

# Unable to cope

**Pam Class** recounts how sharing her burden with others became a turning point in her life whilst caring for her husband.

**When my husband John** was diagnosed with Alzheimer's in March 2009 I wasn't surprised. I still had my freedom and could get out in the evenings if I had a carer from the agency for a couple of hours.

**However, everything changed** in November – John's condition got worse and I felt really frightened because there were times when he was hallucinating all night. I had no medication to give him, I wasn't managing and there was no-one to turn to. John's care manager was on maternity leave, the psychiatrist had discharged him, the GP was on holiday. After a lot of phone calls John's new care manager placed him into respite care for a week. At the end of the year he was prescribed anti-psychotic medication.

**I wasn't coping any more** and I didn't like being his main carer because I didn't feel up to the job and I was angry that things had got so bad. I couldn't get out unless there was a carer for the whole evening. There was so much to do and finances to sort out. I was going downhill and my health was deteriorating. In the New Year I went to the HELP shop in the town and was told that a Carer Support Worker would contact me. It was about four weeks later that she came to see me. I told her everything and she understood. She was very sympathetic, helpful and supportive. At the same time she was worried about me and rang me the next day to see how I was. I was still feeling tired but better for talking to her.

**A few weeks after this I went to a four-day meeting** with people from the Focolare and my husband went into respite care. One evening I was with a group of about ten people and someone said, 'What do you do Pam?' I didn't want to tell her anything so I ignored her question because I didn't want everyone to know how I struggled and how weak and helpless I felt. But then I thought how rude I was because I would be very upset if someone ignored me when I asked them a question. I started telling the group how it was and when it came to the bit where I went to the HELP shop, I started crying. There was such a change in the dynamics even though I didn't want attention at a time like this. Everyone was warm, caring and loving and tried to comfort me. They understood my misery and they loved me, they had compassion for me.

**I thought I would feel ashamed** after my outburst but I told myself that these things happen and the great thing is I felt the burden had lifted and I had been healed. It was a grace that God had given me to help me with my difficulties. My situation hadn't changed but I had.

**Looking after my husband** had become the most important thing in my life and it had become a burden. Didn't Jesus say, 'My yoke is easy and my burden is light'? I needed to be reminded that God loved me immensely. Once I put God in the first place in my heart, mind and soul then everything was put into perspective. It was no longer a burden and I became confident looking after him.

Some people advise that in situations like this we should pray more. This is true but what helped me in that moment was the presence of Jesus in that group who enabled me to experience the love of God.

Now I know that I can count on everyone's love as my experience with John continued to unfold. 

