



It Takes A Village

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Anna G. was a force to be reckoned with. If there was something that needed to be done, she made sure it happened. If there was a party going on, she was there. If someone needed help, she was right in the thick of it, organizing what needed to be done.

Then, one day, Anna started having headaches. Shortly after, she started slurring her words. Knowing that things weren't right, she went for testing, believing that she had had a minor stroke. When she got the news that it was an inoperable brain tumor, her first instinct was denial. Surely, there had been a mistake.

Slowly, Anna, who had been the caregiver, needed care and support herself. Her family, whom she had raised and supported, were coping with their own grief and disbelief at the loss of their mom's health, and struggled with the transition to what their family was becoming. Her husband, a leader in their church and community, wondered how he would cope with life without his partner, his soulmate.

In the middle of the messiness, grief and uncertainty, something beautiful happened: a community came together to support Anna and her family. Meals were delivered by neighbours, so that after long days of treatment, dinner was taken care of. Close family friends babysat Anna's grandchildren, so that Anna's grown children could attend appointments with her. An acquaintance from the church mowed their lawn in the summer, and shoveled their snow in the winter, so that Anna's husband could spend as much time with her as possible. Anna's illness brought out the best of those whose lives she'd touched.

Anna's story wasn't without heartache. Well-meaning friends often said unhelpful things. Sometimes people minimized her pain, and brushed off her concerns with platitudes. There were times when personalities clashed, and moments when Anna struggled with being the recipient of so much care. It wasn't easy for her to accept help. Not when she had always been the strong one.

But what Anna knew, despite her pride, was that this was an opportunity for her to leave a lasting impact on those in her circle of influence. By letting all of us, each one of us, whom she had loved be part of this chapter in her life, we had a way to work through our own grief, and to 'do something' in a situation where we felt completely helpless. It was an opportunity for us to grow, and to join together as a community.

There's a saying that it takes a village to raise a child...but it also takes a village to help someone die. In hospice palliative care, we recognize the value that a person's community has in their life. We can help provide you with the tools and knowledge you need to rally around those you love who have a life-limiting illness. We believe that the journey can be so much better when you're not alone. And the truth is, you don't need to be.