

Catherine Ann Raff (Cathy) 24-07-61 - 24-09-20

Determined, courageous, strong, inspirational - some of the words used about Cathy in the many letters and cards arriving since she died. Cathy was diagnosed with kidney failure when she was sixteen, but never allowed her illness to define her. She dealt with it and carried on with her life. She did a variety of clerical jobs in the first eight years she spent on dialysis, mostly home dialysis, in the days when there was a Kiil to build regularly, there was no epo and dialysis was much harsher. She also worked some evenings and weekends at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre in Stratford and volunteered in the Renal Unit's charity shop in Headington on Saturdays for two years.

She went to evening classes to get the qualifications she had missed at school so that, when she had a successful transplant in 1985, she could train as a nurse at Addenbrookes. On completing her training she worked as a dialysis nurse in Wordesley, then for two years at The Churchill Hospital, going on to Harborough Lodge in Northampton for thirteen years and then to Kettering. Her travelling really took off following her transplant and, after visiting relatives in Canada, she holidayed in Spain, Italy, Crete, Cyprus and America. She also did occasional holiday jobs in department stores whenever she needed extra money to fund re-decorating the various homes she moved to. She had a talent for taking a run-down property and transforming it into a colourful home. Her family's address books quickly ran out of space in the 'R' section. At some point she also spent a while acting as joint chairman of the SCKPA when the need arose.



After her transplant failed in 2011 she spent a few years in Cyprus. She returned to England and took a "Back to Nursing" course and continued to work as a dialysis nurse, always interested in her patients as people who had lives to lead outside the renal unit. She encouraged many of them, who thought that kidney failure meant an end to normal life, to focus on what they could do, not what they couldn't. In her they could see that it was possible to work, go on holiday, enjoy friendships and have fun. There was a lot of fun in Cathy's life - a mixture of catastrophe and laughter.

Just over three years ago she met Paul and entered a very happy, contented phase of her life in spite of increasing illness - breast cancer and non-Hodgkin lymphoma. She dealt with them and the treatments with her usual determination and, for most of the time, kept on working. Paul was a tremendous support to her and, just over a year ago they both decided to take early retirement and live in Cyprus where Cathy had lived before for a short time. They loved the climate, the place, the people and enjoyed exploring the island. Then Cathy was diagnosed with leukaemia which brought them back to my home and The Churchill Hospital where, for most of 43 years, she had been cared for. She still hoped to get treatment for the leukaemia but was never well enough to undergo chemotherapy. She stopped having dialysis and was admitted to the Michael Sobell Hospice where she had expert and loving care for the last ten days of her life.

Cathy was inspired to make the most of her life by the doctors and nurses of the Churchill Hospital who treated her all those years ago and she, in turn, inspired many of her patients to do the same - and have fun doing it.

Tribute by Ann Raff