Social Services a perfect fit for Colleen

How does a nice girl from Warrnambool, Australia find her destiny at Lincoln Long Term Care?

"It's a long story," smiles Colleen Talkington, who came to America as a teenager and found both her soul mate and her professional calling in Lincoln County.

"I was a high school exchange student to Harrington and while I was here, met Gene Talkington. I went home for four months after school was over and I knew I had to come back."

The couple was married for over 20 years before Gene's death a few years back. With three kids to raise and a busy and fulfilling family life, Colleen says she has a lot to give — especially to area seniors.

"I love the geriatric population," says Colleen, who heads up the LTC Social Services Department. "I can't imagine working with anyone else." Her affinity for seniors was discovered as an adolescent. After the death of both her parents and a sister within a four-year span, she realized she was naturally drawn to older people. "I grew up so fast that I found I got along better with older people."

Starting her illustrious career in 1987 as an NA-C, Colleen worked the floor for three weeks before landing the full-time activities aid position working with then-activities director Kathy Campbell. She worked here for three years when a dream position at another facility opened up. Despite the "golden opportunity," Colleen found herself again in Davenport.

"I was back in a year," she laughs. "If you want to know how good things are at Lincoln Hospital, leave and come back. This is a great place to work and this crew is very good at what it does."

And social services is the ideal job for this common sense girl. "There's never a dull moment. We look at care from a psychosocial point of view. Are residents adjusting? Do they have mood swings or behavior problems? Are they terminally ill? Do they understand their rights as a patient? We deal with everything from roommate problems to missing laundry — those things that seem little to us, but are huge to a resident."

But it's easing the pain and confusion of the admission process that brings her the most professional satisfaction.

"It's frightening for families and individuals to come here, both socially and financially. Our job is to help ease that transition by making sure the families understand Medicare and Medicaid, how to fill out applications and all that. Kathy and I lessen the trauma."

Colleen says her greatest reward is the richness the residents here bring to her life — not what she does for them.

"They have so many memories. They make me realize how much I have compared to the hard times they've been through. It makes me very grateful to them." And we're grateful to Colleen!