

An Inspiration...

NICOLA AND STEVE PHILPOTTS

Once upon a time, over ten years ago, we didn't know each other existed. However, we were both volunteering on the In-Patient Unit (IPU) at St. Michael's Hospice on alternate Sunday evenings.

In September 2013 we were put together to help at the Midnight Walk, handing out drinks and bananas to the walkers as they passed the Rugby Club. A week later, Nicola asked Steve if he would like to join her for a coffee. So, one afternoon, we met up and didn't go our separate ways until four hours later. On the following Friday evening we went out for a meal and, as they say, the rest is history! Within nine months Steve had proposed to Nicola in beautiful Venice and we married in September 2015.

We both became volunteers around 2007, initially as fundraisers. Steve still collects outside supermarkets, while we both help out at various fundraising events, such as the Woodland Walk, the Big Wheel, the Half-Marathon, the Upton Grey Autumn Festival and the Sunflower Fete. We both volunteered in the IPU too for a number of years – Steve still does, while Nicola is now helping in bereavement services.

We both volunteered in response to Hospice advertising. Steve remembers seeing a small ad in a local monthly magazine, and thinking that

volunteering would be a good thing to do, especially as his wife had recently died and he was looking for things to fill his time.

Over the years the Hospice has opened up a whole series of friendships for us – with staff and other volunteers. We have met so many lovely, caring people. For example, standing outside a supermarket with a collecting box for two hours can initially be uncomfortable, however it becomes enjoyable collecting with others, chatting to shoppers, realising how generous people can be, and hearing stories of how St. Michael's has cared for their loved ones and friends.

On the IPU we have helped in any way we can, be it providing breakfasts for patients, making drinks for visitors, or running errands to the hospital for the nursing and admin staff – in fact, doing whatever is needed at the time. We both passionately believe in the value of simply listening to patients and their loved ones, and trying to provide some comfort – especially for those with few family or friends. At times, all some patients want is an ear to listen.



Wedding Day 4th September 2015

Although volunteering in the IPU naturally has its sad side, there are so many heart-warming experiences too. For example, we have been privileged to help out on the Unit on Christmas Day over the years. On one occasion we were able to help provide impromptu Christmas lunch festivities for the young children and wider family members of a patient, giving them a moment of respite. Watching the children pull crackers and play with their toys, while the older ones looked on smiling, provided a moment of normality for them at a heart-breaking time.

It is such a privilege to be involved with people, even in a small way, at the end of their lives. Being able to wheel patients around the garden, enabling them to join in with the Light Up A Life service, or simply listening to the stories of their lives is so very special. We have both learned so much about what is really important in life.



Christmas Day 2013

If you've never been in a hospice you may think it is just a place of sorrow and darkness. While there is inevitably sadness, in our experience it is also a place of laughter and light. To witness the care provided by the doctors, nursing staff and ancillary staff and other volunteers; and the displays of love and affection between patients and their friends and families is heart-warming and inspiring. We both feel that our lives have been greatly enriched by being volunteers at St. Michael's Hospice.

We have a lot to thank the Hospice for as a couple...and, hopefully, we will both live together happily ever after.

Steve & Nicola Philpotts