

Advocate Craig McCulloh uses comedy to raise spirits and funds

Just six months out of college in fall 1981, Craig McCulloh was attending his first Little People of America Regional Conference when he locked eyes with Linda, a fellow attendee. He admits “it was pretty much love at first sight,” and they were married the next year.

Linda graduated from Santa Clara University Law School and went on to work as an attorney for the State of California, responsible for policies for accommodating people with disabilities in the California court system. Craig became a patients’ rights advocate and then staffed the San Mateo County Commission on Disabilities for many years. He knew advocacy was his calling.

“As a person with a disability, being able to get paid to be an advocate for people in your community is a pretty good deal.” Being an advocate “is who I am,” he says – and he has demonstrated that repeatedly.

Craig retired when the COVID lockdown began in April 2020, giving him more time for something he’d dabbled in – standup comedy. Using his stage name “Tut” (his college nickname), he dove right in with Zoom comedy shows (something he describes as “performing in front of a vacuum cleaner”). By starting with gigs on the east coast and working his way west as the day progressed, he managed to do 45 shows in a two-month period, gaining experience and connections.

But in July 2020, Linda was diagnosed with metastatic melanoma, and her oncologist told her she had 4-6 months. “Linda wanted to fight it,” says Craig, and she did. Over the next 16 months, she tried immunotherapy, chemotherapy, and more. Despite the treatments, the melanoma kept growing, and by October 2021, she was in Stanford Hospital.

Craig became her stalwart patient advocate. “I told everybody at Stanford that I had a career as an advocate, that I was damn

good at it, and that I was going to utilize every bit of what I know to get the best care for Linda.”

When her oncologist recommended Mission House, Craig said they knew it was right. “It was just a godsend that we found Mission House. It was a totally different environment than the hospital – so peaceful and tranquil. When Linda arrived there, it was the first time that either one of us could really take a deep breath. We were so grateful.”

Craig recalls the thoughtfulness, care, and accommodations provided by the entire Mission House team, with particularly fond memories of Dr. Gary Pasternak and volunteer Paul Smith. During the weeks that Linda and Craig were in Mission House, they formed some deep bonds. Craig says that a few staff members even stopped by on their days off to visit Linda.

While Linda was at Mission House, she realized that she wanted to have a “living memorial,” giving her a chance to say goodbye to her family, friends, and colleagues. Undeterred by the house COVID protocols that limited visitors, Craig

arranged for visitors to arrive in shifts. About 30 people visited that day to spend time with Linda.

Throughout Linda’s stay in the house, Craig was by her side 24/7. Her two sisters and two nephews also spent time with them. The day after everyone but Craig had returned home, Linda became unresponsive, and on the morning of November 5, 2021, she passed away at the age of 62.

After that, Craig said everything changed for him. “I was miserable. I didn’t know what my future held.” He benefited from individual grief counseling provided by Mission Hospice as well as our grief support groups, including our partner loss support group led by Social Worker Tracie Pyers.

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When his wife Linda was diagnosed with metastatic melanoma, Craig McCulloh leveraged his expertise as an advocate to ensure that she got the care she wanted, including her final weeks at Mission House.

Judy DiPaolo to receive 2023 Lotus Award at anniversary celebration

We are thrilled to present volunteer leader and board member Judy DiPaolo with the 2023 Mission Hospice Lotus Award at our 44th anniversary celebration on Sunday, January 29. Since 2005, this annual award has been given to an individual who has shown outstanding support of the organization. After several years of hiatus for both the celebration and award due to COVID, we will finally gather in person again at the Peninsula Golf & Country Club in San Mateo.

The decision of the Lotus Award Committee to honor Judy was unanimous. Judy's career involved leading large HR teams for both Mills-Peninsula Health Services and the Peninsula Coastal Region of Sutter Health. As a board member for nearly two decades, she has graciously shared her HR and healthcare expertise to help guide our organization.

Lotus Award Committee member and former board member Mary Chigos says, "Every CEO that Judy has worked with considered her invaluable. She is the go-to person for management questions and decisions regarding Human Resources. Everyone looks to her for history, vision, and direction."

In her years of volunteering with Mission Hospice, Judy served as Board Chair for three years, chaired the board's

HR Committee, and participated on many other committees. Currently she is the Board Secretary and also serves on the Quality and Compliance Committee.

Former board chair Steven Weller, also a member of the Lotus Committee, says, "Judy is a terrific

leader. When she makes up her mind based on evidence and thought, she's calm but very firm in her decisions – she carries forward with conviction."

"In addition to being one of the nicest people we all know, she's been so generous over the years to Mission Hospice," says Steve. "She is always willing to take on duties and tasks. She never says no. She first says yes to her family, and then second, yes to Mission Hospice."

Mary agrees. "Judy is a one-of-a-kind person – bright, giving, loving, and dedicated, all while being quietly humble."

True to form, Judy's response to learning that she was to receive the award was to share the honor with the entire team.

"I am tremendously honored to be recognized," says Judy, "but the award really goes to everyone at Mission Hospice. At a small nonprofit like ours, it takes a talented, dedicated group of staff, volunteers, the Auxiliary, and the board working together as a team."

"To me, this award is a tremendous thank you to everyone who collaborates to make it work. We have really wonderful, dedicated people at Mission Hospice who give of themselves generously. It's so rewarding knowing that we make a difference in the community." 🐾

Tickets for the anniversary celebration on January 29 are available at www.MissionHospice.org/anniversary.

Honoring
Judy DiPaolo
Recipient of the
2023 Lotus Award



Please join Mission Hospice & Home Care for our
44th Anniversary Celebration

Sunday, January 29, 2023

2 – 5pm

Peninsula Golf & Country Club, San Mateo

Hosted bar & hors d'oeuvres

Cocktail attire

Club rules prohibit denim and t-shirts

Tickets \$125

MissionHospice.org/anniversary

Questions? Call 650.554.1000

Honoring
Crosby-N. Gray & Co.
Recipient of the
2023 Special
Recognition Award



Meet LVN Rachel Joy Tancioco

Joined Mission Hospice: 2018

Grew up: Tondo Manila, Philippines

Family: My small family started migrating to the US in 1989.

Why I came to Mission Hospice: I worked as a bookkeeper for 18 years before deciding to switch careers. The experience of caring for my grandmother (who received hospice care in a skilled nursing facility) was the driving force for me to become a nurse.

Hobbies: I am fond of watching Korean dramas and also passionate about educating future LVNs.

Reading: Nursing books! I am constantly keeping up to date on nursing practices and ways to be more effective as an instructor.

Favorite food: I love to eat and explore different cuisines but am most fond of sushi.

Little known fact: I am a single mother, and my pride and joy is my 18-year-old daughter who is pursuing a career in social work and is currently volunteering to teach sex education to high school students.

On my bucket list: A few of the things on my bucket list are visiting Paris, France; becoming an RN and CHPLN; and buying a small condo that I can consider my own.

Craig McCulloh... *continued from front*

Eventually, Craig decided to take charge of his new life by immersing himself in his comedy and the community he found with his fellow comedians. As much as his new vocation offered him companionship, Craig was keenly aware of the approaching one-year anniversary of Linda's death, and he didn't want to be alone that day.

He solved that problem by planning a comedy showcase on November 5, 2022 as a fundraiser – an event to honor Linda and to support future patients at Mission House. He knew that Linda would have approved as she supported his initial venture into comedy, hence the title of the show, “Smiles from Heaven.”

He booked a venue for the event and reached out to his community, who supported him wholeheartedly. A comic friend who runs a catering business donated baked goods. His fellow musicians volunteered to play music as people arrived. And while he offered to pay the comedians he'd invited to perform at the show, most of them volunteered their time.

The audience was full of so many people who had been part of Linda's journey – staff and volunteers from Mission House, members of his grief support group,



Craig's community, including fellow comedians (above), rallied around him (right, performing) to support his comedy showcase fundraiser.

and social worker Tracie, who says “I woke up the next morning and felt chemically changed following two hours of straight laughter.”

Craig covered all of the expenses for the show, which raised \$2,000 for Mission House. He feels empowered by the success and sees more fundraisers in his future – including an annual event each November 5. “It all worked out,” he says. “This is the way to spend every anniversary.”

Tracie says the comedy showcase was a key part of Craig's grieving process.

“Each person comes to terms with their loss over time. Honoring the legacy of the relationship by acknowledging the anniversary is a milestone along this sacred process. Craig chose to honor his love for Linda with laughter. It was amazing to see the many parts of his support system come together with the Mission Hospice community to honor Linda, their amazing love story, and the last days of her life at Mission House.” 🍷



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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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INSIDE: Craig McCulloh: Comedian and advocate
 Judy DiPaolo to receive Lotus Award
 Anniversary celebration January 29 in San Mateo!



Fabulous Fall Gala raises awareness and funds

Diamonds & Denim

At our first in-person Fall Gala since 2019, it was great to reconnect over cocktails, dinner, and on the dance floor. The October 22 event raised some \$175,000 to benefit our patients and programs.

Many thanks to our Auxiliary volunteers, as well as to our sponsors and all who attended and participated.

For more photos, visit [Facebook.com/missionhospice](https://www.facebook.com/missionhospice).

