

Aeroplanes in the Sky

Geoff's story told by Sheila

*"Your love of the long light evenings, the days we spent in the open air
Enjoying our picnics and flying your planes."*



Geoff had got so he couldn't swallow. It caused him pain. The doctor referred him to the hospital. Unfortunately, he was diagnosed with cancer of the oesophagus. They organised for him to go to the hospital for radiotherapy. They took him every day for a week but they wouldn't let me go because of the transport situation. After a while they started chemotherapy. It knocked him about terrible. He ended up in hospital having to have transfusions.

In the November we had to go to outpatients. "It's knocking you about so much we'll give you a break from it" the Specialist said. I held back. "Does that mean there's no more you can do for him?" I said when Geoff left the room. "Yes" was the reply. Geoff didn't know this. I kept it to myself. He came home for Christmas. I promised him I'd keep him at home. He seemed to pick up and he was alive for the birth of his grandson at New Year.

In February I knew there'd be a right time to tell him. It was very hard to keep the secret but I didn't want to spoil Christmas or the news of the baby's birth. I coped well enough. When I did tell him he accepted it. "When I'm better..." he kept saying and I said "I'm sorry, you're not going to get better".

We'd always been so close. We'd been together for fifty years. We became even closer during that time because we could make plans.

Geoff had been my carer for so long. The roles reversed and I became his carer. I had help from Bridges, Crossroads, and the district nurses. It was better because I could make plans about how I was going to manage. I assured him I'd be all right. I know Geoff worried a lot about it because since then I've found out that's why my neighbour comes twice a week to do my shopping. It's because he promised Geoff. My daughter does my big shop, but it's nice to know he organised it and they talked about it. Geoff always insisted I had a night out. Our neighbour would sit with him so they must have talked about it then.

The chemo classes during Geoff's treatment were nice. They were almost like a party. People would take sandwiches and sweets. They'd chat to each other. The day I was told about Geoff we went back to the ward. People were waiting for chemo. I had to tell them we wouldn't be coming

again. I think I knew then.

I thank God for the six months we got. I didn't think we were going to get them. He was always cheerful even when he was in hospital and they moved him from one ward to another.

I noticed one day there was blood on the floor. Geoff's big toe was bleeding from under the nail. I got a tissue and mopped it. I called the nurse. They put a dressing on it. The toe gradually went black. It could have been gangrene. It was shrivelling. He also got an ulcer on his leg. He came out in terrible blotches – like bruises. They were on his hands and his neck. I don't know what that was.

The district nurses were marvellous and provided me with night sitters. In the June – the last two weeks – you could see he was really going down. In the last few days the district nurse said it wouldn't be long.

On Monday our daughter stayed all night with her dad. The next night the other two girls came but I don't know whether Geoff knew they were there. My son was just around the corner so he could be got quick.

The sitter insisted we went to bed.

Just after 5 am in the morning she came and said "he's gone". He had lifted up his arms in the air. We were convinced he had gone into his mother's arms. She had come for him.

Everyone rushed downstairs but I had to wait for my lift. When I got there – it wasn't Geoff, it was just his body.

My nephew got married on the day Geoff died. I shall never forget his wedding anniversary.

The only things that didn't change were his hands. Even in his coffin he had the most wonderful hands. At school Geoff had got prizes for drawing and he had drawn his own hands. I can't find that drawing. I've put it somewhere safe.

If they had not let him come home he would not have lived to New Year.

We were given a clock as a twenty-fifth wedding anniversary present from our children. I stopped it because its chimes were disturbing Geoff when he was ill. I stopped it at five past seven. It was strange because that was the exact time Geoff died.

I was sixteen when I met Geoff. I'd had rheumatic fever. I used to wear leg irons. I was going to a dance that night and I did not want them creaking everywhere so I left them off. That night I met him. I never wore them again.

My lasting thoughts about Geoff are about everyone saying what a nice man he was.