

An Angel on the Pillow

Harold's story told by Dot

*“Always the life and soul wherever you went,
Chasing the dark clouds away”*



Harold was back and forth from hospital. He was in hospital for fifteen weeks. His lungs were filling up. He had a tube in him and they took six litres of liquid from him. He was Chair of Age Well and he wanted to carry on.

He wanted a chair lift because he didn't want to be stuck down in the living room. He wanted his own bed. Our daughter contacted SAFA and they told us they got bits of funding from ATS, Burma Star to get the stair lift.

He was a big man. He wasn't always like that. Both of us did voluntary work for thirty years for the elderly and disabled.

Harold went into the license trade.

He worked for British Steel. We both took early retirement, but he couldn't. We worked voluntarily for the council. Harold would drive; I was escort. He was one of those men who liked entertaining. “You go home and tell your mother what you've been doing with Harold” he'd say to the kids on the bus.

I did the medicines and that.

Harold had all the fishing gear. All the kids in Sandwell – he'd teach them fishing. We've got a big garden and he'd show them how to cast out and all that. Since then some of the kids have taken it up. This little fishing rod, one of my daughters bought him to take on his holiday. He'd go to Knightwick in Worcester way. He'd go fishing in all weathers. Sometimes he'd have to chip the ice away. “You'll catch pneumonia” his mother would say.

We got children from Blakely School and put them together with the elderly. They loved it. The children got to appreciate the elderly. When we retired they gave us a cut glass vase and they made us a book. We loved the kids, wherever they were from and whatever they were like. After a few weeks they phoned us up and asked us back.

When Harold died his mind was OK. People would still ring him up for help. He would go on his scooter and the ring and ride. He never stopped going to meetings.

He gradually lost weight.

We had a last holiday in June in Eastbourne at a disabled hotel. On that holiday in Eastbourne he got this toy, a fluffy dog, and I've still got it.

One of the carers came down. Harold had been coughing and bleeding. He had to go into hospital. He was full of cancer. He'd tap his side. He would joke about getting fat on one side of his stomach, but it was cancer.

He had an electric bed put downstairs. The hospice nurses would come. His eyes went so they would have to put drops in. "What nationality are you?" he would say to carers who came to our house, and if they were Indian he would jabber away in that language.

My daughter works at the hospital where Harold was a patient so she was there when they told him. I was at home. She said she'd be there because "our Dad never tells you what's going on when he sees the doctor". This time the doctor said "Harold we keep bringing you in and chatting. There's nothing more we can do, but you have an open invitation if there is anything wrong. You know what's coming Harold. You've got cancer" the doctor said. "Right, I can have a drink then now can I?" Harold replied.

"Mam, Dad's coming home he's got cancer" my daughter said when she came home. I was lucky I got my daughters who are all in the medical field. Of course they could organise things.

He was badly dehydrated. They said he'd have to go in for an overnight stay. He went in the next day with our daughter Gillian. When they said they'd keep him in my daughter said "no he's going home. We know what to do". The doctor came and said "I've never heard anything like it. It's all arranged for this man".

You see we knew we'd got six rugby boys, grandsons, and we only had to phone them for their help. So they got him home. We drew up and the lads were waiting. We opened the French window. Even though there's a slope on the drive they managed it. We got him off the trolley. We put him in his bed.

The specialist palliative care nurse asked me how I felt. I said "I don't know what to expect". It did help, talking. I had carers and I did some of the work. For weeks I did it by myself and it got too much. Carers came during the day and nurses came in the evening. "We're sending her out now" they'd say to him. I'd go sometimes to the Catholic Church Bingo Club. "She can use her own money" Harold would say. I'd leave stuff out for the night nurses: a pillow, a quilt. "It's lovely coming here. It's a home from home" they'd say.

The last days were terrible. It was November. He hadn't been very good. The nurse came. All of a sudden he took his rings off and he said, "we've had a good innings." But he kept hanging on. He kept going. We reached our sixty years anniversary, which he wanted. We couldn't go on

a cruise because they wouldn't insure him. We booked a holiday for Christmas it cost £1000. I had a hard job to give that holiday away. I did eventually to someone who wasn't very well. So it did somebody some good. "You're not doing as you're told. You've got to give that holiday away" Harold kept saying. He was like that.

In the last week of his life I remember he shouted "turn that off". There wasn't anything on.

My daughter Gillian said "I know Dad you're waiting for your favourite daughter's birthday" which was on the 14th December. He did too. He died on the 15th.

Our daughter Marilyn was out shopping and she'd got stuck in traffic. We phoned her and told her to come. She just got to the front door when it happened. She took it very bad for a while.

Marilyn my daughter said "Mum you're doing very well. Dad would have wanted you to go on holiday". We went to Tenerife. We just relaxed. It did us good. I'm still – sometimes I cry. A couple of weeks ago I wasn't very well and I cried. I talk to him.

My son in law is jolly. He takes me to the bingo on a Monday. He talks to Harold he says "she's spending all your money".

When I went to bed on the day I buried him, I could have sworn he was in that room. I heard "Dottie, Dottie, Dottie".

I often hear his voice. In the morning I'll hear "are you alright?"

My daughters say the same. His voice is plain. The words are plain.

In bed I'll read a bit.

I say "Good night. God Bless". Even when I go to the crem, I've got him in one of those sanctums, I say "I'm here".

When I went into the doctor's last week, I said "I'm fine". "You're allowed to be weepy" she said.

I'm not well myself. I've got leukaemia and I've got a son with leukaemia. A Myeloproliferative disorder. It has stabilised. I take chemo tablets and some for depression. Some days I sit and feel like I want to sit and do nothing, but there's no good stopping in the house. I try to help other people. They call me the carer. They keep telling me to look after myself.

They are doing a memorial for Harold.

I've still got this stair lift. Sometimes I stumble so I'm not getting rid of it. They're going to remove the outdoor lift because I think it's a reminder and it makes you vulnerable.

When Harold had his eightieth birthday the kids put balloons on the lift outside. We had a garden

party. It was lovely.

He arranged all his own funeral. When he was cremated he wore everything he'd worn for the sixtieth. He had played 'My Way.' Harold chose that because he used to sing. He'd go to entertain in hospitals. He'd sing along to the telly. We'd go to holiday places and he'd go into the competitions – he always won.

At the funeral they played 'The Last Post' and 'Danny Boy' his dad's favourite. He had the Burma Star. The place was full. He had this disc made. I can still play it. My eldest daughter Debbie, she wrote 'Our Dad.' It was a tribute to Harold. She'd written about how he was the eldest in the family and how his brothers and sisters went into cottage homes. She got in all his life from what he did in the army right through to the end. The Vicar read it because my daughter couldn't. Lots of people said his funeral was marvellous.

They said he was a big man because he was a big man in every way. He also read a lot.

When I got back from the crem there was a bouquet of flowers and this ring and a card. Harold had made sure that was there for me. The night he died my daughter took me down to her house to sleep there and she'd put a guardian angel on the pillow.

My thoughts go back to this time last year, I will never forget. Such a sad time, seeing my dear Harold struggling to stay with us. It was hard and we were helpless, we could not do anything. It broke our hearts to see him suffer like that, but we would not want him in pain, which he must have been. He never let us know how he felt. He used to say "I'm alright, don't worry". It was an awful time, but a blessing when he finally went to sleep. We all miss him so much, but I'm sure he is still around us, keeping his beady eye on us all. Little things happen, and I hear sounds. Sometimes I'm sure I hear him speak. His presence is felt very much around the house. I'll talk to him as if he was here, tell him all what goes on each day, it makes me feel good.