



Hospice Blessings, From One Who Knows

(**Editor's Note:** Suzanne M. Watson is a 43-year-old resident of Flanders. She has two children, Michael, 15, and Kellie, 11.)

By Suzanne M. Watson

What is Hospice?

If you're a layman like me, your answer is surely, "I really don't know."

Approximately 1 1/2 to two months ago, my neighbor, Claire Lum, who herself is linked into the medical field, came to me with the phone number and the name of the person in charge of East End Hospice. She gave me the number and like so many other things, it became a permanent fixture on the refrigerator. I always had the belief that "hospice" meant you were terminally ill, and I wasn't ready for that yet. Yesterday, July 25, was the second anniversary of my diagnosis with metastatic breast cancer.

On Friday, July 12, my mom's twin sister, Ida Herfel was here with her daughter, Lola Myron, for a visit. I had a bone scan scheduled that day; however, I was advised I could cancel it because the previous two MRIs indicated the cancer had spread again. I spoke with the doctor and she hesitated when she told me I had approximately four to six months to live. I know the doctor was as upset as I was. She is an absolutely wonderful person. However, hearing news like this is not very easy, especially when you're a single mother of an 11-year-old daughter and a 15-year-old son. I certainly was glad my family was here. My cousin recently lost her mother-in-law and her father. She had Hospice for both of them, so she was a lot more familiar with the system.

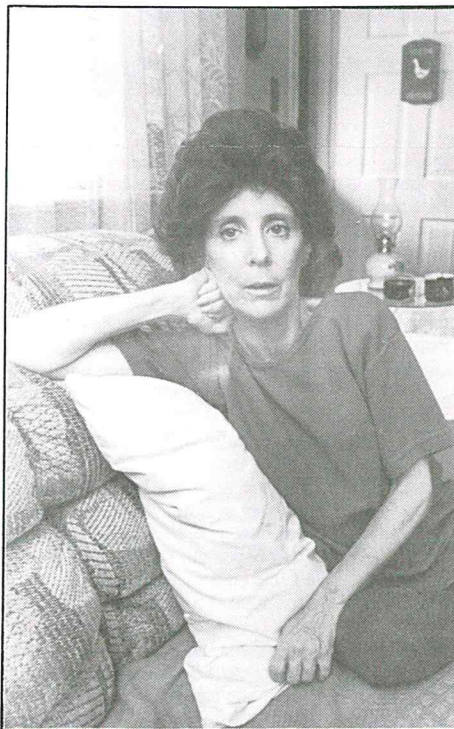
While I was crying, Lola was on the phone with Sylvia Wood, the head of operations at Hospice. She, in turn, spoke with my doctor, Dr. Emmanuele. They felt my case was an emergency and instead of coming to see me on Monday, they came the very same day. I did learn that day that Hospice is there for people who have exhausted their treatments and now need to be made as comfortable, happy and pain free as possible. Sylvia was such a lovely woman and so understanding. I'd like to thank my aunt and cousin for coming to my rescue that day. Without them here, I'd probably still be in the dark about Hospice.

The first people to show up were Jean Brace, one of the nurses, and Michele Beebee, the social worker. I remember they went over everything with me, and when they gave me their business card, it went up on the refrigerator. I thought, "Oh, I'll never bother these people after hours — it wouldn't be fair." Michele and I spoke a little that day, but Jean was there to make sure all my medications were correct and were being taken correctly. She's had to change things around for me a few times now.

The following Monday, Michele came to see me and listen to me cry and complain. She also gave me a fantastic foot massage.

On Wednesday, the 17th, I had to go out. I never drive while under medication, so I didn't take anything that day. By 8:30 in the evening, I thought the pain was going to burst my body open. My boyfriend of five years, Tom Gallo Jr., called the after-hours number on the Hospice business card (remember, the one I

First Person



Suzanne Watson

said I'd never use). By 9:30, the nurse, Suzanne Menard, was there. She was a Godsend. I explained to her what happened that day and, of course, I was scolded for not taking my medications. However, she was on the phone with my doctor and they decided the game plan. At 11:45 p.m., Tom had to go to Barth's Pharmacy to pick up medication for me. I was shocked. I never realized you could get help after midnight. I'll be forever appreciative to Barry Barth as well. When Tom returned, Suzanne showed us how to take the medication and then left. At approximately 12:45, Sandy Knappman, another nurse, called to see if everything was okay. It's absolutely amazing the concern everyone has for you. I finally fell asleep after taking this medication every two hours during the night.

The next day, I saw Jean again. She wanted a run-down on what transpired. Everything was straightened out and I was feeling 100 percent better.

I went to my mom's for the weekend. When I returned Sunday, Sandy, the nurse, called again just to check on me.

The following day, Suzanne came to see me again. We made a few changes in medications again but everything is fine once again.

Sometime during the week, I spoke with Joan Hor-

continued

*"To everyone involved, thank you from the bottom of my heart. . . .
May God bless you all!"*

Hospice Blessings, From One Who Knows *continued*

ton, the head of volunteers, to discuss having an aide come in and help me out. On Wednesday, the 24th, my first aide arrived. Her name is Sharon Wichert. The aides will do anything you want. We talked out on the deck, just relaxing — my first time all this summer. It was great. Then she came in and did housework. I felt so bad for her because she, as most of the others, work days as well. She stayed about three hours and was most enjoyable. She even offered my daughter a bike and had it here the very next day. Sharon will be coming to see me on Wednesdays from now on. I'm looking forward to it.

The next afternoon, the 25th, Jean came back to see me. She took my blood pressure, checked my medications and talked to me until my heart was content. These people are never in a hurry. They'll stay with you until you feel comfortable with them leaving. Jean herself is such a lovely person; her face is never without a smile. Like I said earlier, when I spoke with Joan Horton, she advised me I would be meeting with Danielle, also in charge of volunteers, who would be bringing Rhoda Mc Gann, also an aide. Later in the evening, at approximately 5:30, I did meet with them for the first time. Danielle left and Rhoda, or "Ronnie" as she likes to be called, stayed and we spoke quite a bit. She, too, is lovely, with a sweet disposition. Ronnie will be seeing me on Monday evenings. That's when she'll run errands, clean or do whatever needs to be done.

The following day, the 26th, Sharon called me in the morning. Unfortunately, I was sleeping and missed her call. She probably just wanted to know how I felt. At 4

that afternoon, Michele came to visit. We spoke for a while and then she gave me a fabulous back rub. It put me right to sleep.

I'm sure on Monday I'll be seeing Jean again, and Ronnie will be here at 6.

Well, today's the 27th and I'm not quite sure what's in store for me today. I do know I'm ready for a nap.

Everyone I've asked to tell me how they got involved with Hospice told me the same thing. They all said they had a loved one who needed Hospice at one time or another and they just wanted to give something back. They all love what they're doing and they will give you as much or as little of their time as you like. It's all up to you. You're never alone with Hospice.

Before Hospice, my girlfriend, Cathleen Kormoski, would take me to chemotherapy when she could, but my main caregiver was my boyfriend, Tom. He did everything and anything for me for the last two years and still does. Hospice helps take some of the burden off him as well. Besides, he's taking my illness, and death, so hard, they're trying to speak with him also. Although no one can take away our hurt of losing one another, we can talk about it a little easier now.

I wish I could contribute some of my time to Hospice because it's an organization I'd be very proud to belong to. Still confused about Hospice? Please, if you have any questions and I can help, feel free to contact me anytime.

To everyone involved, thank you from the bottom of my heart! I know I couldn't get through this without any of you. May God bless you all!

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Suzanne M. Watson died on September 15, 1996

