

HEALING HEARTS

A local resident who wishes to remain anonymous explains how she was helped by the Healing Hearts Bereavement Support Group following the death of her husband

I am a resident of Wanstead. I lost my husband four years ago suddenly after over 50 years of marriage, which, as you can imagine, was a big shock to me. My GP suggested I go for therapy, which I agreed to, but soon realised it was not for me, especially as the therapist, although very nice, was a young man and I thought he didn't really have any idea of what I was going through.

What I wanted was to meet people in the same situation as me and so I asked the therapist if he knew of any such groups. He said he would look for me and at the next session told me about a group in Wanstead that met once a month. I started going there and through this I found out about Healing Hearts. They meet every four to five weeks at Spire London East Hospital, in Redbridge, but in the evening which suited me better. Three years on and I am still going there.

It is a lovely group with like minded people and it has really been a lifeline for me. In addition to the meetings, we also go out for a meal once a month. Although it is quite a large group, we are always looking to welcome new members, so if you are going through a bereavement, why not come along? I am sure you will find it helpful.

The group was started by Pat Peake MBE and Mary Casey in 2000 and has now been running continuously for 19 years. In 2000, Pat had just lost her husband, who had suffered with cancer, and found that the emotional support she was offered in the community was ineffectual; it did not meet her needs. She felt one-to-one counselling was unhelpful, as the other person (counsellor) had not lost their partner, so how could they hope to know what Pat was feeling? She did look for other



Mary Casey and Pat Peake MBE

help but there was nothing available at the time. Pat had also had cancer at the same time as her husband and felt a sense of guilt that she was the survivor. He was her soul mate and to this day she still misses him every day.

Mary was an oncology nurse and had to deal with death frequently. She knew her patients and their families very well while under her care and then the patient died... There was no follow up and after the death certificate was given to the family, they were left to try to and get on with their lives. This seemed to Mary to "leave an unfinished chapter". How could the caring and support stop?

Death is an important part of life. It is a painful – but unavoidable – experience. Although grief is always the penalty for loving someone, it can give us the opportunity to move on with greater insight and understanding once grief has started to resolve.

The Healing Hearts Bereavement Support Group meet on a Monday once a month at Spire London East Hospital, Roding Lane South, IG4 5PZ (free). For more information, call **020 8500 4838** or visit **healinghearts.co.uk**