

A day with a social worker: compassion and support for families

Listeners, problem-solvers, advocates, and much more, social workers wear many hats. Mission Hospice social worker Elizabeth (Tess) Rogers says that her job is “pairing what resources and support are available with what families are ready for.”

Tess aims to see each of her patients every two weeks, or more often as needed – patients’ needs may change over time. Some days Tess visits three or four patients; other days she spends more time making calls, faxing paperwork, or following up on MediCal or VA benefits.

“While nurses and physicians help with physical pain, we can help with emotional pain, resources, and counseling – for patients and families,” Tess explains. “Our job is to hold space for everyone to express their feelings, their fears, and their wishes, and to be the mediator as needed.”

On a recent day, Tess started with a phone call from a nurse who needed some advice about how to assist a struggling family. “It’s part of our job to support our fellow team members,” Tess explains. “We have such a supportive, compassionate team – we all have each others’ backs.”



Social worker Tess Rogers on a recent visit with her patient Opal and volunteer Bill – who is also Tess’ dad. Opal, a retired professor, enjoys talking about her childhood and her career with Tess.

By the time this conversation has finished, Tess has arrived at the Millbrae home of her first patient.

Opal, a retired professor with Alzheimer’s disease, recently turned 102, and Tess brings with her a small box of doughnuts to celebrate. She’s welcomed like family by both Opal and her caregiver.

With her wheelchair scooted up to the dining room table, Opal eats breakfast while Tess visits. Warm and gentle, Tess asks Opal about her childhood on a Mississippi farm, skillfully working in questions about her pain level and mood.

“Is there anything on your heart that you want to talk about?” Tess asks. Opal says she wouldn’t change a thing about her life, something Tess says is a good reminder of staying in the present and expressing gratitude.

Tess also reassures the caregiver that she’s doing a good job. “Part of my role is to encourage the patient and family, to let them know that they can do this,” she says.

While stopping for a second cup of coffee, Tess makes some notes about the visit for other members of the care team. And later, she will – as usual – call Opal’s daughter Pam with an update. She explains: “Sometimes I work more with the family than with the patient. A lot of our work is helping families accept what is happening, while acknowledging their pain, grief, and sadness.”

Tess’ next stop is at the Redwood City home of John and Michelle. When John, who has prostate cancer, started hospice care, his wife was reluctant to accept social work support. After Tess offered to stay with him so Michelle could attend her church

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Please join Mission Hospice for our

*41st Anniversary
Celebration*

Sunday, January 26, 2020
2 – 5pm

Peninsula Golf & Country Club
San Mateo

Celebrating our community
Hosted bar & hors d’oeuvres

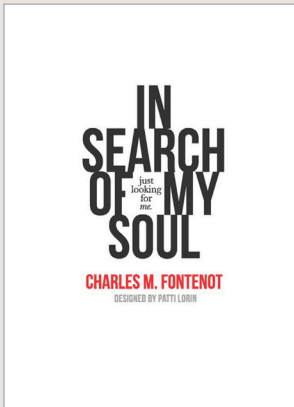
Tickets \$75

MissionHospice.org/anniversary

Author's Corner: Recent books from the Mission Hospice team

The Mission Hospice team pours their heart into their work – and some of this heart also pours out onto the page.

In the past year Mission Hospice volunteers and staff have written blogs and published books, all of which inspire, educate, and offer support and insights.



Chuck Fontenot,
Direct Care Volunteer

***In Search Of My Soul:
Just Looking For Me***

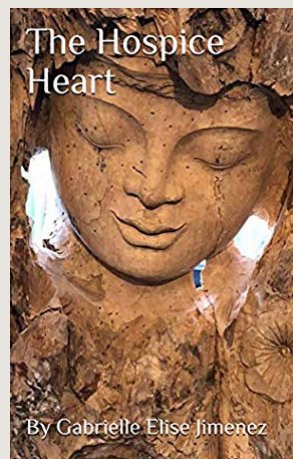
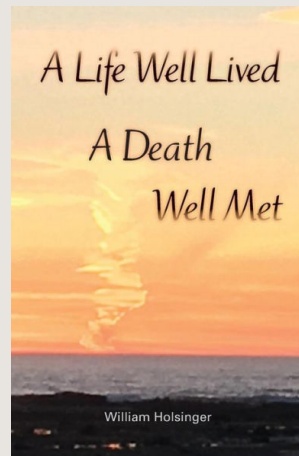
Poems about the journey of life after loss.

William Holsinger,
Direct Care Volunteer

***A Life Well Lived,
A Death Well Met***

Parables and poems about aging, death, and dying – and finding peace.

William blogs at www.williamholsinger.com.



Gabrielle Jimenez, LVN
The Hospice Heart

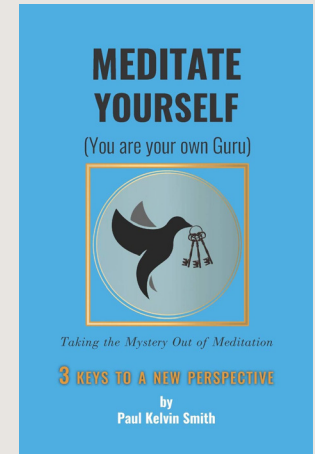
Life lessons and a personal journey toward hospice work and caregiving with heart.

Gabby blogs at thehospiceheart.net. She will be part of the Mission Hospice 2020 Author Series on May 28.

Paul Smith,
Direct Care Volunteer

***Meditate Yourself
(You Are Your Own Guru)***

An instructional manual to creating a meditation practice.



The Mission Hospice 2020 Author Series starts on Thursday, January 23, when we host Jessica Zitter, MD, author of *Extreme Measures*.

More information about the Author Series and many other events can be found in the enclosed **Community Connections** guide or at **MissionHospice.org**.

Patricia Matthews to receive Special Recognition Award

Long-time volunteer and supporter Patricia Matthews will be honored with a Special Recognition Award at the January 2020 anniversary celebration. For the past 17 years, she has served as a Direct Care Volunteer, companionship patients at the end of life.

She explains, "My connections with patients are always powerful and intimate. At the end of life, the simple act of being present – holding hands, listening to stories, sharing music – is a profound gift, not just for the patient, but to me as a volunteer."

"Over the years, my patients have taught me a new kind of love."



Patricia Matthews visiting her patient, Carla.

Volunteer informational meetings January 21

As a Direct Care Volunteer, you'll help patients and families make the most of their time together. You might provide companionship, offer respite for loved ones, read books or listen to stories, or sit vigil with patients.

Find out all about volunteering with Mission Hospice in advance of our winter training session. No RSVP needed – come to the meeting that works best for you.

Volunteer Info Meetings

Tuesday, January 21, 2020
noon–1pm or 5:30–6:30pm
1670 South Amphlett #300, San Mateo

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meetings, that built trust that allowed Tess to provide even more meaningful support to the family.

Tess explains that much of her work with this family has been counseling. "Both of them were angry about John's disease. I was able to help them talk through it so that they could project their anger onto the disease, and not each other." Tess also facilitated family meetings with their two adult daughters, who wanted to be more involved in care and decisionmaking.

Today, Tess talks to John about his veterans' benefits, which she facilitated so that he could get the VA caregiver he had earned. Helping people navigate benefits and find resources is an important part of the social work role.

Only partly joking, Tess says that social workers are "the forms people." In addition to helping people navigate insurance benefits, MediCal and Medicare, and paid family leave, they help people complete Advance Health Care Directives and review their POLST forms. Social workers also help navigate care at a very practical level. "We can start the conversation about where the best place is for care. We help determine whether the patient is safe in the home, or needs care beyond what family members can provide."

After her visit with John and Michelle, Tess heads north again to her patient in an assisted living facility in Burlingame. Harold, at 93, has congestive heart failure. In a single week, he moved into the facility and started hospice care – quite a change for the vibrant, independent man. Tess says that she visited weekly at first, to help him adjust to his new environment.

When he first moved there, she orchestrated a care conference with Harold and his children, the entire Mission Hospice team, and facility staff. Tess explains that "these meetings lay the foundation for the patient's care, who does what, and making

sure the family understands how we can support them. We are always there to advocate for the patient."

The staff at Harold's home now knows Tess well. As part of her visit with Harold, Tess observes and records his appearance, eating habits, and alertness.



Tess visits Opal to check on her physical and emotional well-being; social workers also help patients navigate benefits, offer counseling to families, and facilitate life review.

Harold is a big sports fan, something he loves to share with his Mission Hospice volunteer – who just happens to be Tess' dad Bill. The father-daughter duo often visit patients together. "It's the biggest joy to be

able to do this work together," says Tess. "I think patients get a sense that they're really being cared for – it's a family thing."

Her main objective is to help Harold review his life and prepare to die peacefully. Over the past few months, Tess has talked with him about his childhood and the many things he has accomplished. She's also helping him through depression and grief from his wife's death four years earlier. "My job is to hear his story, to witness and help him process his life."

Back in the Mission Hospice office, Tess will finish her notes for these patients, plan tomorrow's visits, make a few phone calls, and check in with her colleagues – an important part of her day. "Experiencing someone's vulnerabilities is such an honor – but it can be difficult. It's so helpful to be able to unpack that with a colleague who gets it," she says.

"Ultimately, bearing witness to someone's anger or grief is the biggest gift. That's when I feel like I am really helping. That's what is so rewarding about this work." 🍌

Hospice House update

In Fall 2015, we opened San Mateo County's first hospice house, a peaceful, homelike place for patients whose end-of-life comfort cannot be managed at home. Over the past four years, we've been honored to serve hundreds of patients, ranging in age from 26 to 106, and their families.

Unfortunately, the reimbursement model for this level of care is woefully inadequate, and our Board of Directors made the very difficult decision last month to close that house to help ensure the organization's financial sustainability – so that we can fulfill our mission long into the future. The Peninsula Health Care District has made an offer to purchase the property to support another local nonprofit that serves the healthcare needs of our community.

While we are saddened to say goodbye to this special place that touched the lives of so many, the proceeds from the sale will support the ongoing operation of our Redwood City hospice house and enable us to keep this important community resource available.

Steve Weller, MD and Mary Chigos, RN, NP
Capital Campaign Co-Chairs

Mission Hospice & Home Care serves patients and families in the San Mateo and Santa Clara County area with quality, 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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Volunteer leader Sheila Young honored with 2020 Lotus Award

Sheila Young, long-time board member, donor, and all-around champion of Mission Hospice, will receive the 2020 Lotus Award at our 41st Anniversary Celebration this month. Created in 2005, the annual award recognizes individuals who have shown outstanding support of the organization.

Sheila's commitment to ensuring that our community has exceptional end-of-life care has been generous and unwavering. A real estate attorney, she served as a member of our Board of Directors from 2006-2019, was Chair of the Board in 2010-2011, and over the years served on the Executive Committee, Development Committee, Lotus Award Committee, and Nominating Committee. She is also a long-time member of the Peninsula Italian American Club committee that organizes the annual Night of Fun dinner-dance that benefits Mission Hospice patients.

"Mission Hospice has been and will always be one of my passions," says Sheila. "In my time on the Board, I was lucky enough to work with a team of dedicated Board members, generous Auxiliary members,

inspiring volunteers, enthusiastic donors, and an amazing and compassionate staff. I am so grateful for all of them."

Lotus Award Committee chair Mary Chigos says that a number of people nominated Sheila for the award because of her long years of service, professional leadership, and generosity. "Over the years, Board Chairs who came before her and after her have called on Sheila for her insight and wisdom. She's such a steady, conscientious person." Sheila and her husband Jim Linehan have frequently offered their Hillsborough home for Mission Hospice functions.

Adella Harris, recipient of the very first Lotus Award, says, "There aren't enough superlatives to do justice to Sheila's long



Lotus Award winner Sheila Young and her husband Jim Linehan.

years of service to Mission Hospice. Her professional skills in real estate and law have been a real blessing. Her open-hearted philanthropy has been bottomless. She has done so much to advance the mission of our agency, and has done it with grace and humor." 🌸