

Passages

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FOLLOWING HIS RETIREMENT DREAM

Sailing down the Mississippi

It was his retirement dream: to build a boat and sail it from Oklahoma down to Key Largo, off the tip of Florida. The *Windsong* wasn't Rex Terry's first boat. He had built two others, but this was his first catamaran and it was perfect for river cruising – shallow, stable, and economical – a Cadillac of boats with hydraulic steering for easy handling and air conditioned hulls for comfort.

Rex is one of those guys who loves to work with his hands. He tried college; it didn't work so he landed at the Spartan School of Aeronautics and Technology where he found his calling – putting stuff together and working with computers. His career was varied and fun, working with computers at a variety of petroleum exploration, aircraft technology and finally telephone systems companies. When he wasn't traveling with his work, Rex and his wife, Rowena, vacationed from their motor-home, sometimes spending weeks in the river port and gulf port cities they would later sail by.



Time was running out. Rex was approaching retirement. He needed to get serious about pursuing his dream. He ordered 14 years of back issues of the boating magazine, "Multi-Hulls" to study, and he decided to build a covered patio for his workshop. It took Rex two and one-half years to design and build the *Windsong*. Small enough for the rivers, but large enough to be an ocean-going catamaran, she had to be taken out of Rex's backyard in pieces and assembled in the driveway. It was the talk of the neighborhood and of Tulsa (see Tulsa World, December 29, 1993).

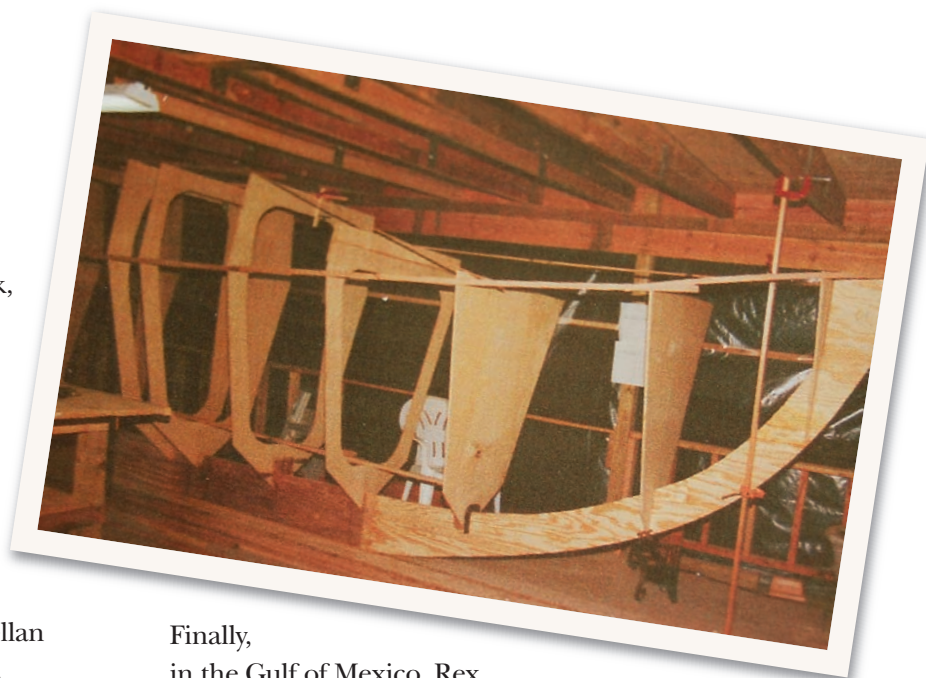
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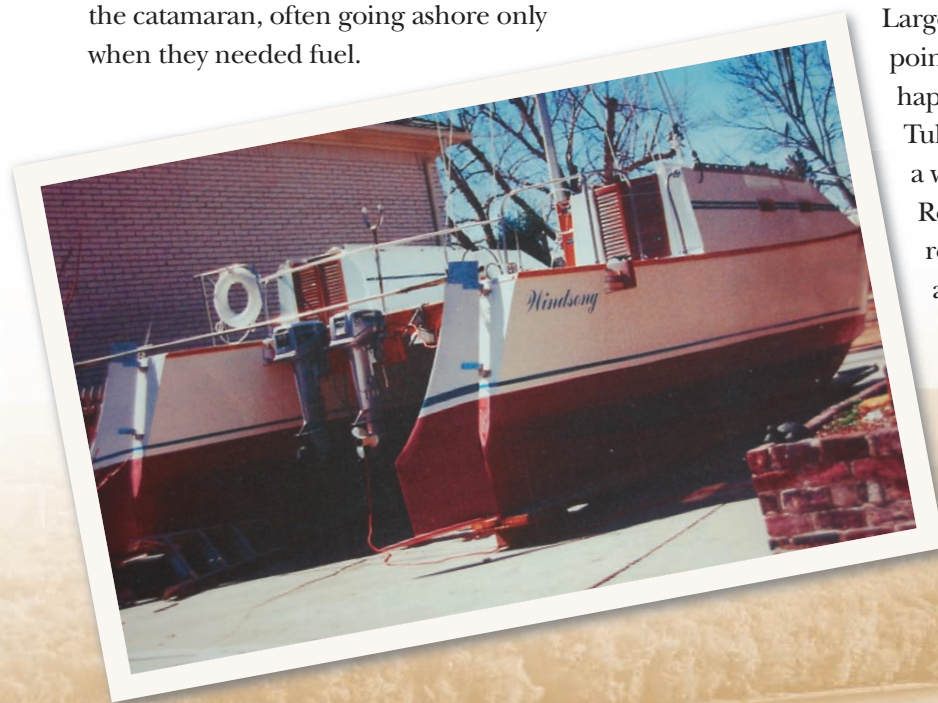
Sailing down the Mississippi

Rex and Rowena took the *Windsong* to Kerr Lake outside of Sallisaw, and to make sure she didn't leak, they lived on her for one summer. She was ready. Rex's brother and his wife joined them for the adventure, living in the other hull, and their meandering adventure began. There was no hurry. They could only go 50 miles at a time on the motor fuel, so their next stop was Russellville, Arkansas, where they camped on the *Windsong* while they planned the next leg of the journey: getting through the big whirlpool where the McClellan Kerr (ie. White River) meets the mighty Mississippi.

Natchez, the choppy, shallow Lake Pontchartrain, the deep and fast running Atchafalaya River through Louisiana and the Great Cyprus Swamp, and then on to Morgan City and the Gulf ... their journey wound through 21 locks and dams between Oklahoma and the Gulf of Mexico. Sometimes using the motor just to stay the course, they "floated" along, eating and sleeping on the catamaran, often going ashore only when they needed fuel.



Finally, in the Gulf of Mexico, Rex could raise the *Windsong's* sail for the first time since Kerr Lake, and the wind took them on a meandering path to Pensacola, Florida, where they put down a long anchor, staying weeks. The final leg of the journey was across the open waters of the Gulf, 100 miles to Panama City where the ladies decided they had had enough water traveling. They certainly weren't sure about navigating the open water necessary to get to Key Largo, so the adventure ended in Panama City. At this point Rex's story becalms and it's unclear what happened to the *Windsong* or how they all got back to Tulsa. Rex is our hospice patient now, connected to a wheelchair and an oxygen tank, but Rex's and Rowena's eyes still shine brightly when they start retelling their story. The album comes out, dates are rehearsed, experiences and impressions are compared, and the great retirement adventure almost begins again.



DAVID BLACKBURN, VOLUNTEER EXTRAORDINAIRE

Constant ... Faithful ... True

David Blackburn is the longest tenured volunteer in the Hospice of Green Country volunteer corps – 23 years of service! That's right! He's been a volunteer for 23 of HGC's 25 years, longer than any of our staff and we still have his original volunteer form! Talking to him, he would have you believe that he began volunteering when he was only 20 years old.

David likes this constancy and seems to live out the philosophy that life is going to throw us enough changes without us having to go create more. He's been married to Marsha for nearly 40 years. He retired from his career as Deputy Court Clerk for Tulsa County after more than 40 years. Constant ... faithful ... true – those are just some of David's qualities.

As the youngest of five children, David's early days were spent on a farm near Hallett. When he was a teenager, his family moved to Jennings where his mom, a nurse, opened a small nursing facility by converting their home and taking on patients. He helped around the house and credits his mother with teaching him patience and loving care for the frail and the dying. You can see that personal comfort with people when David works with our patients. There is no hesitation with his patter or his humor. He's a natural.

A graduate of Tonkawa's Northern Oklahoma College, David majored in business, but he claims his most important skill was his ability to type. At twenty, he went to work for the Tulsa County Court Clerk where he typed and filed and kept the probate divisions straight, but then his number came up - he was drafted. Instead of going to the jungles of Vietnam, David was shipped to Germany where he became a legal clerk in the JAG office. The Army wanted him to join the 7th Army Chorus, but David admits he turned the offer down because it was too adventuresome – travelling all over the world for concerts, never knowing where you were going to be.

So, he did his time and came home to continue his work in the Court Clerk's office – rising to Deputy Court Clerk



and maintaining the stability through one Democrat and two Republican bosses. David says it was a great job, allowing him flexibility to raise his family (a son and a daughter) and then later to volunteer.

As a hospice volunteer, David's mission has nothing to do with the medical or practical elements of caring for someone who is terminally ill. There are doctors, nurses, social workers, and home health aides for that. David's job is to fill in the blanks – to bring humor and a listening heart to the home and to the patient – to listen to the stories, read to the patients, help them eat, or simply sit while their families run errands or just take a break. David brings humor and a ready laugh that lights up the eyes of patients lost in the fog of dementia or struggling with depression or pain.

Federal law requires all hospices that receive Medicare reimbursements to use volunteers for a portion of patient care. In 2011, there were 450,000 volunteers providing such care in the United States, according to the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization. HGC's volunteer corps has 80 active folks who deliver meds, sit with patients, help clean their homes and yards, and/or drive them to physician appointments. Volunteers bring an extra pair of eyes for our clinical staff and also for the family, particularly if their loved one is in a nursing home. They are critical to quality patient care!

So, THANK YOU, David Blackburn for all your years of service!

PET PEACE OF MIND – FINDING FOREVER HOMES

They have just lost the most important person in their lives.

Brandi and Eddie grew up in a quiet, Tulsa home where for 15 years they lay under the grand piano, listening to concertos and sonatas played by their “mom,” Georgann. Their “dad” had been an attorney, having argued successfully three times before the Supreme Court, when he was not traveling as a professional football referee. Both were Hospice of Green Country (HGC) patients and died within five months of each other.

Brandi



Brandi and Eddie were 90 years old in human years when they were enrolled in Pet Peace of Mind (PPOM), a program created by HGC in 2007 to take care of the pets of patients when they are no longer able to AND to find the animals forever homes when the patient dies. It was that last promise that HGC knew was going to be hard for these little dogs – finding a forever home for two 15 year old dachshunds. To exacerbate the situation, Brandi was almost blind, partially deaf, and required daily pain medications for her degenerating spine.

It was Brandi’s and Eddie’s vet, Dr. Chet Thomas of City Veterinary Hospital, who came to the rescue. He knew a young woman with two rescue dachshunds of her own who might volunteer to at least be their foster “mom.” “Omigod!” as the young people say. It was a match made in heaven or at least by the Brady Bunch! These two elderly wiener dogs went from life under the grand piano to a house and backyard full of two young dachshunds, 8-year old Smitty and 1-year old Halle, an elderly

chocolate lab, Elle, with a tumor on her back so she needed help going up and down, and two gorgeous young rescue Siamese-tabby brothers, Maverick and Goose, who liked to mix-it-up with the wieners. Shannon, the new foster “mom,” took the elderly additions to her menagerie in stride – she and her friends are in the rescue business. There are enough beds and bowls for everyone.

Eddie thrived. He thought he was a teenager as he chased and dug holes with his two new siblings. However, Brandi was in too much pain to keep up, but she loved being held in the loving arms of her new owners as she watched the antics in the backyard. Finally, she was just in too much pain all the time. The PPOM folks agreed with Brandi’s foster “mom” - it was time to ease her way to her final journey. We’re pretty sure she’s relaxing under a grand piano somewhere listening to a sonata.

Eddie



Current pets needing “forever” homes:

The HGC website has descriptions and circumstances of pets that need to be adopted by a loving family (http://www.hospiceofgreencountry.org/hospice/Pets_Available_for_Adoption3.asp). Our hearts go out to them – they have just lost the most important person in their lives and now they are having to make the adjustment of a new home. They need understanding and loving new homes. Check back often for PPOM animals up for fostering or adoption.

MEET SUZANNE KASSEN, THE NEW HGC DIRECTOR OF CLINICAL CARE

You might have heard her sing some of the old standards in one of Tulsa's clubs or seen her display of painted silk at the Philbrook Art Museum in 1996, but Suzanne knows she was meant to be a nurse. She started in high school, becoming a Certified Nurse's Aide by the time she was 16 through a work-study program in her California high school. She began working in a nursing home in her northern California mountain community. Nursing gave her more personal rewards than anything else she had tried, except maybe her music and her art, so when the family moved to Tulsa, she pursued her nursing education with purpose, becoming an RN by the time she was twenty.

Suzanne didn't stop there, but went on to get her BSN all while raising a family and working at Hillcrest Hospital for 19 years. Suzanne has two daughters, college student Margie who's worked in the HGC office answering the telephone, and Madeleine, age fourteen. While at Hillcrest, Suzanne worked every department except "babies and pediatrics," but her area of expertise was helping to set up Intensive Care Units at Hillcrest's three specialty hospitals.

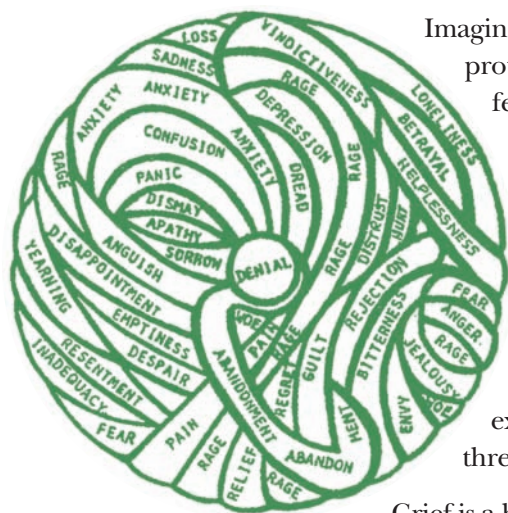
Suzanne came to Hospice of Green Country when she was working on her Master's. She could be the weekend on-call nurse, working Friday night through Tuesday morning, putting in a five-day work week, while going to class and studying Tuesday through Thursday.

The timing was perfect. Suzanne had her Master's in hand when the HGC position of Director of Clinical Care became open. It's a great match and everyone's pleased with the results of her leadership – patient census is up and maintaining while the same quality of compassionate care is being delivered. Welcome, Suzanne!



GRIEF: A TANGLED BALL OF EMOTIONS

Grief is a normal response common to all who have suffered the loss of someone significant. At the beginning, feelings can be overwhelming. Life feels out of control and chaotic. The pain of the loss is present in every thought and action. Grief can look and feel like a tangled ball of emotions.



Imagine a ball of yarn that has become tangled with uneven and overlapping threads protruding everywhere. Each thread represents a feeling. One day the predominant feeling may be anxiety, the next day anger. Each separate string of yarn is pulled in an attempt to get to the end of it. But it is difficult to pull hard enough to free the thread from the tangled mess. One thread holds another down tight. And there always seems to be yet another thread to deal with. The brokenness continues to roll, just as the ball rolls, a winding, confusing grief process: depression, sadness, panic, confusion, and many more emotions.

These jumbled feelings are NORMAL. Even in all its pain and discomfort, using the tangled ball of emotions to help identify and acknowledge exactly what is being experienced can be the first step in recovery. The only way to get to the end of the threads of the grief process is to face and experience the pain.

Grief is a healing process but healing takes time. A tangled yarn ball can't be put back into a smooth, perfectly wound sphere quickly and easily. It takes patience and hard work. An unraveling has to take place. And so it is with grief. Unwinding, identifying and experiencing those intense feelings help take apart the way things were before the loss. Only after slowly and intentionally unwinding and then rewinding can life be smooth again. Admittedly, the ball of yarn, unraveled and wound back up again, will not look exactly the same as the original ball of yarn. It will be different, but still perfectly capable of being knit into a beautiful scarf or sweater: useful, warm and alive with color.

The Rev. Cindy A. Ritter
Chaplain, Hospice of Green Country

THE COMPOUNDING CORNER

A mixture of stories, events & successes



< Cub Scout Pack 67 at Carnegie Elementary School in Tulsa held a Thanksgiving Meal Food Drive. The Pack, under the leadership of Scout Master Ben Davis and HGC volunteer Rick Crouch gathered the important components of Thanksgiving meals to be delivered to eight HGC patients and their families.

> Hospice of Green Country delivered eight Thanksgiving meals in a box to patients and their families. Craig Nelson (Left), station manager for KDOR Television and his colleague, Robert Steele, helped by donating sacks of potatoes, half-cartons of fresh eggs, pre-made pie crusts, and stuffing mix. Thank you, KDOR TV!



< Celebrating their tenure with Hospice of Green Country are the following staff members. Pins were presented by two Board members.

From Left: Jim Lee (Interim Executive Director), Susan Garcia, CFRE (1 year), Tammy Rawlings, RN (1 year), Deb Sodergren, BSW (10 years), Ellen Jones, CHHA (1 year), Faye Mannie, RN BSN CHPN (5 years), and Board member, Mike Bagby. Not pictured is Jeanean Doherty, RN (5 years).

- HGC received the First Annual “Healing Spirit” award from the Center for Counseling and Education, a pastoral counseling center. Board member, Don Hamilton, graciously accepted the award on our behalf.

- Families who have lost a loved one often struggle mightily during the Holidays with their grief. Follow this QR code to our website for some thoughtful ways to cope or go to:



<http://www.hospiceofgreencountry.org/hospice/Holidays.asp>



FROM THE BOARD PRESIDENT

“You can’t know where you’re going until you know where you’ve been.”

As we enter the next 25 years, I want to reflect on where HGC has been and ask the same question our former HGC president, Jim Huff, asked five years ago: Have we been and are we successful? I think the answer is a resounding, “Yes!” but we shouldn’t stop at this answer. I also think our reflections will inform us on what we need to do and where we need to go in the future.

Since that first patient who came on service in September, 1987, we’ve given the same high quality and compassionate end-of-life care to patients and their families, regardless of their ability to pay. Historically, our numbers indicate that about 20% of our patients would not be able to afford hospice care, IF we weren’t here. Over 84% of ALL our 2011 patients were at or below the U.S. guidelines for poverty, even those with insurance or Medicare.

I’m convinced that our non-profit status and the amazing support of our donors are THE reasons why HGC is the area pacesetter for hospice care. In addition to the basic care of managing each patient’s pain and disease symptoms within 48 hours, providing the family with a minimum of 13 months of bereavement services, and helping to resolve any issues or challenges that may prevent a death of comfort, dignity, and peace, HGC has very innovative programs.

We are the only hospice with a Live Alone program with the goal of maintaining the patients in their homes, if that is their choice, even if they have no or limited access to caregivers. Our Pet Peace of Mind program has been so successful that Banfield Charities is replicating it with 50 non-profit hospices in 25 states. Over 266 pets have gone through our PPOM program since its beginning in 2007. AND, our volunteer program is without peer – we matched the clinical hours with 19.77% volunteer hours when most hospices have to stretch to achieve the Medicare mandated 5% match.

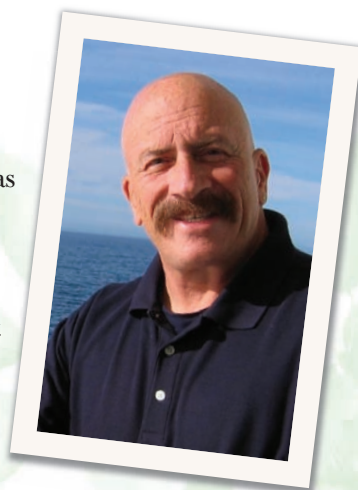
Public opinion is probably the best evaluator of our success and a good way to measure success is how well is our fundraising. Since that first gift of \$500 from IBM in March, 1987, Hospice of Green Country has raised a total of \$7,087,854 in donor dollars to support its mission. In the first ten years we raised a respectable \$782,730. In the 2nd decade we boomed, raising a whopping \$3,543,701! And, just five years into our 3rd decade, we’ve already raised a total of \$2,373,634 in donor dollars. Yes!

Another measure of success is the fact that 90% of our referrals come from family members of patients we have served. They know first-hand the quality of our services and kindness of our staff.

By any of our standards, Hospice of Green Country has fulfilled its promise of high quality and compassionate end-of-life care, regardless of ability to pay. These achievements and our future are only made possible by our dedicated volunteers, donors and employees who have given and who continue to give so much. You/they/we ARE Hospice of Green Country and we are headed in the right direction! Happy 25th Anniversary!

ART RASHER, PhD

President



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