



"Windermere was the hardest," says Heather.

"It was my second swim there, as I'd already done that one the year before, but it was the first of the five this year. I found it really hard, and afterwards I kept thinking 'oh no, I've got four more of these to do and everyone's sponsored me...' Luckily the second one, which was in Suffolk, was only a week later, so I didn't have much time to dwell on it, and after that one I felt much better. Scotland was the swim I enjoyed the most. It was freezing but the scenery was stunning. It started raining while I was in the water and I didn't even notice. I've got the bug now," she smiles. "I'm going to have a quiet year next year, just do a couple of race swims and give my husband Steve a break from driving me up and down the country, then in 2017 I'm going to do another big swimming challenge."

As well as the money which Heather has raised through her swims, her family have given to Phyllis Tuckwell all donations received at Graham's funeral, and the Farnborough and Cove Women's Institute – of which Heather is the President - have made PTHC their Charity of the Year 2015.

We are privileged to care for people like Heather and her family, at probably the most difficult time in their lives, but we can only do this with the generosity of our local community.

We have to raise over £20,000 every day in order to provide care, free of charge, to our patients and their relatives.

For further information about how to support Phyllis Tuckwell Hospice Care, contact our Fundraising team on:

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Our patients are inspiring...

"We were looked after as well as he was."



Heather's Story

How our In-Patient Unit supports patients and relatives

Phyllis Tuckwell[®]
Hospice Care
...because every day is precious

Heather's Story



After seeing the impressive array of medals which Heather has been awarded for completing the UK's five Great Swims, you could be forgiven for thinking that she has always been a keen swimmer. In fact it was only recently that Heather began swimming seriously and

just last year that she took on the challenge of her first outdoor Great Swim.

Heather had often watched the London marathon on TV and had thought it an incredible challenge, but – not being very keen on running – one that she wouldn't want to take on herself. When she heard about the Great Swims, however, she felt that maybe she had found her niche. After chatting to a friend who had taken part in one, Heather decided to take the plunge. She signed up to the Windermere Great Swim and began her training, swimming outdoors three or four times a week at Sandhurst Horseshoe Lake and Farnborough Quays, and indoors at Farnborough or Aldershot.

As Heather told her friends about her challenge, she was surprised to hear many of them ask which charity she was doing it in aid of. *"It felt like a missed opportunity,"* she admitted. At the same time as Heather was increasing her training in preparation for the Windermere Swim, her father, Graham, was facing a different challenge. The lung disease which he had been diagnosed with only weeks before, was terminal. Although very ill, he was being treated for his condition and remained relatively well. However,



as Heather emerged from Lake Windermere relieved and proud at having completed her first outdoor swimming challenge, she received a call from him telling her that the doctor had just been to visit. *"She had told dad that this was the end,"* she says. *"Things had changed rapidly and he was dying."*

Heather and her husband raced back home, not knowing whether they would get back in time to see Graham before he died. Thankfully they did, and were able to discuss with him, Heather's mum Pamela, and her brother Philip, what they should do next.

Graham's doctor had referred him to Phyllis Tuckwell, a charity which Heather was familiar with, as her daughter's dad, Robert, had been cared for by its staff and volunteers during his battle with MND. He and their daughter Katie had also taken part in one of the charity's fundraising skydives, and Katie had visited the Hospice for work experience with Complementary Therapist Bridget Prusik, whilst at college.

After Graham's referral, Phyllis Tuckwell's Community Team called round to visit him and his family. Together they discussed whether he should be admitted to the Hospice, where he would be cared for by the In-Patient Unit staff, or remain at home and receive visits from the Hospice Care at Home nurses. The family was undecided – Graham wanted to go into the Hospice, but Pamela was afraid that she would say goodbye to him one evening, go home to bed and find the next day that he had died during the night – she wanted him to stay at home so that she could be with him until the end.

Phyllis Tuckwell's visiting Clinical Nurse Specialists (CNSs) reassured Pamela that she could stay with Graham at the Hospice the whole time he was there, and that she wouldn't have to leave his bedside, even at night. The family agreed and Graham was admitted to the Hospice's IPU that day. Once there, his doctor talked to him about what dying would be like for him and discussed pain relief options. Heather and her mum Pamela were able to stay with him the whole time he was there, with other friends and family able to visit at any time. Although staff offered

them a relatives' room, they didn't use it, choosing instead to eat and even sleep by his bedside, and staying with him right to the end.

Four days after he was admitted, Graham died peacefully at the Hospice, with his family by his side.

"We were looked after as well as he was," said Heather. ***"All of us were really important to the staff there. One day we were eating some sandwiches that we had brought in with us, but the staff said we should have a proper meal and urged us to order some hot food from the kitchen."***

This year, Heather decided to combine her passion for outdoor swimming with fundraising for the charity which cared for both Robert and her dad – by completing all of the UK's five Great Swims, taking home a medal from each one and raising a total of £2,000 for Phyllis Tuckwell.



"The average water temperature is around 16 degrees," she smiles. *"But Loch Lomond was the coldest, about 14 degrees."* The cold doesn't seem to bother Heather though. With a neoprene wetsuit to keep her warm, she revels in the sensation of swimming in the cold, clear freshwater. *"It feels clean,"* she says. *"Sometimes you are crawling through weeds and you can see fish, but it still feels clean."*

The Great Swims are organised throughout the year, the first being in Lake Windermere, followed by Suffolk, Manchester, London and finally Loch Lomond in Scotland. They are attended by between 1,000 and 3,000 swimmers, who start the race in waves of around 300 every half hour, to allow everyone enough room to swim. Safety teams patrol the route in kayaks, making sure that everyone is ok and moving quickly to the aid of any swimmer who seems to be struggling.

