

Love and joy are everywhere.

The sounds of nature breathe gently through the open window of a cosy room in the hospice. Its resident, Elaine Oliver, is multi-tasking – something you imagine she's been adept at all her life. She is being interviewed while having her hair done. No bother to her. Her voice is as alive and natural as the sounds of nature outside.

Elaine chats brightly and openly about her life's journey – an eventful road that has arrived far too early at this defining time in her life. And even though she now faces end-of-life – whether that is in months or longer – her perfectly-observed humour is never hidden for long.

Enjoying her magnetic company, you'd never think she has been through hell and back, facing multiple harrowing health struggles. But Elaine carries both her vulnerability and her resilience with equal ease. And as we speak, she is so 'thrilled to be living' in the hospice – she chooses the word 'living' carefully.

"When I arrived in here I was a shadow. After nine gruelling weeks bed-bound in hospital, nobody thought I'd regain mobility. Now I'm up and about and active. That's what hospice care has done for me. It has re-ignited, not just my zest for living, but my capacity to do so."

Elaine blazed a trail through her work and personal life from modest working-class beginnings to a stellar career with a number of diverse companies. She eventually retired as a highly-valued Executive Assistant with KPMG.

The memories come flooding back. Snippets of a full life. School books covered in velvet by her dad. Her mam expertly running a home of seven children. Growing up in a safe community. Time spent working in Paris. Postcard memories from Malaysia. And so much more.

A series of catastrophic health problems began 10 years ago. Acute heart disease. Recurring lung cancer. Diabetes. Gallstones, a blood clot, Covid. But even though she hit rock bottom on several occasions, she always rallied. Her spirit is astounding.

Elaine was delighted when she got news that she could be transferred to the hospice. She "was worn out." She had previously experienced the hospice visiting people she knew. So for her, it was already 'a healing place'.

"The sense of love and joy is everywhere. And it's not artificial. The staff really do care about you – they're actually interested in you."

"My family and friends are wonderful and so supportive. And having my own room with my own things, it's home from home. I can have people visit, eat in the restaurant, or stroll outside in the stunning gardens."

For Elaine, it's also all the small things that really count:

"They encourage me to ask for anything I want. I had a massage yesterday. The food is so good. I've used the therapeutic jacuzzi. When you're ill with cancer and other complications, every muscle hurts."

Elaine is very aware that all these facilities and 'little extras' are paid for by people's kind donations and events like the Spring Raffle:

"Please, please, sell tickets for this raffle. Or buy lots. Encourage your friends and family. I can testify to the difference your effort will make. It will turn people's lives around just when they need it most – at a very precious time."

As we end the conversation, Elaine is having her hair washed by one of the carers. She's getting on with life and living.

In a place defined by life and living.



Elaine in hospice care today – and at 17 years of age in Paris.