



HOUSTON HOSPICE

Life Matters

A Publication of Houston Hospice



'Paws' to Celebrate

VOLUNTEERS

ALL HOUSTON HOSPICE VOLUNTEERS & THEIR GUESTS ARE INVITED

Saturday, May 21 at 1:30 pm
Houston Hospice
1905 Holcombe Blvd., Houston Texas

CELEBRATING ALL OUR WONDERFUL VOLUNTEERS AND HIGHLIGHTING OUR VOLUNTEER THERAPY PETS

To RSVP, kindly leave a message at 713-677-7121

Volunteer Newsletter

Cake and Smiles

Patsy Piner

Last month, Jenny, our pediatric team nurse, informed us that the mother of one of our pediatric patients was having a birthday. Jenny also told us this mom loved vanilla cake. The volunteer department decided to give her a little birthday party because, sadly, Jenny felt sure no one else would do anything for her.

With help from the Volunteer Fund, Elisa jumped into action, buying a cake with candles, a card and small gifts. Elisa and volunteer, Linda Martinson, made two trips before they found the birthday girl at home. Due to the neighborhood, the house where the mom lived with her mother and her own three young boys was surrounded by a fence and gate.

Elisa and Linda sang happy birthday to her and her children and handed the cake, card and gifts over the

top of the gate. The mom told them it was the only time anyone said Happy Birthday to her. Cake and smiles — what an experience.



Above: Volunteer Linda Martinson presents the cake.

It is such a privilege to serve our families. Thank you Lord for these precious opportunities.

A Matter of Life and Death

Andrew Kragie | Published December 9, 2013 in *The Chronicle of Duke University*

Exam week is a great time to think about death. As wide-eyed freshmen forswear human contact and move into Perkins study rooms, I wonder: What will happen after I die? Not in the religious-spiritual-metaphysical sense — rather, what will they say at my memorial service? Will the service be short and perfunctory, or will they raise a toast to a life well lived?



Three years ago this month, my grandfather's family and friends gathered to honor a life well lived. My Grandpa Herb graduated from college and earned a master's degree — so he passed exams, like I hope to do this week. But when he died, his obituary didn't mention his GPA. No one quoted from his midterm essays at the memorial service. Instead his obituary promised that his loved ones "will carry on his joyful spirit and unshakeable commitment to family." His legacy was not grades, degrees or credentials. It was joy and family. For instance, my grandfather taught us grandboys how to be family men. He treasured his four siblings for all of his 81 years. During college, he lived with his sister and helped raise his beloved nieces. He made sure that our extended family gathered every summer for raucous family reunions — you really reinforce the ties that bind when you're bound together for a three-legged race! In his last years, Grandpa talked with his brother Ken every week. Men don't often

talk on the phone, so that really says something.

Grandpa was so close with his siblings that I actually believed one of his favorite stories. Food was tight in the Great Depression years, he reminded us. Sometimes there wasn't much for breakfast. So each morning his mother cooked the one piece of bacon that the family could spare and

knit it with a length of twine, like a hook on a fishing line. She lined up her five children from oldest to youngest and moved down the line, dipping the bacon into each child's mouth to give them a taste before reeling it in and moving to the next child. It's embarrassing to admit that I believed this story until a few years ago — birds do this, not humans! I think the story's credibility stems from my grandpa's love for his siblings. Grandpa instilled that sense of family in each of his five grandboys, with one difference — we get our own slices of bacon now.

In "Shower the People," James Taylor sings that you should "shower the people you love with love." Grandpa excelled at sharing love as a father and a grandfather. He had a particular style of fatherhood; skeptics might call it spoiling, but I prefer the term "doting." The day after he died, my aunt shared a story from her childhood. Every week

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Volunteer Spotlight

Houston Hospice Volunteer of the Year—Sylvia Valverde

When Sylvia Valverde retired from a 33-year career as an educator in 2011, she knew volunteering with hospice patients and families was what she wanted to do. A personal experience prompted her to seek opportunities to help through Houston Hospice where her empathy and commitment to service have made her a perfect fit.

Because she's bilingual, speaking English and Spanish, Sylvia often helps translate for patients and families. She enjoys her conversations and says seeing patients and their loved ones smile is priceless. "I enjoy visiting with the patients and family members and they like knowing that Houston Hospice is very special to me because my mother was a patient here. That experience connects us and lets them know that I have personally experienced hospice care. While every death is different, I can somehow relate and understand what they're going through."

Sylvia says the biggest surprise about her volunteer work is how much she loves it. "The patients have given me tremendous insight about living life to the fullest and that the dying process is not to be feared. I've especially been blessed to give babies and toddlers love and care in their final days when their parents haven't been able to be present. That has been my most rewarding experience."

Her mother's experience inspired Sylvia to volunteer. She says the care her mother received in 2003 from the nurses, doctors and other staff



Left: Sylvia was honored May 12, 2016 at the Salute to Volunteers Awards Luncheon hosted by the Texas Medical Center Volunteer Services Council.

members made a big impression on her. "I always said I wanted to give back when I had the opportunity. I retired from education in August 2011, and I immediately contacted Houston Hospice and began the training that September. God has blessed my life tremendously and He calls us to be servants—this is why I'm here—to serve."

Patsy Piner says it wouldn't be Friday morning at Houston Hospice without Sylvia Valverde's lovely smile and sweet spirit. "Whether she is passing out pillowcases to patients, training new volunteers or sharing her delicious homemade goodies

with the staff, she is a blessing to everyone she visits. We are so fortunate that she chose to volunteer with us."



Volunteer Training

June 11, 18 and 25

From 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. at

1905 Holcombe Blvd, Houston

Contact [Patsy](#) or [Elisa](#) to reserve your spot!

713-477-7128

A Matter of Life and Death

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or so, my grandmother would spend a much-deserved evening out with her bridge club. And when the cat's away, the mice will play. Grandpa Herb was quite the mouse. After my grandma left, my mom and aunt raced down to the den and encountered a sight for sore eyes: a veritable feast of pretzels and Pepsi! Grandpa's two girls spent those evenings munching happily, watching cartoons and basking in their dad's love.

If Herb spoiled his children, imagine how he treated his grandchildren! I'll never forget the many hours we spent in his workshop, toiling away on little woodworking projects. We shared endless cups of Arizona Iced Tea and never tired of watching "Walker, Texas Ranger" with him and my grandma. Once we were old enough (about 5) he treated us to covert sessions with his BB rifle. Oh, the adrenaline rush of shooting at a soda can from behind my grandmother's flowers.

Herb died on a Monday after two weeks in hospital and hospice. The Saturday before he passed, I wrote in my journal that he was "radiating love." As his body weakened, he seemed to drift between two places. He was there in the hospital with us. But he also spent time somewhere else, somewhere we couldn't join him. And from that



place he brought back love, overwhelming waves of love that emanated from his hospital bed and gently crashed against all those around him—his wife who held his hand, his daughters who stroked his hair, his grandsons who dabbed his lips with water in those last days. You couldn't enter his room without feeling bright rays pierce your soul. I cried, but not quite out of sorrow. I cried because there is nothing else you can do in response to that kind of all-consuming love. You must simply hold it while you can and remember it forevermore. If I could talk with my grandpa this exam week, I think he would tell me to hit the books.

But he would remind me that loving my family and friends matters so much more than studying for finals. That doesn't make exams easy, but it does remind me that grades will not define my legacy. So I raise my glass to toast a good man; he passed on three years ago, but his love endures. And I raise my glass to toast the only things that are truly a matter of life and death—our lives, and our deaths.

Training Gives End-Of-Life Insights to Hospice Volunteers

An AP Exchange feature by Jessica Bies, Mankato Free Press

The body is smart. It knows how to give birth and be born, how to breathe, exhale and keep itself alive. It also knows how to die, Kim Rotchadl said.

"Our bodies know how to shut down," the hospice coordinator told a small group of recruits recently. She was leading a volunteer training session at Madison East Center, the Free Press of Mankato reports. A model of care for people with terminal illnesses, hospice and palliative care involves a team-orientated approach to medical care and pain management, as well as emotional and spiritual well-being.

Volunteers are an important part of that system, Rotchadl said. While nurses and medical professionals treat the body, hospice volunteers provide additional comfort and support. "The ideal volunteer is someone who understands that the transition toward the end of life can be a beautiful experience," Rotchadl tells people interested in becoming part of the team. "It's truly a special journey for all involved."

It can also be tough, she admitted, which is why volunteers are required to go through a three-day, formal training process where conversations, lectures, role-playing, team projects and instructional videos prepare them for both palliative and hospice care. They learn about bereavement, body mechanics, communication, feeding, infection control, pain management and proper transfer techniques.

They also discuss what to do when someone is just ready to die. "Letting the patient dictate what they can do and letting them withdraw," is often part of the job, Rotchadl said. The body is smart. It knows what to do and when it's ready to shut down. "They aren't dying because they aren't eating, they aren't eating because they're

dying," she said. Which can be tough in of itself, because the patient's family may not be ready to let them go. "Caregivers often see that as very sad," she said. "They want their loved ones to get out of bed."

It swings the other way, too. Some patients in the hospice program "graduate" and may be able to live more independently. (You generally must be within six months of death to be eligible for most hospice programs.) In fact, hospice care may prolong the lives of some terminally ill patients. In a 2010 study, the median survival time for survivors getting palliative care (which involves more intensive medical care and can be used at any stage of illness) was 2.7 months longer than those receiving standard care. The mean survival time for hospice patients was 29 days longer, according to a 2007 study. (That figure can differ depending on the type of disease involved.)

Regardless, signing up for hospice care does not mean giving up hope, Rotchadl said. "Now my hope is I'm going to die pain free, that this is a pain free process," she said, putting herself in the mindset of a patient. "That I'm surrounded by family, that I don't become a burden, that I don't linger too long."

For the most part, Rotchadl's small group of volunteers seemed prepared to join the program after their second day of training. "I don't feel like I'm totally prepared yet," Peggy Kotek interjected. They all came from different backgrounds. Kotek is volunteering because she has two friends that are already part of the program. They've had good experiences, she said, and recommended she try it out. She's also taught childbirth classes before, and sees this as the opposite side of the spectrum.

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MISSION STATEMENT

Houston Hospice provides uncompromising, compassionate end-of-life care to patients and families in our community.

Through the efforts of specially trained and highly skilled interdisciplinary teams of health care professionals and volunteers, Houston Hospice patients and their families are guided through the process of illness by receiving clinical care, psychosocial support, spiritual guidance and volunteer assistance.

Houston Hospice
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Training Gives End-Of-Life Insights to Hospice Volunteers

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"You come into the world going toward the light and you leave the world going toward the light," Jeannine Goodnough said, nodding in agreement. She volunteered for the program because she's currently unemployed and feels like she has enough time to commit to it.

Jon Kearney, a Minnesota State University student, also has friends who've volunteered for the program. "A lot of college kids are always looking for volunteer jobs," he said. "... I think this is making more of an immediate impact."

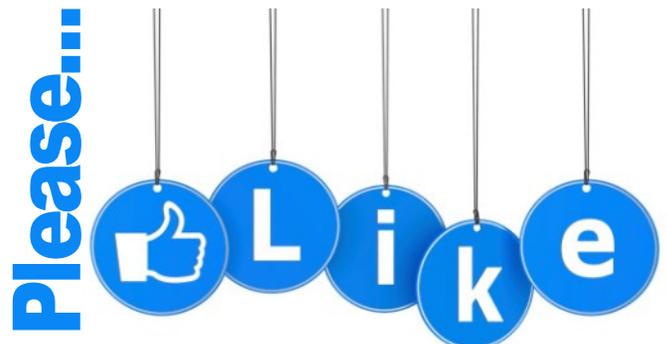
Charlotte Dobie retired from the Trimont Health Care Center (which is a nursing home) about one year ago. She's seen hospice at work, but now gets to be a part of it. "It took a year for me to figure out this is what I wanted to do next," she said.

Retired physical therapist Joan Lucas, has been volunteering since 1987. She told the new volunteers on a Friday this month that it's a difficult program to be part of, but also an extremely rewarding one. One of her hardest deaths yet happened just this summer, she said. A 37-year-old man Lucas was caring for died one of the mornings she was scheduled to visit him. She didn't find out until she knocked on the front door. "I knew I had to go in," Lucas said. "I said a little prayer that I'd know what to say and how long to stay."

She walked out of the house later that day with no regrets. "I felt so good about it," Lucas said. "When I left, I thought 'this is why we do this.' It is hard, but it makes you really realize what a great thing it is."



Dr. Joel Policzer checked on Lillian Landry in this Oct. 30, 2009 photo, in the hospice wing of an Oakland Park, Fla., hospital. Unlike most of Policzer's patients she made end-of-life decisions. She wants little care that will prolong her life. She even gets a drink of whiskey in the hospice — something that she wanted. J PAT CARTER | AP photo file



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