

Deb Broadbent, wife of St. Thomas Fire Chief, tells her story of losing the love of her life



“I never imagined my husband was going to die”.

Rob asked for our daily tradition of tea and toast at 10 pm on what became his final evening. When he was too tired to sit up, to sip his final cup of tea, he kissed me goodnight. I wish I had known it would be our last.

Rob Broadbent was a vibrant, social, and hardworking man. He started his career as a probationary firefighter in St Thomas in 1985. He worked his way up the ranks and was promoted to Fire Chief in 2010. He loved his job. We planned for an early retirement and looked forward to being able to spend more time enjoying life together and with our families. We travelled to far off places, enjoyed gourmet cooking together and spent time watching the sun rise and set. We enjoyed good coffee, evenings of pizza and wine rarely missing our tradition of tea and toast at ten. We were best friends.

Our world was turned upside down when we learned of his cancer diagnosis in 2017, followed by rigorous tests, treatments, hopeful optimism and then crushing, troubling news. We struggled privately through his illness, initially believing that it was “just a bump in the road”.



The disease quickly took over, in a way that no one expected. I watched my husband, who was a strong marathon runner, a proud husband, father, and grandfather progressively become weak, lose his appetite and weight. He struggled to breathe, all the while maintaining a sense of optimism and hope with his infectious smile.

The journey to his death was tangled and chaotic.

Life, that once felt very certain, became a roller coaster ride of unknowns as we tried to navigate the path toward recovery. Without a Hospice in Elgin County, there was little support for my husband, myself, or our family during this time. I was often left not knowing where or who to turn to when Rob needed help most. No local Hospice meant much of Rob's care took place in a London hospital. While there, I often felt left in the dark about the reality of my husband's condition, regularly wondering what would come next. The communication between us and the care team was confusing.

One day we were told Rob was preparing to come home and then suddenly, I was being informed that Rob was dying and most likely only had a few days left in this world. My best friend and husband of 36 years was dying, right now. I was in shock and was unprepared for this news. To this day, I continue to struggle with so many unanswered questions and regrets. If only I had been told sooner and been more prepared along the way.

Rob passed away surrounded by our loving family. The hallways and waiting room were overflowing with our close friends, extended family and colleagues from the Fire Department who were there to support us. A testament to the man Rob was.

With the support of Hospice, our family could have been cared for as his illness progressed. I might have been more aware that we were sharing our last tea and toast at ten that night.

As I breathe through tears, I am filled with hope that our story will inspire our community to build a Hospice... to help write a better ending for us all
