

Passages

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SETTING THE STANDARD FOR SKILLED, COMPASSIONATE CARE SINCE 1987

THE LADY FROM FLIPPIN, ARKANSAS

Sixteen years ago when Helen and her husband, Pete, were thinking about retiring, they knew it was not going to be in dry and windy Borger, Texas, where they were living. They did some research and decided to investigate the towns along Hwy 412 in Arkansas and then parts east into Tennessee or Kentucky. They loved fishing, horses, and country music, so they hopped in their car to check out the options.

When they got to Flippin, Arkansas, they stopped to have lunch. When they got back to the car, Pete announced that Flippin was the place. There was just something about the look and the feel of this bustling little Arkansas town, so they stayed, and they never regretted their decision. "It was close to Bull Shoals Lake and the White River, so there were plenty of fishermen and retired people." Helen goes on to say that their decision was also influenced by the presence of a cousin in Mountain Home. "We had family near, so we felt home."

"Another reason why we stayed is that we like the name," Helen says with a chuckle. "Folks coming through town would stop at the Church of God on Main Street and get their photos taken in front of the sign. There they were in front of the Flippin Church of God." There is a mischievous grin on Helen's face.



Linda and Helen Little



Helen is about to "graduate" from Hospice of Green Country – that is to say, go off service because she's no longer hospice appropriate, and go on home healthcare. She got better! Such graduations are not common, but they happen!

Helen came to HGC at the end of September with acute exacerbations from Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease. She was dependent on oxygen, disoriented, and extremely short of breath with the slightest exertion. Given six months to live, she had left Flippin to move in with her son's family where she started receiving weekly HGC nurse visits. HGC brought in a hospital bed that helped Helen sleep better at night, her daughter-in-law made sure she was eating nutritious meals, and everyone in the family monitored her medications.

Almost immediately Helen's goal was to get her strength back so she could manage herself – "catheters and Depends are great for other people but they're not for me," she asserts. "I need to get up and move around so I can get stronger." Helen attributes her recovery to her faith and the blessings of God with whom she connects through daily Bible readings and prayer. She knows she'll not return to Flippin, that she'll need family around her, but she's willing to trust in God for her future. It's worked before.

MEET ROBIN STRATTON...



It's been a journey back to where she's supposed to be. It hasn't always been easy, but Robin Stratton wouldn't change a thing. She's sure that each part, the good and the bad, was critical to who she is and where she is now – Director of Patient Care and an active RN/Case Manager for Hospice of Green Country.

Robin grew up in Freehold, New Jersey, in the “projects,” one of five children, with a hard-working, single mom. It was not an easy childhood – gun shots and drug deals were common neighborhood occurrences – but it was softened by a caring mom who made time to take her kids to the ocean and to the lake. Nonetheless, full of adventure, Robin left when she was sixteen, supporting herself with a series of odd jobs until she met her first husband, an Oklahoman stationed in Pennsylvania.

One of those odd jobs was as a Certified Nurses Aide (CNA) – by that time she was living in Oklahoma. That training helped her take care of her dying father-in-law. Then life got tough – a divorce, alone with three little children, the need to support her family on more than a CNA's salary – Robin took the bull by the horns and applied to Nordam as an entry level mechanic. “I had no real background in aircraft mechanics, but I can be very convincing in an interview,” Robin says with a grin. She went on to become the Production Head of the weekend shift.

“You're helping people during a really difficult time, giving them a sense of comfort no one else can provide.”

When her mother became ill and was dying, Robin took a leave from her Nordam job to go back to New Jersey to take care of her. Being with her mom convinced her of what she should be doing. She announced she was going to become a nurse. “Everyone was surprised, especially my mom, but they didn't understand how much I loved taking care of people. And, I was good at it.”

Robin got her Registered Nursing degree from Rogers State University. Because of the care she gave her father-in-law and her mother, she knew she wanted to become a hospice nurse. “You're helping people during a really difficult time, giving them a sense of comfort no one else can provide,” she explains. “It is so fulfilling. Also, hospice nursing allows you to have relationships with your patients and with their families – you can take two hours to be with them, listen to them, and care for them through their pain crisis. That would never happen in a hospital.”

Robin says there's a huge difference between Hospice of Green Country and the other hospices in Tulsa. “Every one of our staff members has ‘the hospice heart’ - the aides, social workers, chaplains as well as the nurses,” she declares. “You can't do this work for the paycheck,” she explains. “You have to want to do hospice work – you have to have the hospice heart.”

Robin says the most important question to ask when shopping for a hospice is how many patients does each nurse see in a day. The answer should be between four to five in a day, six maximum.

Robin claims that HGC tries to schedule each member of the hospice team so that they can spend the time they need to bring peace and dignity to each patient and to his or her family. “I was helping a patient's husband who just wasn't ready for his wife to die. He was so emotional and distraught. I stayed in contact with him for a long time after she passed ... we were in contact for years.”

It's that heart Robin was talking about.

LEGACY LETTER TO YOUR DESCENDANTS

One of the best gifts I received was from my cousin Pat. She interviewed my Dad about his experiences as a child through his journeys during World War II. She recorded these, made a CD for me AND transcribed these. I have read the transcription, but 6 years after my father's death, I have yet to listen to his voice. She accomplished something that I could not – have a discussion with my father about the experiences that were impactful and influential to his life.



The interview with my father enhanced the “business” discussions I had with him – about estate planning, financial independence and what type of health care he wanted as he added birthdays to his life. For us, that was the easy part, yet it is NOT easy for most people and families. For us, that was the “business” part of life and we were both business professionals. However, I have my cousin to thank for better understanding his values, his influential life experiences, and what gave him meaning in life.

As I add birthdays (I do not use the word “old”), I am taking a different approach by creating a Legacy Letter for my family and friends. (FYI -The term Ethical Will may be synonymous with Legacy Letter.)

> HERE'S AN OUTLINE OF ONE WAY TO ACCOMPLISH THIS:

- Identify whom you'd like to write to. I call this my “Circle of Trust” of family and friends with whom I have the closest relationships.
- Jot down your personal list of important experiences, values, ethics, influential people, and overall things that are important to you. Reflect on how you would like to be remembered. Don't spend time to edit initially, just start writing. (Bullet points work for me.)
- When you review what you've written, determine if you'd like to share the same letter with all members of your Circle of Trust, OR, if you'd like to modify for each person. Some people choose to share the same letter with everyone, but then add personalized comments for each individual recipient.

The most significant gifts I have received in life are neither material, nor tangible. Yet, I have realized the giver took the time and energy to share their message and lessons. I hope you'll invest first in self-reflection and then share how and why your life has been a voyage worth taking.

Jane Mudgett
Associate Vice President and Financial Advisor
Morgan Stanley Wealth Management
Past President, Hospice of Green Country Board of Directors

OTHER INFORMATION TO BE FOUND ON LEGACY LETTERS & ETHICAL WILLS

- *The book, The Wealth of Your Life, by Susan Turnbull*
- www.yourethicalwill.com – created by Susan Turnbull
- www.celebrationsoflife.net/ethicalwills
- www.amazon.com/Ethical-Wills-Putting-Values-Edition/dp/0738210552
- www.life-legacies.com/ethicalwills/

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT...

Volunteers are the heart of Hospice of Green Country

On a beautiful October Saturday members of the Praise & Worship Church of Broken Arrow gathered to make basic repairs on the home of our HGC patient in Claremore. Thank you Pastors Ray and Kim Mills, Youth Leader Brian Gosselin, and all the folks from P&W Church.



Williams Auditing Dept. on Day of Caring 2014

The folks from the Auditing Department spent the day with us making blankets that we give to each of our new patients and putting together marketing materials that we take to our booths and non-profit fairs and doctors' offices. Thank you WILLIAMS!!

Thanksgiving Dinner to Patients in Need

HGC volunteer, Debbie Stevens (rgt), waits with Susan Garcia to deliver the fixin's for a complete Thanksgiving meal for two HGC patients. The call went out – the food was donated – Susan and Ruth bagged the items and the Hospice volunteers delivered them to patients and their families. Among those who helped, Cub Scout Pack 67 with their Den Leader, Ben Davis, collected food items, paper products, and personal toiletries to stock our HGC food pantry. They also gave a wonderful donation to our Patient Needs fund that supports various unexpected patient needs.



SOMETIMES THERE IS NO KARMA IN THE NAME “LUCKY”...

Dogs need to be dogs

Lucky, a Boxer mix, had lived all of his eight years by the side of Carol – eight years of being the ‘only pet,’ constant treats and loving pats, the ever-present sound of her voice, sleeping by her side. He didn’t understand being taken away, caged for the first time in a crate, and put into a strange home. And so he acted out, destroying the door frame, tossing and tearing anything reachable.

Lucky’s owner, Carol, could not take care of him anymore. She was dying with advanced Alzheimer’s and her caregiver had her hands full caring for the woman.

The family worked with a local vet to try to cure Lucky of his separation anxiety so he could be placed in another home. The vet took the anxious and inconsolable dog to see if he could begin the work of easing his anxiety with the use of drugs and some loving redirection and training. The vet started bringing the dog to his office where he would be around other people and animals. He would leave Lucky for short periods of time, always within earshot of the dog, but out of sight. He hoped the dog would settle in.



The vet had warned the family that separation anxiety in dogs is very difficult to “cure.” Even if the animal settles into another home, they often transfer their former dependence and loyalty to their new owner; they can become overly protective and aggressive.

Such was the case with Lucky, even under the supervision of the vet. Eight years of being treated like a small human by a doting owner was too difficult to change. Lucky was returned to Carol’s family, and Hospice of Green Country lost track of him.



The moral of this sad story, according to the vet, is that we must resist the temptation to dote on our animals, particularly our dogs. We must teach them boundaries and socialize them to other humans, and most particularly to other dogs. We must give them routines and firm discipline, so that, if it is in their future, they can be happy and adjusted even when we are not at their side.

SEPARATION ANXIETY IN DOGS:

- What it looks like: aimless wandering and restlessness, not eating, moping, whining, panting through the mouth in an obsessive way, lack of tail wagging.
- Take them to a vet – there is Prozac and Xanax and they’re being used with dogs and cats more and more. It takes the edge off their anxiety and makes them teachable.
- Don’t dote on them – allow them to be dogs. Use a firm, kind alpha hand.
- If adopting, particularly an older dog, don’t leave them on their first day with you, or even the second day.
- Give them a window to look out of.
- Get them used to your absences little by little. Consider them an emotional equivalent of a two-year-old human.

THE COMPOUNDING CORNER...

New Claremore Office

We have a new Claremore office location. It's on the main drag. Here's the address: 400 West Will Rogers Boulevard. Everything else has stayed the same.



Annual Memorial Service

Eighty HGC families, volunteers and staff gathered at First Baptist Tulsa for the reading of the names of our patients who have died in the last year. Thank you to the Home Depots on Elgin, Sheridan, and 71st Streets and to the 15th & Lewis Reasor's for their donations of beautiful fall mums and centerpieces which our patients' families took home.



Save The Date!!

The 4th Annual Oysters & Ale will be in a new place this year – Living Arts of Tulsa. It's a great venue with plenty of space, great art on the walls, and perfectly paired with our thousands of fresh oysters, nestled in their beds of ice, and cold locally crafted ales and beers. Stay tuned, but SAVE THE DATE!

Go Pokes

It was the envy of all the OSU fans in the office. This was the "basket" that our Clinical Administrative Assistant, Rita, put together for the Rogers County United Way Chocolate Affair. This is a tailgate party waiting to happen.



WORDS OF WISDOM FOR THE CAREGIVERS:

Here are some words of wisdom if you are anticipating the death of a loved one or if you are caring for a loved one who is actively dying.

- Cut yourself some slack. Be generous with yourself.
- When you're in the backyard screaming to the sky, "Just die God damn it!" know it's okay. Things will happen as they will, if you think uncomfortable thoughts and if you don't.
- It's an honor and a privilege to be a midwife to the dying.
- Don't let the pressure to make it right and perfect get to you. Instead enjoy and savor the last precious days, weeks, or months.
- You'll be hoping you can keep it from happening. That's okay. But it has its own course. It is ordained. And you will have to surrender.
- When they offer to help, "let them help!"
- Thank you notes can wait.
- It's a crucible. There's no way around it, over it, under it. You just have to go through it.
- Others have done it before and will do it after you. You can do it.

A Conversation with Robin Ballenger, Reprinted with permission from "Simple Gifts", All Souls Unitarian Church, October 2014

GETTING THROUGH THE HOLIDAYS

This is the time of year when it is especially difficult if you have suffered a loss, be it the death of a loved one, the loss of a job, or a recent divorce. Here are some suggestions to help you cope with your profound feelings of sadness, loss and emptiness.

- 1. Plan Ahead For Those Special Days And For Family Gatherings:** This is so important. Even though you may think you want to be alone, don't be. Decide which family traditions you want to continue. Structure your holiday time. This will help you anticipate activities and be prepared.
- 2. Be With Supportive, Comforting People:** Identify those friends and relatives who understand that the holiday season can increase your sense of loss and who will allow you to talk openly about your feelings. Find those persons who encourage you to be yourself and accept your feelings—both happy and sad.
- 3. Talk About Your Grief:** Supportive people will help make you feel understood. Through shared grief, you will all heal.
- 4. Be Tolerant of Your Physical and Psychological Limits:** Feeling fatigued and having a low energy level is normal when you are grieving. Lower your own expectations about being at your peak during the holiday season. Get lots of rest.
- 5. Eliminate Unnecessary Stress:** Don't over-extend yourself but at the same time avoid isolating yourself. Give yourself special times to be alone.
- 6. Talk About the Person Who Has Died:** Include the person's name in your holiday conversation. The more you are able to do this, the easier it becomes to talk about the death and your memories.
- 7. And Finally, Embrace Your Treasure of Memories:** Memories are one of the best legacies that exist after the death of someone loved. And holidays always make you think about times past. Instead of ignoring these memories, share them with your family and friends. Keep in mind that memories are tinged with both happiness and sadness. If your memories bring laughter, smile. If your memories bring sadness, then it's alright to cry. Memories that were made in love—no one can ever take away from you.

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