

A Day at May Court Hospice

By Bruce Grant

Old Ottawa South is home to the May Court Hospice, an institution that affects us with some powerful and contradictory emotions. Everybody wants to go to Heaven, but nobody wants to die.

The exterior is quiet and inconspicuous, set well back from the street and tucked in behind the May Court Club on Cameron Avenue, easy to walk on by and not notice. Inside, it's full of life, a comfortable home-like environment, lots of natural light, groups of people engaged in conversations and activities. There I was introduced to two people who shared with me their time and their stories.

Alison Bouchier, OOS resident, volunteer, a retired civil servant, with a degree in French literature: "In 1988, my mother was dying with a brain tumour and she wanted to die at home. The Hospice at All Saints Church offered respite visits for my father, and we all worked together to make the best of it. I knew then what I wanted to do in retirement, and I started my training for this volunteer work in the year before I retired.

Now I'm in my fifth year working here."

Jennifer Mulder, 33 years old, complex congenital heart issues, day hospice participant; she lives in OOS with her husband, two dogs and two cats: "I receive support services at home and I come here every Tuesday.



Jennifer Mulder, enduring spirit, with a smile that lights up the room.

We relax, talk, laugh, enjoy a good lunch. Tuesday is the highlight of

my week. This is one place where I can meet people and be my true authentic self, I don't have to hide my feelings."

Jen is a big, strong-looking woman, five-foot-ten, but she's had a pacemaker for years and she's plugged into an oxygen tank since September. Presently she is being evaluated for the possibility of a transplant operation, heart and two lungs. Just now, she doesn't know if she will be a viable candidate for this big operation. If yes, she will have to move to Toronto and wait on the list. If no, she will come back here and live out her time. "I don't want to die, but I think I'm ready if it comes to that."

Alison: "Jen is by far the youngest in her Tuesday Day-Hospice Group, but she gets on very well with everyone. She is young in years but preternaturally wise, an old soul. The conversations are lively and intense; everyone is the protagonist in their own novel."

Jen's parents were told that she would have a very limited potential, a wheelchair, no education, a short life. Jen finished high school, on her feet, and went on to Humber College

for a course in Radio Broadcasting and a job with the Rogers group of radio stations. In 2008 she returned to Humber College and took the Disability Support Worker (DSW) program. She also took a grad certificate course in behavioural therapy, for a total until now of three diplomas. She worked in the caring professions as a DSW in Toronto, Belleville and Ottawa. There is also volunteer work in her story, fund-raising for cancer.

Jen has been a traveller, to Ireland, England and Fiji and into the southern U.S. But for now, medical problems are pressing and international travel is out of the question. A big football fan, she was at the Grey Cup game, her sixth, and a trip to the Yukon with her dad is planned; she wants to see the aurora and ride a dogsled. What do you do when your future is so uncertain? You just don't waste the time. You go girl!

Bruce Grant, retired Engineer and Layabout, is a resident of Old Ottawa South.