



HOUSTON HOSPICE  
*Life Matters*

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A HOSPICE NURSE EXPERIENCES THE OTHER SIDE OF HOSPICE CARE WITH HER NFL HUSBAND

I graduated from nursing school relatively late in life, at age 42, with the intention of working for Houston Hospice. My father had been on service in 2010 and, like so many with whom I work; I was inspired by this painful, albeit beautiful experience, and felt called to be a hospice nurse. I volunteered for Houston Hospice prior to graduation, hoping to become familiar with hospice services. After working a year on med surge at our local hospital, I was able to get on the Houston Hospice El Campo Team as an Admissions Nurse.

At this point, I must disclose that three months after graduating from nursing school, in September 2012, my dear husband and best friend, Bryan, was diagnosed with Hodgkin's Lymphoma.

Bryan is phenomenal – a professional football player in the NFL, rancher and surfer; this man embodies strength. The morning before his diagnosis at the ER, he mowed the yard with a collapsed lung! Bryan fought through chemo for six months and when told that his cancer was unresponsive to treatment, he continued fighting on his own terms; holistically and spiritually. When I was hired by Lisa Machen, RN, PCM in July of 2013, she was well aware of Bryan's condition, however she knew that my heart was in hospice and she believed, rightly so, that when his disease progression began causing issues, she and the El Campo Team would be here for Bryan and me both. In December of 2013, Bryan's cancer was progressing to the point that hospice care was needed and both Dr. Barker and Lisa Machen came to our home to assess and admit him onto service.

It is difficult to describe the blurred lines that can occur in these kinds of situations. Bryan's Case Manager, Jackie Hooper, RN, is my friend, my mentor, my co-worker, and...my husband's hospice nurse. Bryan is her patient but he is my life. I am able to be a calm patient advocate for all of our patients – but not for my husband. The phone calls, the hugs, the voice of reason given by Jackie through this process thus far are beyond words. In addition to feeling like I've been emotional for our team, Bryan is what we would all describe as a "difficult patient"! He may sleep 18 hours a day and then get up and decide to chop down a tree... or disappear to go fishing for hours without his phone. Trying to keep him safe and manage his symptoms, while encouraging his autonomy has been an arduous effort. Jackie has been wonderful at developing a rapport with him, educating Bryan and supporting his efforts to 'be a man' to his fullest. As a case manager, Jackie is a wonderful example of patient advocacy. She is proactive and yet equanimous at her core.

And then there is me, with a husband who's a patient on hospice, still learning and finding my footing in my chosen field. Jackie, Lisa, and the rest of our team, have exemplified patience and support for me. Sharing hugs, a kind ear, and special notes and cards, they have managed to help me feel grounded and protected throughout this painful process. Pat Matthes, not a nurse but a wonderful social worker, has been such a pillar of support and reassurance. Victoria and Karen in our office, have been blessings as well, always available to share a hug or laugh with me. And then there's Dr. Barker, what a true angel.

Knowing the 'end result' of Bryan's illness does not lessen the journey that we are on. I truly cannot fathom walking this road without the Houston Hospice El Campo Team. The gratitude and love I feel for Jackie and Lisa, and the whole team is humbling and inspiring. These nurses are walking beside me, pulling ahead, and pushing behind when

needed. I am inspired by them professionally and personally, and I am so very grateful.

Krista Caldwell, RN, Admission Nurse Houston Hospice El Campo

Founded in 1980, Houston Hospice has evolved from an alternative, grass roots concept to a leader in hospice care for people of all ages and walks of life. Houston's oldest, largest, independent hospice, is a 501 (c) (3) organization that is community-based, community-supported and not for profit. Thanks to the support of corporate and private sponsors, Houston Hospice serves Texans from all socio-economic groups irrespective of a person's ethnicity, beliefs or ability to pay. Hospice care is provided in-home and in residential facilities throughout Harris, Waller, Fort Bend, Montgomery, Wharton, Matagorda, Austin, Colorado, Brazoria and Jackson Counties. In-patient and respite care is provided through the Margaret Cullen Marshall Hospice Care Center located in the Texas Medical Center.