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## Upfront

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**TWO**

**OF US**

STORY BY *Dani Valent* PHOTOGRAPH BY *Josh Robenstone*

**MICHELLE:** Our friendship began when I invited her to our wedding. We wanted to make friends, increase our social circle. She was easy to talk to, but she's quieter, not as boisterous, more of a lady. I'm out there, a bit of a comedian. Joy became a big manager where we worked. I had to respect her position and what she said, not that I always agreed. Knowing Joy, though, you took heed. She might tell me I was a bit harsh in a meeting and she would be right.

Joy will think very carefully before she speaks, whereas I don't have many boundaries. I was always learning from her leadership skills. In life, too. I might say to a friend, "You've got a hair on your chin, can I pull it out?" Words just come out. I have learnt to sit back and listen.

Palliative care is a really rewarding job where you feel needed, can help people and bring a little light into their life; it's not all seriousness. I could make jokes with patients, have them laughing like mad: "Are you dying for a wash?" Nurses are not very good at debriefing but if I came in from a family where a child had died, one of those hard cases and it was really bothering me, I might tell Joy and that would be enough. She might say I did a good job. But we wouldn't talk about it too much.

We planned to have our children together. I got pregnant. She got pregnant. Unfortunately, I lost mine. Our relationship had a little parting because I wasn't coping: sharing the joy and the sadness was very difficult. We had space for a couple of years. Then she had her second child and I had my first. We were at an occasion together and we had the best night

## Nurses Michelle Clancy (left), 61, and Joy Jarratt, 60, moved to Australia from Yorkshire in the 1980s to work in palliative care. Now retired, they spend every day together, walking, shopping, travelling and talking, talking, talking.

**J**OY: Michelle and I lived a few streets from each other in England, went to the same university and nursed at the same hospital, but we were always a year apart and had never met. When I moved to Australia in 1989, I had two contacts: one was Michelle. I was working in Frankston, in Victoria, and she was nearby at Rosebud. I went out to one of my first clients and the gentleman said to me, "I'm crook and off me tucker." I asked Michelle what he meant. She said, "Oh, he's not well and isn't eating."

Because I was new to Australia, she said, "Come to my wedding, meet some people." Our friendship flourished from there. I liked her immediately. She was the type of person I was used to. It was hard leaving everyone behind in the UK and I got a bit of that back with Michelle. Our children have grown up together, we socialise and holiday together. We've been to Bali, Thailand, Hawaii, Santorini. Since we've retired [to the same coastal Victorian town], we go walking every day, have lunch, go shopping. We've started playing golf. We've tried bowls. We shop till we drop. We like a bargain.

I got into palliative care nursing after my mum died at home of cancer when I was only 22. I wanted to support people when they most need your help. It's so rewarding, a privilege to

know you make a difference. Michelle is truly one of the best palliative-care nurses I've ever come across. She shows such empathy. She'll spend the time with you, hold your hand, share her knowledge and experience and always be calm. It's nice having someone who understands the business because it can be stressful. You get to know families and it pulls at your heart strings. We can support each other.

We were pregnant at the same time, but Michelle lost her baby. I didn't realise that she was struggling, that it was painful for her to see me. We didn't fall out, but our paths separated. I didn't appreciate what she was going through. A couple of years later, she had her baby and we picked up where we'd left off. We put it in the past, we didn't talk about it then. It's the English way to not talk about things, but that's changed. We're Aussies now.

Michelle and I saw people die very young or not get to retirement. We promised each other we would have our bucket list and do absolutely everything we wanted to do. Fortunately, our husbands get on well, too. We've nearly ticked off all the places we want to go. Now Michelle's got her camper and I've got my caravan, so we're going to start travelling around Australia. You only get one chance at life.

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ever, we laughed and laughed. From there, we've been alongside each other all the way.

When you get to this time in your life, you know who the good friends are. Joy's always there. Friends are your sanity. If a woman hasn't got genuine friends, she's missing out on an awful lot. You can let go with your girlfriends, say things they're not going to tell you off about.

She's mostly organised, but she can be scatty. We were in the shopping centre and she kept seeing a sign for a lift and thinking it was a toilet; we were laughing like anything. By the time we actually found the toilet, we were dying for it! I said, "You're an idiot, you are." That's the relationship we've got.

She has a protective instinct as a friend. We were walking up Kilcunda way, talking, talking. And suddenly Joy grabbed me really tight: "Michelle, stop!" She'd seen a snake. I wanted to run, but she told me to stay still. I trusted her and, after a while, the snake went back into the bush.

I think working in palliative care makes me less unhappy and grumpy. You learn to appreciate a flower, you will look at the skies, stars, walk down a road and enjoy fresh air. Every day is a bonus. You know all you need is love, friends and health.

Me and Joy, we worked out we've got a 20-year window. So we say, "What can we do now?" We want to do those things together, fly to LA, enjoy life. Nobody knows what tomorrow will bring. ■