an opportunity to spread



awareness about palliative care services.

"Me and Teagan spoke about it and I think that we just wanted to get it out there a bit more," she said.

"We found with people we have spoken to that they didn't know about the services available, necessarily."

The three women met at Teagan's house and spent time discussing their experiences with their dad, his treatment and how hospice helped them through it.

Arja said Mrs Wischart made it easy to discuss the sensitive topic and was happy to change, add in or take out information when it came to portraying their experience properly.

"I just hope people realise what hospice do and how they help," Arja said.

"They do a lot more than just caring for the person who is sick, they take care of the family as well.

"I think Shepparton is lucky to have them."

Arja hoped *Precious Time* would make people realise they are not alone and that there is support around.

Precious Time is a free resource available at Goulburn Valley Hospice Care Service.

Precious Time: Carers in the Goulburn Valley

TEAGAN AND ARJA (PICTURED) CARED FOR THEIR DAD JOHN.

JOHN'S PRIMARY CARE FELL TO HIS DAUGHTERS, WHO HELPED HIM TO LIVE INDEPENDENTLY WHILE HIS CANCER PROGRESSED.

TEAGAN AND ARJA SHARED STORIES WITH PIPPA WISCHART FOR PRECIOUS TIME. HERE WEEKEND LIFE SHARE AN EXCERPT OF TEAGAN AND ARJA'S STORY.



TEAGAN:

I had a phone call saying my dad was in hospital. He'd had a fall, so they had scanned his brain and found a large cancerous tumour.

He was rushed to Melbourne.

He really needed surgery and I had to give them permission, despite the high chance that Dad wouldn't come out of it, or may have no memory of us afterwards.

We later found out that the primary cancer in his lungs was already at stage four.

We knew then that Dad would be in palliative care and the treatment would be about giving him quality of life.

I think the doctors thought Arja and I were just kids at the start, but our roles were reversed.

We were caring for our dad.

It was really tough for us to see our dad like that, but it gave us the opportunity to spend more time with him.

We were able to make lasting memories with him in the last 14 months of his life.

Hospice used to come to see us once a week and they would always be on call if we were having a terrible day.

They were always here for Dad to talk to and to make him feel better.

Arja and I will be forever grateful for their support.

Dad went into hospital for the last few days, and was surrounded by family.

He had a sip of beer, we played the Essendon theme song, and he passed away.

I felt he was in a good space, but for a month or so afterwards, when I closed my eyes, all I would see was my dad taking his last breath.

Arja and I have always been really close, and we've both been married since Dad passed away.

We are lucky to have such supportive partners and family, so we never felt alone.

To have had that time with Dad was really good, and I don't regret any of it.

"AFTER THE BIRTH OF MY SON IT JUST HIT ME; DAD WAS NEVER GOING TO MEET MY SON."

— ARJA

ARJA:

I was overseas when I heard Dad was sick and it wasn't until I got home that I learnt he had stage four lung cancer.

With the extent of his injuries from the brain tumour, the only way Dad could leave hospital was in our care.

After a month, we realised that it was in Dad's best interest if Teagan was home during the day to look after him.

We'd look after him in shifts.

Teagan would give him his medication in the morning and I'd do it at night because Dad would often forget.

Dad insisted on living in his own flat, and one day I found him totally collapsed.

In the back of my mind, I was always wondering if this was going to be the day that I found him passed away.

Hospice are on call 24 hours a day, so we could ring them and they'd tell us if we needed to go to hospital or if they could help us.

They really helped with prescriptions and medications, and they gave us a wheelchair and whatever else we needed.

During his last days, Hospice organised for Dad to go into their special palliative care suite and they made him very comfortable.

He had a private room, and there was a couch and a pull-out bed that we could stay on.

There was a private courtyard and a little kitchen.

They were really good.

We were lucky because Dad could tell us what he wanted for his funeral and remains.

He was a die-hard Essendon supporter so he really wanted to have some of his ashes spread at the MCG or at Windy Hill.

Windy Hill said it was actually really common and we scattered some of his ashes there and let some balloons go.

It was a beautiful day and it was great to be able to honour what Dad wanted.

I cried most days for six months after Dad's passing.

By the third month I wasn't really sleeping so I went to my doctor for advice.

He told me that I was going through the normal grieving process.

You don't know when grief is going to hit you and you never expect it.

After the birth of my son it just hit me; Dad was never going to meet my son.

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