

**The Angels of the North**  
**An Open Letter to the Staff of Cross Hill**  
**Nursing Home, Paragon Street, Stanhope,**  
**Co Durham.**

IN this ever changing world of ours we might be forgiven for feeling fearful of putting our loved ones in the care of people we don't know; carers who may not care. We read, seemingly constantly, stories of lack of care in hospitals or institutions of care. Can we trust anyone? And of course the answer is yes, we can. This is a thank you letter to a nursing home in a little village in the north of England where, to the staff, this very idea of lack of care would be totally abhorrent.

Three years ago my wife and her brother were faced with the decision that many of us dread. Their mother Winnie had managed to care for herself until the age of 94 in her own home but things gradually became too much for her and following a fall it was clear that she could no longer care for herself. She was admitted to a small hospital in Stanhope, Co. Durham and it was their assessment that it would be beneficial for her to be admitted to a Nursing Home. (Neither my wife nor her brother were in a position to provide the level of required care). We just had to wait for a space in a suitable nursing home to become available. However my wife was told (with a nod and a wink from a helpful nurse) of a possible vacancy at Cross Hill Nursing Home in Stanhope and she came to your establishment to check it out. She was reassured immediately and she reported back to me, "I've found the right home. The staff are wonderful".

And so in March 2010 Winifred Davis was admitted to Cross Hill Nursing Home where she was made to feel welcome, and loved, from the start. My brother-in-law, who lived close, visited his mother almost every day and my wife made the trip from London about once a month; I was a less frequent visitor but I was always touched by the level of love, care and affection that you all gave to every patient in your care. I know that Winnie, my mother-in-law, would have made your task easier because she retained her sense of good will and humour till the end but I witnessed all of you giving the same commitment and patience to some irascible behaviour from less loveable

patients. Your fortitude and good humour seemed irrepressible. Winnie went on to spend over two very happy and fulfilling years at the Cross Hill Nursing Home and I am confident that those important years in the twilight of her life could not have been happier anywhere else. It's a testament to Cross Hill that, when Winnie was hospitalised because a stroke had made her unable to swallow food, the home was there for her. It was clear that the end was close but Maria the daughter of the owner of Cross Hill visited Winnie at Bishop Auckland Hospital and insisted that she should return to Cross Hill to end her days peacefully. "We want you to come home, Winnie" she said "and we'll re-decorate your room with your favourite colour." It was a huge comfort to my wife particularly as we lived 300 miles away. This all happened over six months ago and Winnie passed away shortly after in your care. We thank you for looking after her.

I doubt I'll ever forget the willingness of you all to go beyond the call of duty and every time I read a headline about lack of care in hospitals and nursing homes I will always be reminded of the staff at Cross Hill. You are part of a vocational profession and you all work, I know, for scant financial reward. I have been moved to tears on occasions when I have witnessed the love and compassion that you the staff have for those in your care. The people in the home are not related to you in any way and yet you all demonstrate a patience and kindness that most people would reserve, at best, for their own children or aging parents. I thank you and would like to remind others reading this that the world is still filled with pockets of goodness. And as we approach Christmas the people of Stanhope can be assured that there is a band of angels in their midst.

**Keith Strachan, East Molesey, Surrey.**