

May 5, 2023
To: Willow Award / Smith Family Funeral Homes
RE: Nomination Letter for Willow Award

Dear Willow Award,

I realize that the Willow Award is traditionally awarded to an individual caretaker, but after my experience at Hospice Home Care, I simply cannot identify one specific individual to recognize as the entire team was simply amazing.

No one ever expects/wants to be a patient or family in hospice. However, after a great deal of research trying to identify what was the best for my father, I made the decision to place him at Hospice Home Care. I never regretted this decision and could not have asked for a better experience.

The Hospice team is simply amazing at making patient's & family's experiences as easy as they can, with their kindness, compassion & dedication to not only their patients/families but to one another as well. Working end-of-life care takes an incredibly special individual to commit to ensuring that a person's end of life journey is meaningful and special, and each employee is special.

The team is exposed to a variety of situations – whether it be tragic accidents, cancer, aging…situations which are never happy considering this is hospice. The Hospice team responds to their patients/families with grace, professionalism, and respect, despite knowing that they will not be able to see their patient's lives continue. This never stops the team from consistently giving patients & families their best – commitment, expertise, hope, compassion, support, and kindness, just to name a few – despite facing end-of-life situations.

Despite some very arduous circumstances, the team rises to the challenge, ensuring the patient and family receive the best care they can offer. This team unfailingly gives patients & families their best – dedication, expertise, hope, compassion, understanding, and kindness, just to name a few. There are no egos, there is only commitment to making things better for patients & families. Their work together is always in rhythm and harmony with one another in order to produce the best outcome for everyone.

Throughout it all, the team always shows such commitment, readily share their knowledge, provide hope to patients & families daily, offer kindness to anyone who comes into their "home" and practice compassion daily.

They do their best to try to make things better, despite some very difficult circumstances. This team is truly exceptional and it was truly an honor and a privilege for myself and my father to have been a part of their family for almost seven months. No words can truly express our appreciation of each and every one at Hospice.

My father was in hospice for almost eight months. As such, the team grew to know my daddy (and me) pretty darn well. They laid out his meals exactly how he preferred, and they quickly learned his likes and dislikes - three pieces of bacon *every* morning - because "two pieces just were not enough" according to daddy. Every meal included a small carton of whole milk in which they would make sure to place a straw in the carton for him. A cup of vanilla ice cream was served at every supper - they would be sure to open the container for him, and they always ensured his utensils were easily accessible to him. Most importantly, if daddy was out of cokes, they called to let me know.

I visited daddy pretty much every weekday evening and twice a day on the weekends. I was always greeted with a smile from Rochelle or Vanessa, as well as all the staff. Each time I came, the nurses made a point of coming in and updating me on daddy's day/condition.

The staff learned what TV channels he preferred - CNN or Gunsmoke (!) - and ensured that either was on daily. Despite it being *very* uncomfortable at times, they placed a large sign over the thermostat in his room to please keep the temperature at 80 degrees, "per patient." And his pictures of his family - they always ensured that these were placed just like daddy liked them to be.

They never really treated my father like a "patient." Nor did they treat me just as another family member, indeed, I felt very much like I was part of *their* family. Not only was daddy my parent, but the staff also acted as my parent, at times. When I would walk in without a coat, I would be met with "Young lady, where's your coat?!" or if it was late, "Why are you out after dark?" It felt so familiar (thanks, daddy!) and was *always* said with such genuine, wonderful affection for me as well as dad.

The only concern daddy ever expressed while there was that someone would "steal" his napkins. Daddy had this odd habit of hoarding napkins in his bed, which we could never understand. Thankfully, when the staff would change him or his bedding, they would throw away those napkins! And of course, daddy was convinced someone was "stealing his napkins."

They laughed with me, and cried with me and truly cared for me and my daddy. This part of our journey was made so much better by this team, and I can never thank them enough for all their love, care, and compassion.

Sincerely,

Laura Wyrens

Daughter of Donald Gassaway

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