

## Our lovely Eileen at Hengist Field Care Home beats COVID-19



*Positive thinking and the Hengist Field Care Team are the recipe for beating the Coronavirus*

### All about Eileen

85-year-old **Eileen Fuller**, a former **Ballerina** with the dancing schools '**Eileen Fuller Academy of Dancing**' in the **Maidstone** and **Sittingbourne** areas, **survived terminal cancer** after being told she had just six months to live some 25 years ago. At the time, Eileen's doctors suggested that she might want to go home and spend her last months with her family.

Eileen being Eileen, decided she wanted to go on a **world cruise**, even though her family were worried that she might die whilst out at sea; Eileen's answer was, *"they could throw me overboard and bury me at sea."*

Five years after the cruise, Eileen was described by her GP as a 'walking miracle' and was told that *"there is absolutely no medical explanation for why she was still with us"*. After travelling upon another two world cruises, Eileen asked her husband Tony if they could go on another cruise and he said that they were out of money as she was now past her sell-by date!



Eileen enjoying an armchair exercise class and the sunny garden at Hengist Field Care Home (Picture: July 2019)

## Eileen's husband Tony

Sadly, **Eileen's beloved husband Tony** developed **Lewy Body Dementia** in 2012. In 2016, he moved into **Hengist Field Care Home** to be cared for by their dedicated Dementia team, and for the duration of his residency he believed he was on a cruise ship.

Tony was very well cared for at **Hengist Field** but as Eileen and Tony had been together since they were 15 and 16-years-old, Eileen couldn't bear to be apart from him. A month after Tony moved into the **Home**, Eileen joined him so that she could be close to him and continue to see him every day. When Tony sadly passed away in March 2018, Eileen chose to stay at **Hengist Field** where she had made many friends with the other residents and staff.



Eileen with her beloved husband Tony (Picture: September 2015)

### Contracting COVID-19

Following the outbreak of **COVID-19**, although the **Home** was operating under strict safeguarding measures, Eileen unfortunately contracted the virus at the **beginning of April**. After a coffee afternoon and activities session on 6 April, Eileen wanted to go to her room because she was feeling unwell. She could hardly walk, and her temperature had spiked up to **38.2**. Care staff helped her to her room and then contacted Eileen's GP who was directly involved. After a swab test was sent to the lab on **7 April**, the results came back positive on **14 April**.

And although it took a week to get the results back, the **Care team** at the **Home** kept Eileen's son up to date every step of the way. Naturally, he was already fearing the worst. On speaking to doctors on **14 April**, Eileen's son was informed that the hospitals would not admit her and they were offered a **Palliative Care** pack.

Little did anyone know that this would turn out to be a life-saving course of action and **Silvia Barret, Operations Manager for Hengist Field Care Home**, advised her son that Eileen was already in the best place she could be. Eileen's son said,

*"Knowing my Mum, I knew that we must have as much contact with her as possible. Staff at the Home organised daily video calls using Skype and WhatsApp."*

### Special care and support

Eileen was cared for by a special team at **Hengist Field** who were dealing only with patients diagnosed with **COVID-19**. The staff had been trained how to look for the symptoms, what **PPE** is necessary and how they could stop the infection spreading.

As Eileen's food and fluid intake became very poor, one of her favourite members of staff at the **Home** (Activities Coordinator, **Debbie**) stepped in to help. **Debbie** dedicated a lot of time to encouraging Eileen to eat and drink her favourite foods and drinks.

Eileen's driving force has always been her son and the staff around her in the Home. Showing their love and care, the **Hengist Field** team took one day at the time, working very hard to motivate her to fight the virus, and their commitment paid off.

Daily contact with her son through **FaceTime**, with the help of the staff, meant Eileen had every reason to win her battle against the disease. Silvia Barret commented,

*"She was so happy to see them, and with all my heart, I truly believe that they are the only reason Eileen is still with us."*





Eileen with Senior Healthcare Assistant Donna Horn (Picture: September 2019)

## Keeping touch

Eileen's son means the world to her and the team at **Hengist Field** knew he would be a key part in her recovery. Because she was extremely unwell and frail, the staff at the **Home** made arrangements for Eileen to be visited by her son as soon as they could.

Despite having both **Alzheimer's** and **Vascular Dementia**, as well as having **congestive heart failure**, Eileen would maintain that she was "*fine*", just as she had done 25 years ago when she was in hospital having treatment for cancer.

During the visits from her son, it was noticed just how much of a positive effect these visits were having on her. The team at **Hengist Field** then did everything they could to enable Eileen to have as much contact with her son and her friends as possible.

Continued contact with her loved ones, along with Eileen's incredible **self-belief and determination** that as she was still enjoying her life, meant she wasn't ready to go yet. There were moments when it seemed she might lose her fight, but her son somehow remained both positive and realistic when leaving her after his visits.

## Slowly getting better

Eileen went through stages. Two days after showing the virus symptoms, she started to improve; her temperature was under control and her food and fluid intake were within normal limits. But after a few more days she took a turn for the worse – she stopped eating and drinking, was unable to mobilise anymore and was very weak. After two weeks of feeling very weak and breathless, with support from the staff and her family, Eileen began to improve and it was clear she had started to 'turn a corner'.

The largest hurdle for Eileen to overcome was reigniting the desire to eat and drink because the virus left her unable to taste or take pleasure in food; nutrition and hydration are key to supporting our immune system and sustaining energy. Thanks to the care and attention she received from the staff team, Eileen slowly but surely began to improve and recover.

Eileen's son said,

***"We have no doubt that if it hadn't been for the impressive care that Mum received, and her positive outlook, that***

*she would no longer be with us. The only problem we have now is trying to explain to her that the lockdown means she can't go out for her favourite coffee and cake! We can't thank the care team enough and hopefully our story might be a silver lining in a sky of grey. Whilst we should all take sensible precautions in order to not catch the virus, we really believe that the combination of great clinical care and a positive mindset has been the answer to tackling this disease."*



Eileen at Hengist Field Care Home in May 2020 with Jackie and Debbie from the Activities Team

## Eileen's words

Thankfully, Eileen is fully on the road to recovery and remains happy and content with her life at **Hengist Field Care Home**. When asked about the whole experience of having had (and recovered from) **COVID-19**, here's what she had to say:

*"Words cannot describe what I want to say. Just 'thank you' all for being so patient, being so caring, being so lovely. My brain was fine, but my body didn't listen, and without everybody's support, I couldn't have done it. There aren't enough words in the world to describe how grateful I am.*

When asked what she enjoys the most about living at **Hengist Field**, Eileen said,

*"I love being here, the staff are wonderful, and nothing is too much for them. They care for us with love and respect and always listen to us. I have good friends here. I like going around the Home and speaking with other residents and staff. I love participating in activities – I think the activities girls are lovely. Everybody is so lovely here.*

After lockdown is lifted, the first thing Eileen looks forward to doing is *"going out with my lovely son for a coffee, as we used to do before."*



Eileen taking a walk with Senior Healthcare Assistant Donna Horn (Picture: September 2019)