Notes From the Volunteer Department

Every summer we meet with a new class of hopeful volunteers wanting to share their time and talents with hospice. They come from all walks of life, some are students, some are retirees. Some are studying chaplains, music therapists, and just those who have been touched by hospice in their personal lives. And while not all will become volunteers, we are always glad to meet and share a piece of hospice with them.

12 Things I Wish I Could Tell My Mother

To begin the conversation about end-of-life and find an empathetic space for families, in volunteer training volunteers are asked to write a loved one a letter to tell them the things they never got a chance to say. Author Meghan O'Rourke, author of The Long Goodbye, deals with this subject as she writes to her mother things she never got a chance to say.

O’Rourke said she bought a 1940’s-style fake leopard-spotted coat that matched one her mother wore during her childhood, “I loved resting my head on the shoulder of the one you had when I was a little girl. That thigh-length coat seemed like the only kind of coat a grown-up woman should own.” She also said she was sorry she never told her mother and never did write her that final letter, “It’s impossible to summarize love. There’s no way to do it. Even though I knew you were dying I couldn’t possibly say goodbye enough, couldn’t look at you enough; you seemed so beautiful even though you were disappearing, aging before my eyes. I just wanted to touch every eyelash around your eyes, to keep you in my sight, and I had no words for that.”

Read the entire article at www.oprah.com/relationships/Things-I-Wish-I-Could-Tell-My-Mother
t was by far the toughest time of his life, but David Taylor coped with a loss the only way he knew how. The day after his mother lost her battle with Stage 4 brain cancer, Taylor was back behind a desk in a hotel. The former Montana State standout cornerback, who describes himself as having a tough mentality and an ability to drown out problems with work, stopped going to church. He buried himself in day-to-day tasks, always keeping his mind on business and life goals instead of addressing his issues with his faith.

Bozeman Daily Chronicle Sports Writer, Michael Appelgate, wrote about Taylor’s transformation from grief to determination writing that what Taylor didn’t realize was depression was slowly setting in. In October of last year, however, he made a change. Taylor, a Galveston, Texas, native rediscovered his faith, and his year-old clothing line, Godly Creations Clothing, has grown. He has opened his first store in nearby Hitchcock. There was no intention to start a Christian clothing line, Taylor admitted, but it’s something he’s embraced.

His mother was diagnosed in March 2013 after suffering a seizure. His brother called to deliver the news when Taylor was living and working in California. “My greatest fear in my life was losing my mother,” he said. “She was my best friend and we talked almost every day.” Within a month, he moved back to Texas despite his mother’s objections. In his mind, there was no question he was moving back. She died in May with Taylor by her side. “Losing her was like losing everything, to be honest,” Taylor said. “I don’t talk about it a lot because it’s a big thing to me. She was just an awesome person just inside and out.”

He started his clothing line in May 2014. Taylor said he came up with his idea for a logo in a dream, then sold 50 shirts the same day. He donates a portion of his profits to Houston Hospice, which cared for his mother in her final days. It was there that Taylor’s eyes were opened to how many people struggle financially with supporting sick loved ones.

“I want to be known as David who started a business and helped so many people and brought people to God,” he said. “One of my goals with this company is to donate a million dollars to Houston Hospice. I want to leave something for this world.”

(Read the full article at www.bozemandailychronicle.com.)

Visit David Taylor’s store at 8723 Hwy 6 in Hitchcock, Texas or shop online at www.godlycreationsclothing.com.

CHAP

As many of you know Houston Hospice is Community Health Accreditation Partner (CHAP) certified. This is an accreditation that we go above and beyond our regular certifications to do. We were audited this summer to ensure that we continue to meet CHAP standards. Learn more about CHAP at www.chapinc.org.

Hurricane Policy

As we enter hurricane season, remember to use your best judgement when coming into the unit or visiting with a patient at home. If you cannot visit due to weather please contact the patient’s family and let them know your reason and next projected visit date. You can read more about this policy in your volunteer workbook. Please contact ppiner@houstonhospice.org with questions.
Welcome New Staff Member Elisa Covarrubias!

W e are pleased to announce that Elisa Covarrubias is our new Volunteer Coordinator! You may already know Elisa because she has been a Houston Hospice volunteer for nearly five years. Elisa plans to continue to volunteer with our Angel Bags program, making care package deliveries to homecare patients. She is also a long-time volunteer at Star of Hope and The Dispute Resolution Center.

Previously, Elisa worked as an HR specialist with a large multi-subsidiary engineering company. Before that, she gained valuable customer service experience working for United Healthcare as a provider and member service representative.

She has a bachelors degree from the University of Houston, with a major in Political Science and is currently completing requisite undergraduate coursework towards gaining entry into a dual Economics/Social Sciences graduate studies program at the University of Houston.

Elisa is bilingual, with oral and written fluency in English and Spanish. When she’s not working to make our community a better place, she enjoys cooking and running. Elisa has a 15-year-old son who is interested in becoming a surgeon, and who currently enjoys customizing Legos and making props from raw materials.

Volunteer Spotlight—Heidi Bode-Paffenholz

by Ann James

It’s not uncommon to hear someone say, “I had never heard of hospice care before.” And so it was with Heidi Bode-Paffenholz back in 2004. She was in the midst of undergoing her own cancer treatments when she befriended a woman experiencing the same. “You get to know a lot of patients when you are doing chemo and radiation,” she said. The woman died without hospice care, which fueled Heidi’s desire to help others during their end-of-life journeys. She researched and chose Houston Hospice because it is a nonprofit.

In 2006 she became a Houston Hospice volunteer and felt visiting people in their homes would be the best fit for her. Heidi enjoys being a homecare volunteer, although she visits the in-patient unit occasionally when her patients are transferred there. She can’t recall exactly how many patients she has had the privilege of seeing over the years, and many she will never forget found a place in her heart. She spoke fondly of two who greatly impacted her life.

Helping Friends Cope With the Death of Pet

Grieving is a difficult process, but grieving the loss of a pet can be uncharted territory. Tripp Carter, the Co-Founder of Bradshaw-Carter Funeral Home, writes in The Grieving Process: Helping Friends Cope with the Passing of a Pet that we all have personal methods of coping. Regardless of the circumstances, there are steps friends can take to help someone handle the loss of a pet. First and foremost, be available to your friend who just lost a beloved animal.

The worst feeling any person can experience is reaching out to somebody who is not there. If you were unavailable when first contacted, make every effort to get in touch with and visit the grieving friend. This helps validate their feelings and makes them feel appreciated. To read the full article you can visit www.bradshawcarter.com/help-friends-cope-passing-of-pet.
As I sat by the bedside in hospice room 101, a feeling of helplessness swept over me. I had been here before when I held the hand of my own precious mother as she lay dying in this hospice. Now that I worked at a hospice, I thought I should have some answers, be able to do something meaningful, be in control. But I had no answers, I couldn’t think of anything to do, and I certainly was not in control. The longer I sat and held the hand of my dying mother-in-law, a wonderful woman and a part of my life for more than thirty years, the more it became apparent that I was doing all I could do...I was being her daughter-in-law.

We, the Texas Piners, were the last to arrive at the hospice. Agony was etched on the faces of my father-in-law and his daughters when they saw us. My husband, Brad, the youngest, went to his mother, his lifelong champion, and whispered that he would not leave her. He held her hand, kissed her cheek and gently smoothed her hair. Though she was unresponsive and unable to acknowledge his actions, we all knew she was probably waiting for his arrival. His presence, his acknowledgment of love, was a healing balm. We sat mesmerized. I will never look at the family members in our hospice in the same manner again, because I have been with people I would never see again, who have been one of them, twice. I know the warmth of a smile and a gentle touch. I have been a hospice nurse, and I have never heard and included details that followed was a precious gift that my daughters and me surrounded her. She gently, quietly quit breathing while we were reminiscing about days gone by. Her niece, Linda, noticed first. She checked her breathing, looked at me, and we fled the room each with a mission. Her two beloved men stayed behind, fulfilling the efforts to take care of one another, an informal schedule evolved. In small groups, we left the hospice for about two hours at a time, needing to go, but hating every minute away. Life became tedious for us as we waited. As Mom Piner began to slip away, we closed ranks. Perhaps we thought if we covered her with our love we would be able to keep death out of hospice room 101. We shut the door and closed the blinds. Everyone had read and reread the pamphlet describing the signs of approaching death. We stared at Mom’s chest, counted breaths and held our own as we waited for her next. Each breath a triumph. Her warm, pink hands became more and more precious to hold. Waiting became hard work.

Thursday morning, as her daughter and granddaughters tried to sleep on a sofa bed in the family room, death came. A small group, her husband of almost sixty-three years, her husband who was her baby, her niece, Linda and me surrounded her. She gently, quietly quit breathing while we were reminiscing about days gone by. Her niece, Linda, noticed first. She checked her breathing, looked at me, and we fled the room each with a mission. Her two beloved men stayed behind, fulfilling the promise not to leave her side. Linda went to get the nurse, and I ran to the family room.

After making calls to friends and family members, we gathered back in room 101, almost as if a schedule had been issued, and waited for the chaplain to lead a family prayer. His prayer was beautiful but long. We began to fidget. Our attention spans were shrinking. We were unable to focus. The chaplain offered his condolences then he sat down next to Mr. Piner. He put his arm around this strong, but heartbroken, eighty-four year old man and said, “Tell me how you met Bonnie.” The story that followed was a precious gift that my daughters and I had never heard and included details that even my husband did not know. We sat mesmerized as my father-in-law told of a basketball game and barn dance.

It was time to leave hospice room 101. We needed to move our family headquarters back to the Piner home. Volunteers stood at the door, like long time friends and waved good-bye. Slowly, with tears in my eyes, I left The Hospice of Cincinnati behind me for a second time.

I will never look at the family members in our hospice in the same manner again, because I have been one of them, twice. I know the warmth of a smile and a gentle touch. I have been with people I would never see again, who waited quietly in the wings to help. I have cried on the shoulder of a person whose name I did not know. I know the agony of needing to leave but the inability to go. I know the frustration of wanting to say something, but not being able to find the words. I know the feeling of sleep deprived but unable to rest. I know the importance of someone asking how I was doing and waiting to hear my answer. I have been too tired to pray for my family but have felt the assurance that others were praying for us. I know the pain of asking how much time is left and not wanting to hear the answer. I have lived in a hospice room and waited for death.

Written in loving memory of my wonderful mother-in-law
Bonnette Fay Piner
August 13, 1915 - August 20, 1998