

Hospice nurse Trudy Brady: Part of a family tradition of service

Mission Hospice nurse Trudy Brady, LVN, is a part of her family's culture of service. She was born and raised in San Francisco, where her father and brother were both firemen.

run a program that provides healthcare to homeless people in San Francisco.

This program – something she calls “one of my favorite, hardest, and most rewarding jobs” – led her to volunteer at

Trudy says these experiences meant that she always knew that she wanted to do hospice care at the end of her career. Long before that – some 30 years ago – she volunteered for Mission Hospice, coming in on the weekends to organize the supply closet. So when she was ready to move on from corporate healthcare, she knew where she wanted to go. “I saw a posting for a nurse, applied at lunch, came in the next day, and was offered the position in the middle of my interview.”

Mission Hospice clinical manager Sue Kensill, RN, says, “Trudy's experience is a real asset to the team because she understands how things work and why – and can teach others.”

Trudy started as a triage nurse, something Sue says is a complicated job she learned quickly, understanding how the teams work best together. “She learns things deeply and understands the processes and why we do things,” says Sue. “That translates to great education of our patients and team members.”

Now, Trudy visits patients in their homes anywhere from San Francisco and the Coastsides down to Palo Alto and Portola Valley. She continues to train new triage nurses.

A lifelong learner, Trudy has become a Certified Hospice and Palliative Licensed Nurse (CHPLN) and has just started training as an end-of-life doula – something she expects will enhance her ability to be with patients and give her tools to be an even better nurse.

Trudy wishes everyone were more aware of the extent of support available to a family with a loved one on hospice care. “I want every patient and family



After nursing in just about every other profession, LVN Trudy Brady (left, shown with Mission Hospice clinical manager Sue Kensill) has found home hospice care is just where she wants to be.

Her grandma taught Trudy and her five siblings about giving back. “We didn't have much,” says Trudy, “but our house was the one everyone came to if they needed dinner or had no place to go.” Even as a little girl, Trudy knew she wanted to be a nurse or a nun. “Service is my whole being,” she says.

Trudy followed her passion and became a Licensed Vocational Nurse (LVN) at age 22. Over the last four decades, she's done just about every job a nurse can do. She's worked in a half dozen medical specialties, staffed and run clinics, managed medical offices, and

Gift of Love Shelter, a 13-bed facility in Pacifica for unhoused men at the end of life without family or resources.

Hospice care resonated with Trudy because of all the loss she has experienced. Her mother died when Trudy was 21. All five of her siblings have also passed. And after a family gathering on Easter Sunday about 14 years ago, her sister-in-law – an oncology nurse and also Trudy's best friend – died suddenly, leaving two children. Trudy and her husband have helped their brother-in-law raise their niece and nephew in their five-person “modern family.”

Hospice volunteer Paul Smith shares lessons from his own grief journey

Belmont resident and master carver Paul Smith has volunteered with Mission Hospice for nearly 20 years. He has accompanied hundreds of people in their final months and supported their loved ones through their grief.

With so much experience, Paul was certain that he understood the immense power and impact of grief and loss. But when his wife Keiko died suddenly from a ruptured aneurysm at the age of 59, the experience changed Paul – and his approach to helping others.

This summer, Paul shared his grief journey at our annual memorial service. Here he shares some excerpts.

Keiko and I met in 1992 on a blind date arranged by a mutual friend. We knew each other immediately. We were locked in conversation the entire evening. We arranged a day-long date for that coming Saturday. That day, she asked me if we were going to get married. And I said, “I’ve got a feeling.”

As it was, I waited a month before I proposed (three weeks longer than I wanted to), and we were married five months later.

Keiko taught me so much – she was so honest, and she could see right through me. We had two incredible children we adored. She often described our relationship as two doves on a branch. But I was always busy, searching, seeking. She said I wore her out...couldn’t we just be two doves on a branch.

The last few years had been difficult, but I had finally found this place of peace inside, and I had a feeling that I had to tell



Paul has volunteered with Mission Hospice since 2005. His wife Keiko's death changed his approach to supporting patients and families.

her **that night** that I could be that dove on a branch...that I wanted another 30 years with her.”

The next morning as I left the house, she thanked me for what I’d said the night before. Later that day, I got a call from her in total distress, and I came home to find her on the floor. She passed 20 minutes later. It was unbelievable.

I was so fortunate to be there when she passed. I had the gift of being there to express my love and receive her love.

And from there, the journey began for me. I learned what I didn’t know about grief – and what I didn’t know about myself.

I’ve talked to SO many people about grief during my time in hospice care. I thought that I knew. But I really didn’t know.

Grief affected me so enormously for two or three months – I was just in shock. If I could get up and do one task in the day, it was a success. It was like walking through a sea of mud. And then shock waves would come out of nowhere – during my daily life, and in my dreams.

That’s grief; that’s shock. Now I know what others have been through. It’s made me a better person. Damn that it had to happen this way.

We were quite independent as a couple. But now that she’s no longer with me, I’ve realized that she’s in every word that I ever spoke, and in every step that I took. She was always by my side. Now that she’s not here, I feel alone in a way I never felt before. Who am I without Keiko?

The last year has been a journey of pain, of grief, of being strong for my children. It’s bonded us together in a unique way.

I’m not going to hang onto the past. I’m moving forward. I choose that word deliberately, because there’s no moving on.



Paul and Keiko had been together 30 years when she died suddenly, upending his world and changing his understanding of grief.



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But life demands that we move forward. I'm stepping into a new life that I really wasn't expecting.

What I've gone through has made me a totally different person. Keiko was my greatest teacher in life, and she's my greatest teacher in death, too.

What I've learned is yesterday's gone. I don't have tomorrow. We like to think that we're entitled to 80, 90, 100 years. No. I have today.

When we lose someone so important in our lives, it forces us to come to terms with end of life. The two biggest things we are so afraid of in life are aging and death. They're the two most absolute, certain things that are going to happen. So why don't we embrace them and be liberated from this fear of something we know will happen? Why don't we live in acceptance? That's how I choose to live.

Life is strong, life is powerful. We have life in us.

In a day, I have 24 hours. In that 24 hours, I realize there are so many joyful experiences, simple pleasures. If you live in the day, everything slows down. I'm not saying be careless – I'm saying care enormously about today, because that's what you know you have. You've got this moment. Let's live it. 🐾

Mission Hospice offers free drop-in grief support groups every week, individual counseling, workshops, and other support for those who have lost a loved one.

For more information, visit [MissionHospice.org/grief](https://www.MissionHospice.org/grief).

Mission Hospice and By the Bay Health Announce Intent to Merge

We are excited to announce that we have signed a Letter of Intent to merge with By the Bay Health, a not-for-profit and the first hospice in California, and an organization that shares our rich history of service to patients and families throughout the San Francisco Bay Area.

Like Mission Hospice, By the Bay Health provides a continuum of care for those in the final years of life, as well as a wide range of free community education and bereavement services. Our new organization would be uniquely positioned to reach more families through our unified mission-driven approach, commitment to compassionate nonprofit care, and impactful community programs.

Together, our patients and families would be supported by more than 400 volunteers as well as 500 multidisciplinary staff, including physicians, nurses, social workers, spiritual support and bereavement counselors, home health aides, and therapists.

We look forward to sharing more information in the coming months. In the meantime, please know that this announcement does not impact our current services, and Mission Hospice remains committed to providing the highest quality, compassionate end-of-life care to our community, which has supported us for nearly 45 years.

For more information, visit [MissionHospice.org/BTBH](https://www.MissionHospice.org/BTBH).

Mission Hospice & Home Care serves patients and families in the San Francisco Peninsula and South Bay with personalized, compassionate end-of-life care and education. Founded in 1979, our local, independent nonprofit has supported thousands of patients and their families through illness and bereavement. Donations from the community support our exceptional care and educational programs, and help us serve people regardless of their medical coverage or ability to pay.

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In May, we welcomed dozens of people to **Season of Remembrance**, our annual community memorial service.

The afternoon event offered space for people to remember and reflect on loved ones who have passed.

In addition to an invocation by Spiritual Counselor Rachel Lopez Rosenberg (above right) and a reflection from Mission Hospice volunteer Paul Smith (story page 2), the service included a candle-lighting ceremony, a memorial altar (right), lovely music from harpist Elyse Ader and the Peninsula Threshold Choir, and a reception hosted by the Mission Hospice Auxiliary and staff.



Nurse Trudy... *continued from front*

member to know that if they're having a hard time, they can just pick up the phone and call or text us."

"Death is just another normal step, a transition. I want to make that easier not only for the people who are passing but also for the ones they are leaving behind."

"I've never felt in a more perfect place than I do when I'm with a patient," Trudy says. "A lot of that is because I understand where they are coming from, both as a patient and as a caregiver or family member." The best part of her job, she says, is just sitting with patients and hearing their stories, their thoughts, their expectations.

"There are times when I connect and it's something I really can't describe. But I know that I made a difference that day. I love my job. I've done a lot of different jobs, but this is exactly where I'm meant to be." 🍂

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