



Mireille Hayden

OUR SUBURB COMPANION

featuring Mireille Hayden

Mireille Hayden is clearly not one to shirk responsibility. She has taken on the role of accompanying families or individuals at possibly their most vulnerable times – at birth and death, and describes both challenges to me in a calm, compassionate and highly endearing manner. She has just taken on a new commitment with the Free Church. I asked her about her connections with the Suburb and how her work can help Suburb residents.

I began by asking Mireille about her family and background. "My grandparents moved to the Suburb in the 60s and bought our family home on Asmunds Hill in 1972. I call it my family home because, from the time that I was born in 1974, my parents and I lived in different places in France and Germany and I didn't move back to England until 1992. I then went to study at university in Canterbury and then Guildford. So Asmunds Hill is my roots and anchor. Since 2004 it has become my own family's home where I live with my husband Eddie (famously known locally for his heartwarming toddler Eenyumeymusic group and his gentle nursery rhyme recordings) and our children Abbey, aged 7 and Aimee, 4 who both attend the lovely Garden Suburb Infant School."

We went on to discuss her professional background and her career to date. "I'm a Chartered Health Psychologist and my first job was in health research at Queen Mary and Westfield University before moving into the NHS as a Manager in 2000. I have been working across North Central London in End of Life Care for most of that time. Simultaneously I trained with Michael Odent, the leading expert in natural birth and started training as a doula (birth companion) in 2007. I then trained with the Active Birth Centre in Highgate, which enabled me to support couples in preparing for birth. I initially started my doula and antenatal work with friends and acquaintances but I now work with families across the area. I left the NHS in February of last year in order to have the flexibility to practice as a doula and to set up my own organisation 'Gentle Dusk' which focusses on preparation and support for end of life care.

I then raised the question as to what her work entailed. "As a birth companion I work with parents to be, helping them to prepare for birth, breastfeeding and a newborn. They have chosen me to fulfil this role so we build up a relationship before the birth and then they call me as soon as the mother goes into labour (many of her clients are home births) and I am there when the baby arrives. A woman used to stay in hospital for 2 weeks now she is often released within 24 hours, also, she may not have a mum or aunt on hand to help her when she gets home. Unfortunately the midwife service is so stretched that they no longer have the time they would like to give. So I help the mum with how to bathe or calm the baby, answer any questions she might have, any anxieties that crop up. I like to think of myself as a companion on the whole journey. It's an amazing job. Attending a birth is a true privilege and a magical moment to be part of. The entire experience makes me feel that I have the best job in the world.

In End of Life Care, I focus a significant part of my work on raising awareness of this type of care, the choices we have and the planning we all need to do. Death, dying and bereavement are the last taboos in our society and they can isolate individuals and families facing this situation which can hamper their care.

Throughout our conversation so far, even when discussing subjects which a lot of people might find pretty grim, I can only describe Mireille's composure as light as a feather. She is obviously highly trained and knowledgeable and I can imagine that she soothes one into action.

We continued by chatting about her life on the Suburb when not working. "I am a member of the Free Church and as such participate in many of the activities relating to the church: helping out with the Sunday morning crèche, at the annual Harvest Festival lunch, singing in choir concerts... My husband also helps out there. Amongst other things he provides a music slot in the Wednesday morning toddler playgroup, and he assists Mrs Cootes, the ukulele teacher at the Garden Suburb Infant School, by giving musical support.

My next questions were: "What do you like about the Suburb?; Do you have a favourite walk and where would your memorial bench be?" She answered, "I love the fact that the Suburb is full of trees; I like the quiet, the sense of community and the mix of people that makes it so diverse and rich. My favourite walk is from home to the heath extension. At the top, near the children's playground, there's a bench where my husband proposed to me. I sit there and look at the fields, the Free Church where I got married, the people passing by and listen to the birds. I love it! Maybe my memorial bench would be on Willifield Green, where I have spent many a sunny afternoon with my children, playing hide and seek, running around and even building the occasional snowman!"

As I left Mireille I felt a definite spring in my step and believed that even if one had no need at the present time for either of her services, one would feel better in ourselves for just knowing her. **S**

Trust (trust) n. reliance on and confidence in the truth. Custody, charge or care. (Sp in **Hampstead Garden Suburb** – members elect four Trustees to the **Trust Council** in whom is vested legal powers to preserve the character and amenities of the **Suburb**.)

The Trust requests the pleasure of your company as a member

The Trust Council would like to see more Suburb residents represented as members. The sole requirement for membership is to have lived continuously on the Suburb for three years.

Many residents come to live here because it is a unique environment and support the aims of the Trust in trying to preserve the Suburb's character and amenities.

All residents who believe that the job we are trying to do is worthwhile should be members of the Trust. New residents are now welcome to join as associate members.



HAMPSTEAD - GARDEN - SUBURB - TRUST

862 Finchley Road, Hampstead Garden Suburb, London NW11 6AB · 8455 1066 · mail@hgstrust.org · www.hgstrust.org