

**My Name:** Robyn

**My Town:** Melbourne, Australia

**My experience during COVID19:**

My life during COVID19 has been strange and lonely. My lovely husband died in early 2017 and although I have started to “pick up the pieces” and begun the journey to rebuild a different, unexpected life, I am still adjusting to being without him and I miss him every single day. As a young-ish widow, living alone during COVID19 has been tough a lot of the time, particularly during Melbourne’s long winter lockdown. I’m OK with my own company, I have resources and a secure roof over my head and I could “see” people via zoom or daily walks, but the isolation and loneliness of lockdown was just too much at times and it went on for *so long*. It also hooked me straight back in to what it was like caring for my husband who had young onset dementia. It was heart breaking. He was a young, fit and active man. He was kind, compassionate, funny and generous. A great friend, a caring partner, a loving son, brother and uncle. I loved him and I would not have done anything differently. But it was really, really hard to be with him, firstly knowing something was wrong and searching for a diagnosis; then coming to terms with the fact that there was no treatment; and then supporting him as he deteriorated over time, losing his speech, mobility, and the ability to care for himself.

During “the year of COVID lockdowns” I’ve reconnected with and re-lived what it was like being carer. You are at home pretty much all day, every day. You are not able to go to work. You can only leave home for a few key reasons – to attend medical appointments, to do essential shopping or to squeeze in an hour’s exercise. Getting to the hairdresser is an occasional luxury. You can only see family and friends a couple at a time for short periods, and you can’t go on holiday. You often feel alone, isolated, exhausted, listless, restless – but this is your “new normal”. And you just get used to the “new normal”, and the situation changes and you must readjust to the next “new normal”. You need all your creativity, energy and resilience to manage it and survive. It feels like lockdown day and night, every day, for however long you are a carer. It is tough.

So, where is hope in this story? The hope comes from knowing that someone “out there” cares and thinks about you. The smallest acts of kindness, like someone dropping off a meal or popping by with a bunch of flowers or some cakes as a treat, getting a card or an email to say “hello and I’m thinking of you” or a friend coming to visit – even when they don’t know what to say. These things made a real difference in my day. Finding a trusted friend who asks “how are you going?” and is resilient enough to cope with tears or slightly hysterical laughter or silence or an exhausted outburst.....these are the kindnesses that got me through as a carer (and during COVID!). And everyone is different – so carer kindness is about asking what someone needs and being prepared to do what you can to meet that need. When my husband died, I always remember two of our friends separately asking if they could do anything to help. I was going to say “thanks but no thanks” when I thought of a wheelchair and some equipment that had to be collected and dropped off for storage in our nephew’s shed. The three wonderful men involved didn’t know each other – I just messaged them each other’s contact numbers and they sorted everything out. It made such a difference to know that something from the long ‘to do’ list was taken care of without me having to give it another thought. I am forever grateful for that act of kindness at a very difficult time. So, please spare a thought and offer an act of kindness to a caregiver in your community. Carers do an incredibly tough job for the person they love and for the benefit of society (just think how much it would cost if the community had to pay for all that care?!). They are “frontline workers” every single day and often incredibly isolated. Right now, and into the future (COVID or not), carers really need our acts of kindness.



“Shiny ring people” – on our wedding day