



HOUSTON HOSPICE
Life Matters

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Service of Remembrance Brings Closure for Hospice Worker

Every six months Gloria Garza coordinates a service of remembrance. Gloria's been putting together these biannual observances for 15 years; since she came to work for Houston Hospice in 2000. She invites families, makes sure the ceremony runs smoothly, and organizes a reception with food and punch. At the service on April 30, 2015 at St. Thomas' Episcopal Church in Wharton, 135 people were remembered. "This event means a lot to our families. They get the opportunity to see the staff that helped them with their loved ones again," said Gloria. She added, "And, we get to see how the families are doing. After the service, we walk over to the fellowship hall and have refreshments and the families talk to the staff and exchange stories, hugs, tears and appreciation for the care and for the service they just attended."

The services of remembrance began when hospice employees realized that both they and the community needed a way to honor their patients and to have closure. After fifteen years of planning some thirty services, the April 30 observance was different for Gloria. As usual prayers were recited, music was played, and, as their loved ones' names were called, families were invited to the altar to light a candle. However this time, the name of Gloria's mother, Lena Quintanilla, was among those called.

Lena, the family matriarch, suffered a massive stroke on January 8, 2015. Four days later her doctor told the family there was nothing more they could do. Gloria responded saying, "Call Houston Hospice now." As a hospice employee, she knew she had a right to select the hospice of her choice, and because she was designated as her mother's medical power of attorney agent, she knew it was what Lena wanted. "We already talked about what she wanted and what I should do," said Gloria. She continued, "It made it so much easier. I had a hard decision to make. Even if it was not what I wanted, I had to honor what she wanted. She didn't want to linger. She didn't want to be a burden." Gloria feels strongly about Medical Powers of Attorney and Living Wills. After she helps her siblings complete theirs, she plans to speak to community groups and help others, so that their wishes can be carried out should they become incapacitated.

Lena Quintanilla was a doting and energetic mother of five, and she had touched countless lives working as a hospice volunteer since June 2004. "She was a loving and caring mommy to me and to everyone that knew her. She could cook Spanish rice and hot sauce like no one else. Just ask our El Campo office," said Gloria. She added, "My father is grappling with how to go on. She did everything for him. They were married for 72 years. She was only 14 and he was 17 when they got married. She did everything around the house. She even paid the bills. All he did was work and he was a good provider with only a second grade education."

"About 40 people attended and the service was beautiful and peaceful," said Gloria. She continued, "I'm normally busy helping. I sat back by the pianist like I always do, but this time my family was there. It [the service] helped us to take it in and gave us some closure that this really did happen. It means our loved ones are not forgotten and we have to go on." Gloria stilled a slight quaver that threatened to expose her

sorrow and continued, “My oldest sister, who lives in Clear Lake came and she was so touched that we do this every six months. She told me she wants to come to the next one. I asked why since she wouldn’t know anyone and she said she would light another candle for mama.”

Houston Hospice is Houston’s only nonprofit hospice, providing care for patients and families throughout ten counties. To learn more about the local bereavement services offered by Houston Hospice, visit www.houstonhospice.org, or call 979-578-0314 or 800-420-6193.

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