

Care and comfort by the sea



Rick and Sharon Pardon with their newborn son, Ethan. (Inset: Little Ethan, a month before being diagnosed with a malignant brain tumour.)

To have a sick child is distressing. To have that child diagnosed with a life-limiting illness is devastating. And then to have that child die is an absolute tragedy.

Since opening its doors in 2001, Bear Cottage has cared for over 340 children with life-limiting illnesses, some of whom have had many respite visits. 130 of these children have passed away. Here is a personal account from one father, Rick Pardon, who wanted to share his experience at Bear Cottage with his first born child, Ethan.

"On 30 May 2003, our world was turned upside down. Our only child at the time, three-month-old Ethan, was diagnosed with a malignant brain tumour at The Children's Hospital at Westmead."

"Although the care Ethan received

at The Children's Hospital at Westmead was excellent, the emotional and physical toll on my wife Sharon and I was enormous. We both stopped working to devote our time to caring for him, taking 12-hour shifts each, and time spent together was rare."

"Night time was the worst, with the sounds of medical equipment, alarms and nurses making their regular rounds. Our nerves were fragile and our health was understandably failing due to the enormous stress of our situation."

"Then one day, Bear Cottage was mentioned to us, described as a special location that offered respite care for the child and family, a place to spend quality time together – we soon found that it was so much more."

"When we arrived at Bear Cottage, we were struck with the peace and

tranquility. Bear Cottage looked and felt like a big house rather than a hospital. It was perched on a hill in Manly with magnificent views of the ocean. Nurses did not wear uniforms, each room had a family bed where parents could sleep with their child nearby and there was a common dining room for families to enjoy meals together. For the first time, we felt as close to being a normal family, given the circumstances."

"Sadly, Ethan passed away in July 2003. Although we will never get over the sadness of his loss in our hearts, being at Bear Cottage allowed us to spend those final precious months of our son's life with him in a calm and peaceful family environment. Sharon and I continue to take great comfort in this."

Rick's moving account of his child's death and the precious last days that they shared with him really brings home the value of a place like Bear Cottage and the significant difference it makes to families in this situation.

An initiative of The Children's Hospital at Westmead, Bear Cottage is the only children's hospice in NSW and all services are provided free of charge to families. Each year, it costs over \$1.7 million to run Bear Cottage and this is entirely funded by donations from our generous supporters. If you would like more information on Bear Cottage, please call (02) 9976 8300 or visit www.bearcottage.chw.edu.au 🐾

