Willow Award
EXCELLENCE IN END-OF-LIFE CARE

1/4/2026

Dear Willow Award Committee,

Our family would like to nominate the Gentiva Hospice team who cared for our mother, **Edna Jean Rowland**, for the Willow Award. There are truly no words big enough to express what these individuals meant to our family during one of the most difficult times of our lives, but we are grateful for the opportunity to try.

Edna Jean was 78 years old and one of the most independent, strong, and vibrant women you would ever meet. She lived a healthy life, only taking two medications her entire life. Before pulmonary fibrosis changed everything, we truly believed she might live forever. She fought that disease for several years with the same strength and determination that defined her entire life.

She loved to dance, loved to laugh, and loved her family fiercely. Everyone depended on her — cousins, aunts, children, grandchildren — she was the center of our family. She was also lovingly known as "Mean Jean." While she could be tough, underneath that nickname was one of the most loving hearts imaginable. There was never a day that passed that we didn't feel her love.

When her health began to decline, she moved into a rent house down the street from me so I could help care for her. She hated feeling like she needed help because she had spent her entire life being the one who took care of everyone else. Family meant everything to her, and she would have done anything for any of us.

When hospice entered our lives, everything changed in ways we never expected.

Mom came home on the 20th, and she passed on the 1st. No one expected things to happen so quickly. Although her hospice journey was only a few days long, the Gentiva team made a lifelong impact on our entire family.

From the very beginning, they showed us what true compassion looks like. They were responsive, present, and incredibly knowledgeable. Anytime I reached out, someone responded immediately. In such a frightening and emotional time, they made us feel supported and never alone.

John helped set everything up while Mom was still in the hospital. The day before she passed, I called him because he was the only number I had. He didn't have to walk me through what to do, especially knowing that care would soon transition to other team members, but he stayed with me and guided me through everything with patience and kindness. That meant more than he will ever know.

Glenda came and bathed Mom and treated her with such tenderness and dignity. Watching someone care for your loved one that way is something our family will never forget.

Bradley, the nurse who came during her final day, showed such professionalism and compassion during an incredibly emotional time.

When Riley came to pronounce Mom's passing, she handled that moment with grace, gentleness, and respect that brought comfort during one of our hardest goodbyes.

And days after Mom passed, Yvonne reached out unexpectedly just to check on us. That simple act reminded us that their care did not end when Mom's life did.

There were also moments that reminded us of Mom's personality, even near the end. In the hospital, while asleep, a nurse tried to place a nebulizer on her face, and she rose up with her fist pulled back, ready to fight. Even in her weakest moments, she was still our strong, spirited "Mean Jean." The hospice team treated her with humor, patience, and respect for who she was as a person, not just as a patient.

Mom understood what hospice meant, even though she struggled to fully face it. On her final day, she quietly said, "I'm tanking out." Because of this team, she was able to spend those last days surrounded by dignity, comfort, and love.

It takes incredibly special people to do this work. These eight individuals changed the way our family perceives death and dying forever. They made a heartbreaking experience feel peaceful, supported, and even meaningful.

They were there for everything we needed. They made us feel cared for in the saddest situation of our lives. I truly do not know how they do what they do, but I would recommend them a million times over.

Our mother spent her life helping people. She often said that helping others is a gift. We believe this team honored her legacy by caring for her — and for us — in such an extraordinary way.

For this, we would like to nominate the following individuals:

John Altenbaumer, Hospice Care Consultant
Taylor Doles, Social Worker
Abbie Golleher, RN
Melissa Heath, RN
Glinda Harvey-Nowden, Hospice Aide
Bradley Hill, RN
Sara Hines, RN
Jason Palmero, Chaplain
Yvonne Sims, RN

We are forever grateful.

With heartfelt appreciation,
The Family of Edna Jean Rowland