

HOSPICE AWARENESS WEEK 12-18 MAY

Maclean's 'angels' bring comfort to all

Diana Dobson, *The Black Balloon*

Norman Maclean thought the Hospice Tairāwhiti doctors, nurses and support staff who visited him were angels.

"They had a peaceful aura or presence about them that made everyone feel assured and relaxed," said Norman's brother-in-law Robert Hunter.

Their association with Hospice was six rather short weeks. Norman's colourful and very full life meant he had layers of connections right across the community. He was an artist, director, writer, teacher and marriage celebrant who made everyone feel they had his undivided attention. While in hospital he would chat to the nurses and before long knew their life stories and would always share a kind word accompanied by a smile that comfortably rose from his mouth to his eyes.

His sister Coralie Hunter was 12 years his junior and adored her older brother. Norman had gone overseas in October (2023) to see old mates but was forced to come home early because he was in a lot of pain. He died on December 1.

"He knew he was terminal before he left but hadn't told us the bowel cancer



was back," says Coralie. "He said he had up to a year but we later discovered that was what his doctor had told him in June. He wanted to go back overseas to tidy up a few loose ends and visit Spain, where he hadn't been before."

It was fitting it was Doctor Sarah

Callaghan who he was under with Hospice as she is the sister of his great friend Maria Jefferson. "Hospice were just fantastic," says Coralie. "They helped with pain control and took any fear away – not that Norman was worried but the family were. It's nice they work just as much with the family as they do with the patient."

Coralie felt comforted she could call on a nurse for support or information when she needed it. "They'd be here so quickly to help."

She also attended a Hospice organised talk for caregivers and says it was hugely beneficial. Norman was very family orientated and enjoyed having the comfort of those close to him including his brother Gavin, and nieces Amanda and Lucy, during his last days.

Coralie and Robert's daughter Lucy was very close with Norman and has inherited a lot of his love for art and drama.

"Hospice carefully and gently explained what was happening, the steps and what we could expect to see. They just knew exactly what to do and how to treat the grieving family."

Robert says the Hospice team had formed a real rapport with Norman and

the family. "It really struck me how they preserve the dignity of the patient."

Even when he was unwell, he welcomed his friends into his home to talk about everything and anything. "He loved to talk," says Coralie.

He died at home – just as he wanted – surrounded by friends and family.

Norman – he hated Norm, but tolerated it, says Coralie – was born in the Rangitikei town of Marton but spent most of his life in Gisborne. He taught secondary school here for 45 years. Theatre was another a passion and he directed 24 productions for Unity Theatre where he also performed, helped with sets and props, and anything else that needed doing. He also directed for Musical Theatre Gisborne and many high school shows too.

He adored his travel and loved to share his tales and observations, particularly around Greek and Roman history, with many who hung on to his every word. He inspired people to delve into the world of art, literature and history and is surely remembered as one of Tairāwhiti's great influencers – long before being an influencer was even a thing.

The value of Hospice care in New Zealand

Hospice care also keeps people out of hospital and emergency departments.

This saves the health system money.





The government is encouraged to recognise the value of hospice care in New Zealand, according to Jane Williams, Board Chair at Hospice Tairāwhiti and Deputy Chair at Hospice New Zealand. Williams believes the hospice care throughout New Zealand is undervalued.

"One-third of people dying from life-limiting illnesses in the country receive hospice support, demonstrating the significant role hospices play in end-of-life care," states Williams. "With the escalating demand on our health care system, hospice care reduces the cost to the government. Hospices are providing taxpayers at least \$1.59 in health benefits for every dollar of government funding. These benefits stem from cost savings to the health system and improved patient outcomes—most significantly, the quality-of-life improvements resulting from better pain and symptom control."

Without ongoing concerted and committed investment by the government, hospices throughout New Zealand—such as Tairāwhiti Hospice—may struggle to meet the growing and complex care needs of their communities.

"Our Tairāwhiti community is amazing in the support they give Hospice through donations from fundraising and bequests," says Williams. "Time and time again, we are humbled by the generosity and compassion shown by individuals, families, and local organisations. Whether it's coins dropped into

a collection bucket, a community event organised to raise funds, or a bequest left as a legacy of love, every contribution makes a meaningful difference. It's this unwavering support that allows us to continue providing care, comfort, and dignity to those facing life-limiting illness. We are truly grateful to be part of such a kind and giving community. But just like other hospices around New Zealand, the demand for palliative care services is escalating and is expected to rise by 53% in the next 18 years. This is not sustainable."

A sustainable palliative care system holds significant value for New Zealand's health care system. Evidence shows that hospice services ease pressure on the wider health system and are acutely aware of inequities due to rurality and ethnicity. Early delivery of palliative care reduces unnecessary hospital admissions and the use of acute health services. Hospice care provides benefits not only to individuals but also to caregivers and the bereaved.

"Nationwide, there's a call to action," says Williams. "We are asking the government to stabilise the sector. We are asking the government to implement consistent regional funding allocations, develop a funding model to secure long-term financial stability, and invest in workforce sustainability. When one considers the value of a sustainable and equitable palliative care system to our communities and to the government—why wouldn't our government invest?"

Please join us at Hospice Tairāwhiti to weave a star in memory of a loved one

Enjoy free tea or coffee and take a moment to reflect. With a \$5 donation, you can dedicate a star to someone special.

The stars will be displayed in our Hospice Shop window and later included in our annual Remembrance Service in June the month of Matariki – the Maori New Year. Join us in weaving together love, remembrance, and community.



MATARIKI HOSPICE AWARENESS WEEK
12-16 MAY 11AM - 1PM

CELEBRATING EVERY LIFE