



HOUSTON HOSPICE
Life Matters

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Helping in Difficult Times: Margaret Stone Named Volunteer of the Year
A Home for Max and Inspiration from Poet Emerson Define Stone's Volunteerism

Anyone driving in Houston knows that trying to merge or turn into traffic carries frustration when other drivers don't give way. Thankfully, there are people like Margaret Stone who would not hesitate letting you in. Displaying random acts of kindness is what Stone believes can make the world a better place - an act that makes someone else's life easier is worthwhile. That outlook has guided her previous work as a nurse and an 11-year volunteer for Houston Hospice.

Every year, Houston Hospice recognizes one volunteer who goes above and beyond as Volunteer of the Year. In April, Houston Hospice will honor Stone as its top volunteer, someone who has met and exceeded the award's criteria. She will also be recognized by the Texas Medical Center Volunteer Services Council during its May 17 Salute to Volunteers Luncheon.

Stone's volunteerism has no geographical limits. She has helped Hurricane Harvey relief efforts at home and will be headed with her church to a Puerto Rico pummeled by Hurricane Irma's catastrophic wrath and, like Houston, still recovering from the fall 2017 hit.

In general, volunteers at Houston Hospice meet rigorous requirements in place with extensive training to fully prepare volunteers for the challenge of working with seriously ill patients and their families. Training covers listening skills, grief and loss, the medical aspects of end-of-life, and the psychosocial and spiritual aspects of care. Houston Hospice recruits and trains more than 100 volunteers a year.

In her remarks to volunteers last year, recent Chairman of the Houston Hospice Board of Directors, Dr. Michele Sabino said: "You, our Houston Hospice Volunteers, are an integral part of the hospice team, filling roles that range from direct contact with patients to providing clerical and fundraising support for the organization."

Houston Hospice Manager of Volunteer Services Elisa Covarrubias said Stone has demonstrated a high level of commitment that's been nonstop for at least five or more consecutive years: "Her dedication really stands out." Stone reflected on the impact that volunteering has had on her life.

How she got into volunteering

I think the main impetus for my volunteering was the death of my mother. Her loss not only got me more involved in volunteering, but it was also the catalyst for my eventually being a hospice nurse. Somewhere I either read or heard the wonderful advice that if you want to take your mind off of your own problems, focus outward, on helping others in need. After her death I began volunteering for Steven's House and also Bo's Place. A little over four years after her death I would begin working as a hospice nurse, with my start date actually being her birthday.

Her history of volunteerism, plans to help Puerto Rico on mission trip

I have volunteered for Citizens for Animal Protection, Steven's House, Bo's Place, my church, Cy-Hope, Child Advocates and Houston Hospice. I have volunteered in disaster cleanup locally after flooding events and last year's hurricane, as well as mission trips for disaster cleanup in other cities/states. I am looking forward to volunteering on my church's mission trip to Puerto Rico this summer. We will be doing debris removal and helping rebuild a church and school, a vacation bible school and offer evangelism to those who need it. There are 50 of us going, including high school students and adults. With our younger volunteers it's important to emphasize that we are coming into someone else's space and we are here to help but need to be mindful of what kind of help people need so we can be effective with the human resources we deploy. For our high school students it's a great opportunity to learn about volunteering and experience helping others.

How volunteering at Houston Hospice is different

I had the privilege of working for Houston Hospice as a nurse for several years both full time and PRN, and I know firsthand that we have an incredible volunteer department and how valuable volunteers are to those we serve! Houston Hospice is a somewhat different volunteer experience because it can involve so many different aspects, but as volunteers, we must always be aware that we are coming in at a particularly stressful time in the lives of these patients and families. Sometimes the volunteers assist with fund raising and fun events during the year, or administrative tasks that keep the department running smoothly. Sometimes they are the face of the inpatient unit front desk, greeting worried friends and families coming to see their loved ones and at others, they are the quiet presence in a patient's room at the inpatient unit when no family is there. Many times volunteers serve in the patients' homes, to run errands or sit with or visit with patients while caregivers get out of the home for errands, appointments or to attend church services. There are volunteers who provide haircuts, massages, some who play musical instruments, some have service animals. Success isn't that the families really remember who we were specifically, but that they remember how much we were able to help them out in a difficult time.

What people inspire you?

I don't know that it's people that inspire me, but really, the actions of some people that are the inspiration. When helping with clean up after Hurricane Harvey, I was inspired by the kindness and thoughtfulness of people who came through the neighborhood with sack lunches they had made, for people they did not even know, because they wanted to help. I'm inspired by wealthy people who use their money to help other people. I'm inspired by people that have little to spare but are still willing to share what they can to help others in need. I'm inspired by people that speak out for what's right when that may not be a popular thing to do. I'm inspired by people who learn from their mistakes and share that with others. I'm inspired by people who have the honesty and integrity to do the right thing even when no one's looking. I'm inspired by people who don't give in to fear, but acknowledge it and keep on going. I'm inspired by people who really get that this life is not just about them, but about all of us, every one of us.

Why people should volunteer

People should volunteer because we are called to serve, to love your neighbor as yourself, to do unto others as you would have them do unto you. There are so many groups, causes and agencies that need our time and talents to meet the needs of those they serve. School districts, charities, non-profit organizations, churches, political groups, social justice issues, service organizations--there is a volunteer avenue that suits everyone's interests and abilities. Look for a cause that you have a passion for and see how you can help. I have felt fortunate to have more time to be able to volunteer, which many people don't have. This may not be the season of someone's life for volunteering due to other commitments, health issues or family caretaking. People working full time are limited in time commitments they can make, but even helping out for one event an agency has on a weekend may be just the perfect fit for you and them! Volunteering is such a gift for the people and organizations you serve, but it is also SO personally rewarding. Volunteering is often the answer to someone else's prayer for help.

A rewarding experience

Every volunteer experience is rewarding. You are making the way easier for someone else by your contribution, whether it's helping the volunteer staff get their tasks accomplished, or helping patients and families by going to the grocery store, sharing a conversation or letting a loved one get out to recharge for a little bit. I've done various things from delivering gift cards during the holidays to working at hospice events, to trimming trees/shrubs at a patient's home, and listening to music with or talking with patients while their families went to church or ran errands. I've done grocery shopping and played board games with some younger patients. Probably the most sacred service as a volunteer was assuring a patient I would either find her elderly dog the right home after she died, or that I would keep him as one of my own. Max now lives happily with a high school friend of mine and her mother, and it is a beautiful new chapter for the 11-year-old Yorkie. In the words of one of my favorite poems, Ralph Waldo Emerson concludes with, "...to know even one life has breathed easier because you lived. This is to have succeeded."

Spring skies

Stone originally studied forestry at Louisiana State University but switched her major to sociology. After graduating she added a degree in nursing. Prior to college at Spring High School, she shared that a frequent, entertaining sight for the area was the Goodyear Blimp. Her school was near the airship's base off of I-45 where it hovered after take offs and for landings.

About Houston Hospice: Nonprofit Houston Hospice was founded in 1980 and has grown from an alternative, grass roots concept to a leader in hospice care for people of all ages and walks of life. Care is provided to patients and families in private homes and in residential facilities throughout Austin, Brazoria, Colorado, Fort Bend, Harris, Jackson, Matagorda, Montgomery, Waller and Wharton Counties. Inpatient care is provided through the Margaret Cullen Marshall Hospice Care Center located in the [Texas Medical Center](#).

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