



# HOUSTON HOSPICE

## *Life Matters*

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## Grief Group Offers Understanding, New Beginnings for Bereaved

A modern-day love story was born when Dominique and Takaaki met at a local Starbucks where she worked as a barista. He asked her on a date where they discovered a shared love of music as they listened to Michael Jackson, Barbra Streisand, The Carpenters and Beethoven. They married a short time later and enjoyed a life together for 18 years.

Even though Dominique and Takaaki had very different upbringings, they were each other's family. He was from a small island outside of Hiroshima, Japan, and came to the U.S. at 24 years old. She grew up on the south side of Houston and was 30 years his junior. When they met, Takaaki was six years into his Parkinson's diagnosis, and Dominique was his loving caregiver for the last 10 years of his life. Takaaki lived with his disease for 25 years but didn't let it define him.

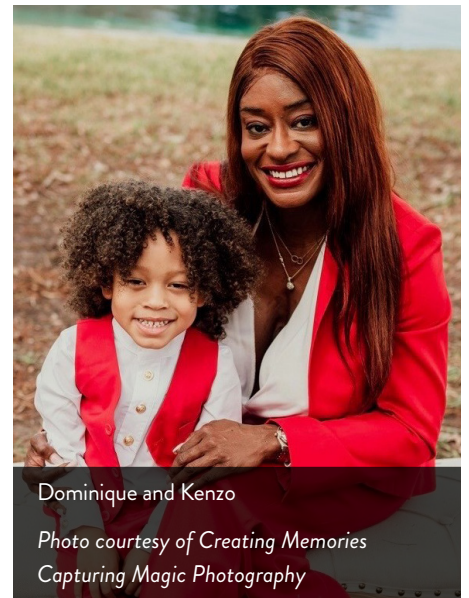
His final days were spent in the Houston Hospice inpatient unit with Dominique by his side and their 2-year-old son, Kenzo, visiting. She has fond memories of the care team, and said they listened to her, shared their wisdom and were so kind to Kenzo. She took it to heart when the team told her to take her time because grief doesn't have an expiration date.

Dominique was eager to attend the Houston Hospice grief groups and started as soon as she was able. She said the other participants were a reflection of herself, and she appreciated their shared experiences. She learned to channel her energy in a positive way and cherished this safe space where she could express herself with no judgment.

The groups were so helpful, in fact, Dominique took this time to chart her future course and decided to become a counselor herself! She's in her second year of a master's program in Clinical Mental Health Counseling at Houston Christian University and expects to graduate in December 2026.

Dominique said it takes a lot of energy to even attend a grief group, and that it's okay to just show up and be present, to listen and be supportive – sharing isn't a requirement. She also indicated the literature resources provided by the bereavement department are very helpful, and even now, two years later, she still references them to address how she's feeling.

The Houston Hospice bereavement department is made possible entirely through philanthropic support. Your generosity makes a lasting impact on families like Dominique's, who are learning to navigate a new normal, and it ensures they receive the support they need when they need it most.



Dominique and Kenzo

*Photo courtesy of Creating Memories  
Capturing Magic Photography*



Kenzo, Takaaki and Dominique

# Social Workers Bridge Gaps, Navigate Resources

When facing serious illness, patients and families are often navigating not only medical decisions, but also fear, uncertainty and complex life challenges. Houston Hospice social workers step in during these moments to provide guidance, reassurance and a steady presence—helping families make sense of what can feel overwhelming. They are part of the interdisciplinary team responsible for a hospice patient’s care.

First and foremost, social workers ensure patients are safe and their basic needs are met. They provide emotional support and can be an outlet for patients who may find it easier to talk through what they’re feeling with a stranger.

“We allow them to feel human,” said Crystal Groenstein, LMSW, a social worker at Houston Hospice. “And remind them they are not alone on this journey.”

Advocating for their patients – being a voice and making certain their wishes are known – is a primary role the social worker takes on, as well. They help patients and families understand how to navigate their care and educate them about their options. Social workers want patients to know they are in the driver’s seat.



Rebecca Clark, LCSW



Crystal Groenstein, LMSW

“We meet our patients where they are,” said Clevecia Adams, LMSW, a Houston Hospice social worker. “Perceptions aren’t always understood, so we bridge gaps to ensure everyone, from the patient and the family to members of the interdisciplinary team, is on the same page.”

Our social workers also recognize when patients and families might need additional support beyond clinical care. Through the Humanitarian Wishes Fund, they can help address urgent needs such as utility bills or funeral assistance, or utilize the fund to brighten someone’s day with a special family dinner or birthday celebration.

According to Clevecia, the ability of patients and families to access external resources is not as simple as one might think. Resources are extremely limited, and multiple hurdles make it no small task. So the ability of Houston Hospice to provide support through the Humanitarian Wishes Fund is phenomenal. This fund is fully supported by our generous donors, and we are so appreciative that we can help our patients and families in a meaningful way.



Ashton Maine, LMSW



Clevecia Adams, LMSW

## A Thank You That Gives Back

After experiencing the care of Houston Hospice during her husband’s illness, Susan Midyett wanted to express her thanks beyond words. As an officer with the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks Lodge #151, she recommended Houston Hospice for a \$5,000 Gratitude Grant.

The gift supports the Humanitarian Wishes Fund, helping meet needs that go beyond traditional care and easing burdens for families during difficult times.

“We like the idea of putting smiles on the faces of families by helping to relieve some of their worries,” Susan shared.

Susan’s story demonstrates how one person’s gratitude can create comfort and compassion for others.



Pictured from left to right: Aida Matic, CFRE, Chief Philanthropy Officer & VP of Community Engagement at Houston Hospice, Earline Grabbe, Cindie Priddy, Jo Ann Ortiz and Susan Midyett

## Smart Giving for Tax Season: Make a Meaningful Impact

As tax season approaches, many of our supporters are exploring ways to give that are both impactful and financially beneficial. Thoughtful giving strategies such as IRA rollovers and gifts of appreciated stock can help you maximize your charitable impact while also offering potential tax advantages.

For individuals age 70½ or older, an IRA rollover (also known as a Qualified Charitable Distribution) allows you to make a direct gift from your IRA, potentially reducing taxable income. Similarly, donating appreciated securities such as stocks held for more than one year may help you avoid capital gains taxes while receiving a charitable deduction for the full market value.

Recently, an anonymous donor made a significant gift to support a new initiative at Houston Hospice and shared that she never imagined she could make a contribution of that size. Like many donors, she discovered that her generosity did not have to come from income. By giving appreciated assets, she was able to make an even greater impact than she ever thought possible.

Her generosity is already making a meaningful difference, helping us expand compassionate care for patients and families when they need it most.

We are grateful for the many ways our donors choose to give. Your support, no matter the method, creates a lasting impact for those we serve.

If you would like to learn more about these options, please contact Aida Matic, CFRE, at 713-677-7123.



## Houston Hospice Welcomes New CEO

Mark Hayes, MBA, joined Houston Hospice as president and CEO on April 6. He comes from a long line of health care administrators and was destined to become a nursing home administrator. Life had other plans, however, and Mark became a hospice administrator instead. The rest, as they say, is history. Twenty years later, he can't imagine doing anything else.



"I'm excited by the opportunity to take what I've learned over the past 20 years and share it with Houston Hospice," said Mark. "The organization's foundation of uncompromising, compassionate care and service to the community aligns with my personal values."

Mark plans to connect with donors and volunteers, so he can have a better understanding of what motivates your support of Houston Hospice. He wants to learn what we're doing right and how we can improve. He will be hands-on and provide an honest and transparent roadmap for the future.

"Nuanced layers will enable us to focus on priorities and allow Houston Hospice to reach its full potential," said Mark.

Let's give Mark a warm Houston Hospice welcome!

## Community Education is a Two-Way Street.

Houston Hospice recently had the privilege of presenting to residents at The Hallmark, led by April Rose, our chief nursing officer and vice president of patient care services. The session provided an overview of hospice care – what it is, when it is appropriate and how it supports patients and families at the end of life – along with the full range of services Houston Hospice provides. Common misconceptions about hospice were addressed, followed by an engaging Q&A. The thoughtful questions and strong interest from residents highlight the importance of understanding care options and how to navigate them.

Community engagement is central to our mission. While we aim to educate, these conversations also allow us to listen and learn. By hearing directly from individuals, we gain important insights into their needs and priorities—allowing us to better tailor our programs and services. This two-way exchange strengthens our ability to serve and ensures we remain responsive as an organization.

We thank The Hallmark for hosting us and are especially grateful to Anne Baillio, a dedicated Houston Hospice volunteer and Hallmark resident, for making this meaningful connection possible. We appreciate the opportunity and look forward to continuing these conversations. To schedule a speaker or learn more about Houston Hospice services, please reach out to [info@houstonhospice.org](mailto:info@houstonhospice.org).



April Rose, BSN RN CHPN, Chief Nursing Officer & VP of Patient Care Services at Houston Hospice (left) and Anne Baillio (right)

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*The Newsletter is published by Houston Hospice, a nonprofit organization providing comprehensive end-of-life services and education to Greater Houston and surrounding communities.*

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



## Houston Hospice 25<sup>th</sup> Butterfly Luncheon Welcomes Dr. Tasha Faruqui, April 27

Dr. Tasha Faruqui will be the special guest at this year's 25th Butterfly Luncheon on April 27, from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., at The Junior League of Houston. She is an award-winning pediatrician, bestselling author, public speaker and medical advocate, whose professional expertise is matched by deeply personal experience. Her middle daughter is receiving hospice care, and Dr. Faruqui brings a powerful perspective bridging medicine, motherhood and the profound importance of compassionate end-of-life care.

Tami Jordan, a certified death doula and Houston Hospice board member, is serving as chair for this year's luncheon.

In recognition of National Volunteer Month, we also will celebrate the dedicated volunteers who help make this care possible.

For more information, please visit [www.houstonhospice.org/butterflyluncheon2026/](http://www.houstonhospice.org/butterflyluncheon2026/) or call 713-677-7124.



Dr. Tasha Faruqui

