Greg Crawford – Let's dance

Greg on tour at Giza, Egypt, 20xx?

When your wife repeatedly tells you to get out of bed at 10 o'clock in the morning, and you dutifully oblige but wonder why, it is time to look at your life and ask yourself some serious questions. The answer for Greg was that being retired was boring and it didn't' suit him. When, after 47 years of nursing, Greg retired in 2022 he and his wife thought they had plenty to do – and they did, they travelled a lot, did the house up, bought new cars, and finished projects that had long been on hold, but now he found that had 'nothing to do'. That is why when he saw the adaptCARE job for a part-time registered nurse on SEEK he applied, was successful, and accepted the role as adaptCARE's Registered Nurse – Clinical Oversight & Complex Care Advisor and returned to work at the beginning of March. Retirement hadn't suited his wife either; she had returned to work a year previously.

Greg's nursing career covers a lot of ground as well as years. His decision to become a nurse, he says, was kindled by his mother's nursing career. She had trained at the LGH and every year a cohort of her nursing colleagues would visit their home in Scottsdale on their way to their annual catchup in Bridport. The gales of laughter that emanated from the group when they got together led Greg to think nursing must be a fun job, and he wanted to be part of that. However, in an era when it was still unusual for men to become nurses, his father was strongly opposed to the idea and arranged for Greg to do a sign painting apprenticeship at the Scottsdale Kraft factory. Greg didn't want to do this. Instead, in 1974, he moved to Launceston when he was 17, to follow his passion and enrol as an Auxiliary (Enrolled) Nurse at the Launceston General Hospital (LGH). When he started nursing, he was only allowed to work in the men's wards – Wards B, D & F.

In 1982, the year he got married, he completed a three-year traineeship at the LGH to become a registered nurse. Greg decided to specialise in midwifery and began his training at the Queen Victoria Maternity Hospital (QV) where he eventually became the Charge Nurse of Gynaecology. His fellow classmates found having a man in their midst a novelty, but for Greg, his time in midwifery was most exciting thing he had done in nursing.

When he was 27 years old, life threw him a curve ball. He was diagnosed with a brain tumour after his wife came home to find him on the floor after having a fit. Fortunately, he was 'one of the lucky ones'. His tumour was successfully removed at the Royal Hobart Hospital and there has been no recurrence.

Although Greg loved his time in midwifery, he returned to the LGH to teach nursing, until training nurses became a university course and went to UTAS. He enjoyed the company and socialisation with those he worked with during these years – 'they were the good days, 'he says, and like his mother's nursing cohort before him, Greg's cohort still meet regularly.

Greg continued his studies, completing a five-year Bachelor of Applied Science in Nursing in 1993. Part of his degree required he do a placement at another hospital, and Greg elected to go the Royal Women's Hospital in Melbourne, where he worked on the maternity ward for 4 months. Then known in maternity circles as 'the home of the epidural', the Royal Women's Hospital was at the time famous for its IVF program, which set it apart from other hospitals. He later completed a Masters Degree of Clinical Nursing in 2005, and later changed his job focus spending many years in aged care homes instead of hospitals, including 23 years as Director of Nursing in Aged Care at Tyler Village, Uniting Aged Care, Ainslie House (Low Head) , Facility Manager at Fred French, before returning to work on the floor on Night Duty at the Manor in Kings Meadows.

Alongside his nursing career Greg had another passion- ballroom dancing. When he was 14 and attending Debutante Balls, he had learnt some basic dance moves – The Pride of Erin and the Parma Waltz –but his interest was cemented after an invitation from a fellow nurse who did competition ballroom dancing to attend and watch the exams being held at the RAOB Hall in Newstead in 1980. He was blown away at how beautiful the dancers looked, particularly the woman in the heavily sequined apricot and yellow gown dancing with the teacher. He thought she was the most spectacular woman he had ever seen, little realising that she was the woman he would later marry two years later in 1982. His wife, Dinah, he discovered was the Victorian champion Latin dancer, and despite his initial misgivings that he would never be good enough to dance with her, when they were paired as dance partners, together they became the Tasmanian champions in New Vogue and Standard Ballroom dancing, and then New Vogue National Champions in Canberra in 2014.

L: Greg & Dinah on the dance floor and R: as New Vogue National Champions, Canberra, 2014

Greg is also passionate gardener, and he is particularly proud of his peony roses. These are planted where there was once a magnificent rose garden. He pulled the rose bushes out because he got tired of everyone pinching them. They still steal his peonies, but less so as many people don't like the smell of them, particularly the tree peonies. Greg grows his peonies and other flowers to beautify his neighbourhood, not to exhibit, and he is delighted when people leave notes in his letterbox telling him how much they appreciate his garden and that they look forward to seeing what he will plant next.

One of the projects Greg finished in his brief retirement was a family history that he had started in 1974. Producing this cost a lot of time and money, but he is proud of the record he compiled and published in 2023 for his family. Only four copies exist: one for himself and one each for his three children – Daniel, a teacher at Sacred Heart College, Alex, who trained as a nurse like his father, but hated it and is now a firefighter, and Olivia who is a mother of two girls. His two sons live in Launceston and his daughter in Victoria.

While making time for family remains a priority for Greg, he thinks his decision to return to the workforce is a good one. 'I still have something to give!' he says, 'and I still want to be involved in the care of people's lives.' In his role at adaptCARE he will do this through training, mentoring and building confidence in staff practice and safe decision-making and he will help strengthen clinical resources, tools and frameworks so everyone feels best equipped and supported in their roles. Importantly for Greg, there will be no night duty, no on call and no shiftwork required. A win-win scenario for all.