

CONTEST WINNERS

Congratulations to the Winners of NHPCO's Photography and Writing Contest

PHOTOGRAPHY:

People (Amateur)

1st Place (below)

Title: Here and Now
Photographer: Tina Andrews, R.N.
Program: Columbus Children's Hospice, OH



2nd Place

Title: Shared Happiness
(With God's Help)
Photographer: Mary Forche
Program: Hospice of Lenawee,
Adrian, MI



Honorable Mentions

Title: Give Me Your Hand
Photographer: Adrian Niehues
Program: Hospice and
Palliative Care of
Western Colorado,
Grand Junction, CO



Title: Resting in Great-
grandfather's Arms —
Sharing the Journey
Photographer: Kim Donovan
Program: Pines of Peace
Comfort Care Home
for the Terminally Ill,
Ontario, NY



This image was chosen due to the striking appearance of compassion and gentleness that was manifested by the "eye" of the camera lens. This was the family's second child with a genetic disorder that was served by our hospice program. I feel as if this photo epitomizes the philosophy of hospice; that in life, we are given the attributes of hope and love that may always continue to sustain us in moments of suffering and pain.

One of the services that our hospice program provides for patients and families is "memory making." Memory making include such activities as handprints, developing footprints in plaster of Paris, cutting locks of hair, and taking photographs

of the loved one with a caregiver. It is through the process of memory making that caregivers have that continued bond of remembrance after the death of their loved one.

The beauty of having an absolute moment in life is to be able to appreciate and cherish that exact moment for what it is, the ability to appreciate the "here and now." What this father was providing for his little girl was one of those moments captured in the "here and now," realizing that her time here with her family was precious. As hospice workers, we are given the gracious gift of sharing in those moments with patients and families.

This photo was taken hours before his daughter died.

PHOTOGRAPHY:
People (Professional)

1st Place

Title of Entry: Time with Timer
Photographer: Clark Hill
Program: Peachtree Christian Hospice, Duluth, GA

Pictured at the Peachtree Christian Hospice inpatient facility is Gary Kent, his wife Linda, and their dog Timer. The dog was allowed to stay with Gary night or day. He would lie near Gary's door and greet visitors with a wagging tail. Timer came back to visit the hospice after Gary's death.



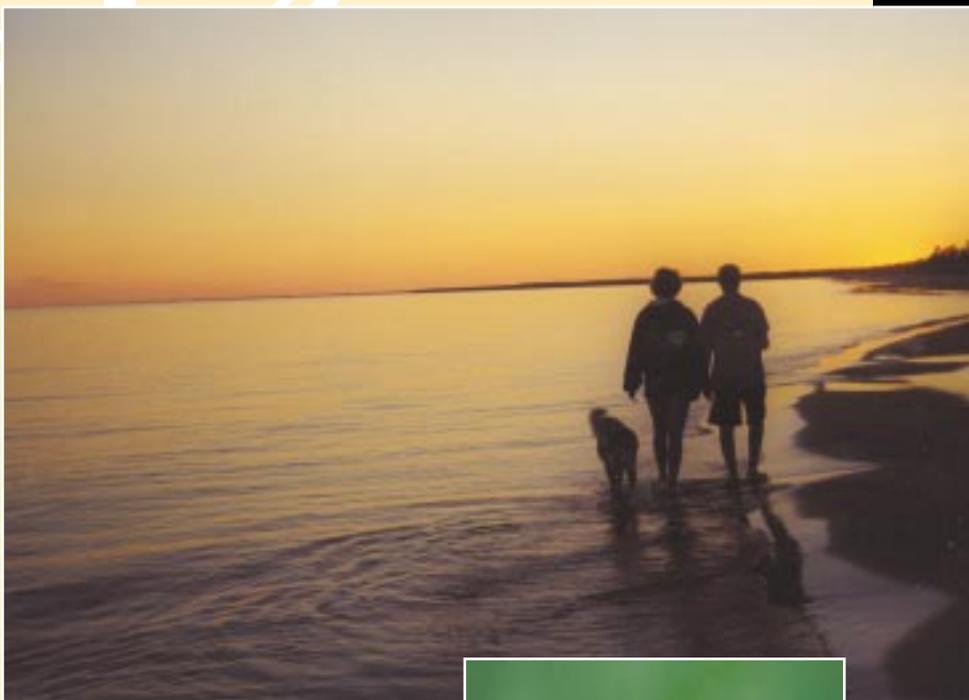
*NHPCO thanks all the entrants
in its 2003 Photography and Writing Contest.
The organization will sponsor
another photography and writing contest next year.
Look for details in NewsLine and at
www.nhpc.org
in early 2004.*

Linda Kent presented the hospice with an oil painting of Timer, which hangs outside the room where Gary spent his last days. Having his dog near him during his last weeks of life brought Gary comfort and peace. In the hospice setting, Gary could continue to have some control over the things that gave him pleasure and happiness, such as his loving pet, Timer.

PHOTOGRAPHY:
Nature (Amateur)

1st Place

Title of Entry: Walking Into the Sunset
Photographer: Barb Verly
Program: Prairie Home Hospice, Marshall, MN



2nd Place (tie)

Title: Letting Go
Photographer: Allan White
Program: New South Health
Care/Hospice at
Charlotte, Charlotte, NC



Title: Untitled
Photographer: Judith Black, R.N.
Program: Hospice of Murfreesboro
Middle Tennessee
Medical Center
St. Thomas Health Services



Honorable Mention

Title: The Umbrella
Photographer: Allan White
Program: New South Health
Care/Hospice at
Charlotte, Charlotte, NC



Quite often when I am asked what I do for a profession and respond that I am a hospice nurse, I am asked how I can do such a difficult service. To constantly be dealing with death is just about the worst thing some people could imagine on a day-to-day basis. To me, death is the sunset of our lives that we all have in our futures. I find tremendous rewards and satisfaction in helping people come to this final time in their lives, able to be at home with their loved ones by their side. It is meaningful to help them find release from physical pain and to make their lives more comfortable on all levels. A very big part of the picture in these final days is to assess and meet the spiritual needs of a patient

and family. Things in life take on a whole new perspective when we know that the end is near. To be able to assess the spiritual needs of a patient and family has been a wonderful gift to me in this day and age. It becomes so important to come to that place where death can be peaceful and is no longer feared but accepted. We do not walk into that sunset of our lives alone. We in hospice help patients and families find a good place where they feel loved and supported and surrounded with peaceful acceptance of walking on into the sunset.

PHOTOGRAPHY:
Photographer's Choice (Amateur)

1st Place

Title: Caring Hands
(shown at right)

Photographer: Margi Magee
Program: Hospice of Martin and
St. Lucie, Stuart, FL



At our hospice, we are encouraged to take care of ourselves. One of our nurses is a licensed massage therapist. This picture is of Vicki Plante giving Wanda Alves a massage. Wanda is a secretary in the Clinical Department. We have incredible employees who

are as caring and compassionate with each other as they are with our patients. I believe this adds to our capability to care for our patients in the best possible manner. I believe this photo exemplifies our philosophy of hospice care for both patients and employees.

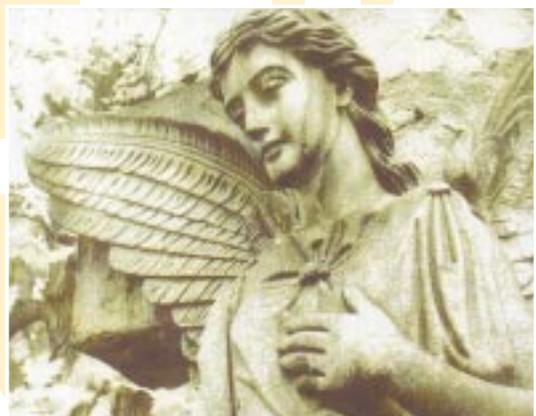


2nd Place

Title: Caring Hands
Photographer: Margi Magee
Program: Hospice of Martin and
St. Lucie, Stuart, FL

Honorable Mention

Title: Angel Heart
Photographer: Jeff Collier
Program: Community Hospice,
Massillon, OH



WRITING: *Essay (below)*

1st Place

Title: "Why Do You Do It?" Reflections on a New Job Description for Hospice Bereavement Coordinators

Writer: Georgia Robertson

Program: Hospice of Washington, Washington, D.C.

I am sitting at the round table in the small living room at the inpatient unit with a sister of one of our patients. The sister's name is Meg, and she is my age, hovering around 50, with a young dark-haired daughter back home in New York who gets up and goes to middle school each day without her mother's presence. Meg wouldn't be here, normally, and normally her daughter would be getting breakfast, sitting down to eat Cheerios with her mother, but that's not the way it is today. Not the way it is this month. Everyone's life is unsettled, weird, not routine.

The reason is Sally. Meg's sister is Sally, and Sally is younger, 38 years old, and she is in the room across from where we sit. She is dying rather suddenly from a cancer diagnosed only three weeks ago. I say she is dying suddenly, but it is taking her a while to go. Everyday, there is less and less of Sally. She doesn't hold her fork by herself, she needs help drinking water, she wants the curtains closed, and asks for less company, fewer visitors. Today, she finally accepts pain medicine she had refused on principle from the beginning. It is another sign. These are the mileposts of loss, the markers of letting go when there is no choice about holding on. Meg has been nearly living here, staying day after day, keeping her sister company, calling back to her family when she can, and sometimes coming to sit here with me, and talk.

It is a lovely place to sit, even if everyone around you is dying. The Hospice of Washington is blessed that way. Large windows look out on a beautiful enclosed garden. A fountain bubbles in the center, and blooming flowers or bushes add color, purples,

pinks, whites, yellows. Your eyes look out there automatically because it is lovely, refreshing, and an escape. But there isn't any escape from the August weather. It is one of the hottest ones many of us could remember for years, and the heat has slowly been robbing the trees of their leaves, leaching the color out of the sky, and reducing the flowers to faded hope. The air seems to bake the world slowly from morning until night.

There isn't any escape from the death that waits for Sally either. Nor is there escape for the grief that has already started for Meg. She and her sister were never particularly close, so in one sense, this illness has brought them suddenly and powerfully together. Conversations that might have happened leisurely over many years are happening quickly and poignantly. They are making their peace with one another. Meg will make sure Sally is buried in her favorite baseball uniform, will take her cat home with her when "all of this is over," as she says. Right now that is all Meg can do—make plans for a future that holds the absence of her sister. It isn't easy to think about. It isn't easy to do. It isn't easy to talk about either. But we do.

This morning Meg is tired, and her face has the blank look of longtime weariness, the haunted look that mourners-to-be sometimes wear at this point in their loved one's illness. It is the look of "hanging on," of enduring, of staying in place with sorrow. It is as if the hot summer has slowly robbed her of any vitality, drained away the liquid happiness of her ordinary life. She looks at me, her face pale, her eyes with no light, and even though she doesn't care about the answer, she asks, "Why do you do this?"

What she means is why do I sit here with her this morning? Why do I sit with her some evenings, and watch the garden grow shadowy with the dusk? Why do I ask her about Sally, and why do I even know her daughter's name and what she misses most about her mother these days? Why do I know what it was like to grow up with Sally, about how their father died, and then their mother, about all the arguments and regrets that came in between then and now? Why do I know what she will read at the funeral service and the casket she has chosen alone one afternoon in a mortuary she knows nothing about? Why do I understand the jokes that she shares with her sister, the small wisecracks they have shared from the beginning to make this horror less of what it is?

For a minute I almost think I need to answer her, but I don't. I say something like, "It's an honor to be here with you," or some other quick and simple statement that puts the attention back on Meg, and not on me, not on what I am doing. This is all about her, and all about Sally. I am Meg's support, quiet like the full moon resting in a hot black August sky at night, or nearly invisible like the promise of rain when you see dew on an early summer morning. It is there if you look for it. I am here if she looks for me, and often when she doesn't.

But I think about her question later, driving home from work, and again, days after her sister dies, and then again each month when I write or phone Meg, reach out to check on her as she is reabsorbed by her life in New York, miles from here. My answer is slow in coming. The easy answers come first, but don't stay. These are the answers most bereavement coordinators will use at

2nd Place

Title: That Dreaded Word, Hospice
Writer: Linda Ann Fitts
Program: Hospice and Palliative Care of Greensboro, Greensboro, NC

3rd Place

Title: Story Time
Writer: Ellen Coughlin
Program: Saint Barnabas Hospice and Palliative Care Program, Millburn, NJ

some time in their career. They come out without much thought after a while. Usually they sound something like: "I feel a calling." Or "It makes me feel as if I am helping someone at a hard time in their life." Or "I remember what it was like when I had a loved one who died." Or "I get so much from being there for them."

For me, the answer is different. When I sort through all the reasons I am a bereavement coordinator, only one seems to be enough. I am here for Meg, and for the others that follow her, because there isn't anything else to do.

There isn't anything else to do. What does that mean? No, it doesn't mean that I haven't got anything else to do with my life. I do. I go home to a lovely family. I love to garden and read and meditate. Everyday I make the choice to go to my job, and it is a

good choice, one I make freely and often with joy. Nor is it an answer that suggests that this is the end of the road for me or for the loved ones who grieve, that life is some miserable trial to be endured. It doesn't mean I am sitting with families because we have run out of hope or run out of coping strategies. It doesn't mean I feel helpless or hopeless or without resources. It doesn't mean I don't love life.

What it does mean is that death comes. And grief follows. It means that life seems unfair at times and cruel, that sadness can rob you of life as surely as August stole away last summer and took Sally with it. And at such times there is nothing to say, no absolute bromide of information and comfort that will make any difference. We are all part of a process of living, of loving, and of dying that spares no one. No amount of grief

expertise will bring back what used to be, will restore fullness to what is now an empty spot in a life. So there is nothing else to do. Or perhaps I should say, there is nothing more to do. Being there for families and friends is everything. The alternative is going through devastation by yourself, is going through pain without anyone there with you.

In an odd way, I am content with this job description. I am here because there isn't anything else to do, because this is where we will all find ourselves one day. And when there isn't anything else to do, nothing more to be done, I will do just that with Meg, and with all the family members and friends who come through the Hospice of Washington door. I will sit with them at this table, looking out at the garden, waiting.

WRITING: Poetry

1st Place

Title: Composition
Writer: Father Paul Gambling, Chaplain
Program: Hospice of Yuma, Yuma, AZ

We witness to the extreme state
Of the human condition.
Seeing earthy lives fade and pass,
As if they were the rendition
Of resounding climactic notes
In one great composition.

Some lives are works of genius,
Playing in a minor key;
Some, a symphony of thunder
Forcing shelter in the lee
Of a bulwark made of training
And compassion, always free.

The songs of the ages are gathered,
From the time when time began,
To be focused in precious moments,
In the too brief human span,
A harmony in majesty,
Soloists in the Master's plan.

And we are grateful to listen,
To find comfort in the strains
Of the brilliant composer,
The one who urges and maintains,
That we are the orchestra
Playing life's airs and refrains.

2nd Place

Title: The Vigil
Writer: Anne Marie Cheney,
RN, MSN
Program: Heartland Hospice,
Santa Rosa, CA

3rd Place

Title: Senses of Life
Writer: Linda Mansfield
Program: VNA & Hospice of
Southern Carroll
County, Wolfeboro, NH