

Orla Freeman

My name is Orla Freeman and I'm from Kiltimagh, Co. Mayo. I have three boys, Rory, Dara and Owen. Last September our lives were forever changed when my husband Shane, more affectionately known as Peach, passed away after living with colorectal cancer.

There were a lot of things that he wasn't able to do and that was completely out of his nature. He started to cancel trips. He couldn't take our children to places. Holidays were cancelled and it really was not shame. The nurses could see that he was in a lot of pain and had suggested hospice.

But again, he was quite reluctant because he felt hospice was about going to die. But they said, no, no, no, no. It's about improving your quality of life. And we know that you have an awful lot more to give. Thankfully, three months before he died, he made a sensible decision to go into hospice and for those three months, he was in a lot of pain, but his pain was so well managed that he was able to get up and function. He would have days out of hospice. He was taking our children to the golf course, football matches. What hospice also offered was support to the whole family. That surprised me because I didn't realise how much I was actually going to need that emotional support.

For me, the 22nd of July is what changed my life and it changed the boys because that was the day we decided to tell them that Dad won't be getting any better because he can't receive any more treatment. I'm so thankful to him because he didn't leave the burden on me to tell the children. We spoke together as a family of five and gave them the most heartbreaking news. But yet we were being protected by the hospice because we were being guided and I feel that the boys have dealt with their dad's passing all the better for the honesty.

And those conversations that we had as that full family unit, and that is how hospice changed my life because without them, I don't think we would have been brave enough to come to that moment.

The best bit about hospice for me on a personal level is that I got to be his wife, not his carer. Through his six years of chemotherapy, I knew what those days of caring for him were like when he was on his bad days. It was a gift to me to have the time to be his wife in those final days, that I didn't have to worry about his medication, his care needs, but I just got time with him and to be with him. That was the greatest gift that I could give him in the end.

Palliative care, it's not what you think. Even 12 months after Peach passing, hospice has been part of our lives. But I think at Christmas, they gave us a very special gift. While Shane was in hospice, his fingerprint was taken and our handprints were taken. And he

had asked them, would they do something with the fingerprint for our first Christmas without him? That was very special because on Christmas Day, I was able to give them to the boys. We went to dad's grave and hospice just thinks of everything.

They think of how you're doing now, but they also think about your future. I don't think we would be as strong as we are today if it hadn't been for them.