



Echoes of the Good Samaritan

Mark is not paid for what he does but the rewards are boundless

The alarm wakes me at 4 o'clock – I quietly creep downstairs, have breakfast, wash and dress so that I don't wake my wife. I leave the house with my flask and packed lunch and drive to pick up passengers in Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire or Cardiganshire. I may need to drive them to Glangwili, Withybush or Morriston for dialysis by 7 o'clock or perhaps radiotherapy, chemotherapy or outpatients in Singleton, Velindre, Glangwili or UCHW Cardiff. The journey may be 10, 20 or even 70 miles away. There are also the more local runs to hospitals such as Prince Philip, Amman Valley or Neath Port Talbot. Often, I will drive for more than 300 miles over 13-14 hours in one day. Two days is enough for me – I enjoy my retirement!

I am a Volunteer Hospital Transport driver (Ambulance Cars). I use my own car to transport people to and from hospitals – for X-rays, physiotherapy, radiotherapy, other treatment, admittance or discharge. This supports the structured Non-Emergency Transport System of big white ambulances that we all take for granted. Patients who can't, or shouldn't, drive often need help to get to hospital because of our poor public transport system, or, perhaps, because they live in isolated farms or small holdings that may have seemed an idyllic bargain when they moved there from the city and were younger and healthier.

There are lots of us, all volunteers, and we drive millions of miles throughout Wales every year.

Generally, when my passengers hear my south-eastern accent, they assume that I cannot understand or speak Welsh. This isn't the case and has led to a few hilarious and surprised moments.

Why do I do it? I want to help out in society and I enjoy driving to interesting places and talking to some fascinating people. Many enjoy my company and that of their fellow passengers.

Some of my passengers say very little but I have had some memorable discussions and heard a few incredible life stories. Even my choice of listening to Classic FM is approved by most!

Sometimes the weather is horrific but seeing the sunrise over Cardigan Bay on a beautiful morning before picking up a patient, or looking down on Laugharne Castle after taking somebody home, more than makes up for the stress of driving along the motorways through the rain, wind and spray.