



Valerie Walters

Caring and Sharing

Submitted by Kim Parr

With unwavering devotion, Valerie makes it her mission to visit her husband, Geoff, five days a week on the assisted living unit of his retirement home. She provides support with daily activities, including feeding assistance and has developed a daily schedule, that includes off unit walks outdoors or to the cafe, reading, conversations with staff or fellow residents, and listening to their favourite music. Spending time together is of utmost importance to this committed couple. Believing steadfastly in the importance of connection and prioritizing their loving marriage, Fridays continue to be dedicated date nights, with movies, pizza dinners and, with staff's assistance, they help Geoff to stand so they can end with a hug.

But Valerie doesn't stop there. In addition to her busy role as caregiver to Geoff, she recognized another opportunity to give of herself. Over the last year and a half, Valerie has been instrumental in initiating and co-facilitating, along with the retirement home spiritual advisor, "The Gather Group", a caregiver peer support group made up of caregivers and families of the residents. As a retired Geriatric nurse, Valerie feels her work with the Gather Group provides her with an important opportunity to use her professional knowledge and current experience to support others dealing with their own caregiver distress and grief. She sees this stage in her life as supporting Geoff while supporting others. They are self proclaimed life-long learners, and it is evident that nurturing relationships and information sharing is just as important to this couple.

Sadly, Geoff's health continues to decline as he enters the final stages of Lewy body dementia, a progressive neurological disease, and his care needs now exceed the retirement home level of care. Coming to terms with this next stage in Geoff's care journey, Valerie finds herself comforted in the knowledge that she has developed important relationships within the retirement home. With this next transition brings renewed opportunities for Valerie to share her deep commitment and understanding with a new community.

Care coordinator, Kim shares that Valerie has been by Geoff's side every step of the way and has provided him with a wonderful quality of life.

In speaking with Valerie, she shared how touched she is by Kim's acknowledgement, saying she is "honoured that Kim feels what she is doing is exceptional". Reflecting on their 33 years of marriage and their journey, Valerie simply remarks, "It's our story. We are a unit". A beautiful love story and a wonderful example of caring and sharing.