Hospice patient’s goal: walk daughter down aisle

The wedding date had been set for some time: May 9, 2014. Mandy Guerrero and Ross Garmley—who first met in Troy six years earlier—were going to be married.

“I’m going to be there,” Mandy’s dad had promised his “princessa,” his favorite Spanish nickname for his only daughter. Danilo Guerrero was born in Ecuador and immigrated to the U.S. when he was 15. He became a citizen, served in the Army National Guard and eventually got his license to drive big 18-wheeler tractor trailers, working for Hannaford for the past several years.

“He was proud he came to this country, the land of opportunity,” Mandy says. He valued education, and helped send Mandy to St. John’s University in Queens, where she received a biochemistry degree, and then later to New York University, where she received another bachelor’s degree in an accelerated nursing program.

Danilo was committed to walking his daughter down the aisle despite failing health. Doctors diagnosed him with Stage 4 pancreatic cancer the previous summer, when he was just 50 years old, but at no point would he consider allowing Mandy and Ross to have the wedding earlier. For several months it appeared the treatments might be working, but then scans showed the cancer had spread to his brain. Twice he was hospitalized in a coma.

The Community Hospice was called in so Danilo could go home and have the best possible quality of life…and hopefully fulfill the promise he made to Mandy. His hospice team members did everything they could to keep him comfortable and help him be present for Mandy’s big day.

“I didn’t think he was going to make it,” Mandy recalls. But on May 9, a hospice nurse helped Danilo get ready, and as father and daughter waited together to hopefully walk down the aisle—with Mandy still having doubts—something special happened.

“He hadn’t really talked in weeks, but all of a sudden he looked at me and said ‘I can do this.’ He got up and grabbed my hand and we started walking. Then he stopped in the middle of the aisle, but said ‘I can do this, give me a second,’ and the next thing he said is ‘let’s go!’ He walked me to the very end, and I hugged and kissed him and everyone started clapping.”

Mandy stayed in touch throughout her honeymoon, and the hospice team kept her apprised of her dad’s health. On the Sunday she and Ross flew home, she knew time was short. She rushed to her dad’s bedside, hugged him, and told him how much she loved him. Danilo died two hours later.

“Our Community Hospice nurse gave us a lot of support that day and night, even after he died,” Mandy says. “Hospice nurses are amazing, such a help to the entire family, even on weekends.”
Vera Lister is a resident of Wynwood of Niskayuna, one of the many assisted living facilities in the greater Capital Region that are growing in popularity. When residents are facing a serious illness, Community Hospice can help them stay in their apartments without needing to move to a nursing home.

In Vera’s case, hospice’s professional staff members visit her regularly, along with three Community Hospice volunteers who check in on her and enjoy hearing Vera’s life stories. “They’re very nice and they take good care of me,” Vera says. She’s thankful she has hospice’s support to be able to remain at Wynwood, where her home is decorated with her late husband’s paintings. A former billboard artist, James Lister’s business was hurt after Lady Bird Johnson convinced Congress that billboard advertising didn’t belong on our national highways. “My husband retired, and concentrated on painting watercolors instead,” Vera says. “We got a recreational vehicle and drove across the country, and he painted pictures in every state. It was a wonderful trip!”

New opportunity for Hospice supporters

Donors are sometimes interested in including The Community Hospice in their estate planning. To show our appreciation, and to honor and recognize these donors, we’ve recently created The Legacy Circle. “It’s our way of saying thank you for thinking of us when you’re considering how your investments or savings will be disbursed after you’re gone,” says Laurie Mante, Community Hospice’s executive director. “In many cases, there are significant tax advantages to the donors and their families, so it turns out to be a win/win.”

There is no minimum gift required to be a member of The Legacy Circle, and no one’s required to disclose how much they’ve decided to give.

For more information, contact our director of development, Steve Manny, at (518) 285-8135.

Volunteer is first Legacy Circle member

Marjorie McCoy recently revised her will to ensure The Community Hospice receives one last special donation from her after she’s gone.

A hospice volunteer for more than four years, Marjorie regularly supports Community Hospice by making memorial donations and by participating each year in the Walk for Hospice. That’s in addition to all the time she donates as a hospital-based volunteer for Community Hospice. “In my first career, I was a social worker in juvenile justice, and had a second career as a lawyer in the New York State Court of Appeals,” Marjorie says. “When I retired five and a half years ago, I grabbed the first opportunity to take The Community Hospice volunteer training.”

Marjorie’s interest in hospice care was prompted by the fact that a close friend died after receiving excellent care from The Community Hospice. After she became a volunteer, her sister Sara became a hospice patient in Worcester, MA. When Sara was dying, Marjorie and another sister, Jane, came to appreciate first-hand the value of hospice care. “We could rely on the service of her hospice team,” Marjorie says, “and just relax and be her sisters.”
Half of our Community Hospice patients end up taking advantage of our support and assistance for less than two weeks...even though Medicare and most insurance plans will cover hospice care for many months. Remember to involve hospice early so we can ensure you or your loved one will enjoy the best quality of life for as long as possible.

**We’re here for you**

**Information/Referral Line**
724-0242

**Web:**
communityhospice.org

**Facebook:**
facebook.com/TheCommunityHospice

**Thank you**

TO ALL THE WALKERS, SPONSORS AND VOLUNTEERS, WE RAISED MORE THAN $150,000 THIS YEAR TO SUPPORT COMMUNITY HOSPICE’S PROGRAMS AND SERVICES!

**Remembering dad for 13 straight years**

When the Walk for Hospice moved to the campus of Siena College this year, Beverly Venable and her family members were there to show their support, just as they’ve been every year since the Walk began 13 years ago.

They wore t-shirts with a photo of Beverly’s dad, who died just before the first Walk in 2002. James Venable worked on one of the many construction crews that helped build the Empire State Plaza, and later owned and operated Venable’s Cleaning Service. After his body was overwhelmed by lung cancer, Community Hospice staff and volunteers helped care for him.

“They came to the house and were very good to him,” says Beverly. “The whole team was excellent, so we wanted to do something for hospice.”

**For patients, music can be good medicine**

“The way people respond to music helps them deal with pain and calms their anxiety,” explains Community Hospice music therapist Mark Ahola. “Music centers a person, bringing them back to memories of the past.”

Specially trained music therapists are important members of the hospice team for some patients. As their job title indicates, they’re not just musicians, but therapists who have considerable experience working with seriously ill patients.

“We can help them put their words and feelings to music. Sometimes I’ll have patients do audio recordings, or we make videos for them to keep,” Mark says. Once he helped a patient’s grandchildren create a rap song for their grandfather.

“We got the rhythm going and they sang to their grandfather all about their happy times with him.”

“Patients and family members sometimes feel awkward, not knowing how to speak or what to do,” adds Melinda Gardiner, who plays the Celtic harp for her Community Hospice patients.

“When we play therapeutic music, the environment changes, and enables people to be really present with their loved ones, and to truly be themselves,” she says. “It helps people move from being stressed to being more relaxed.”

13 Days
Community Hospice patient Sherry Boutard remembers the man who frequently rode his bike to the Berkshire Botanical Garden over in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, often stopping to rest and enjoy the scenery beneath the same shady trees. It was Stockbridge’s most famous native son, illustrator Norman Rockwell.

Sherry and her husband Roy lived on the property for 30 years. He was the garden’s highly regarded horticultural director. She was in charge of the education programs and led countless tour groups.

“People would ask me if I knew who that man was, sitting over there, often with his wife Molly knitting at his side,” Sherry recalls. “After the first six or seven times I had to stop telling them it was Norman Rockwell, just to give him some privacy.”

Sherry and Roy were famous in their own right, particularly in botanical circles. They often exhibited or served as judges at the big flower shows in Boston and New York. Although Roy was the formally trained gardener, Sherry ended up pursuing a degree in horticulture therapy from the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. She loved using flowers and plants to help people with disabilities.

After retiring in 1985, they moved to New Lebanon, in Columbia County. They continued to grow flowers as well as organic vegetables they sold at the side of the road, long before “organic” and “pesticide free” were the popular terms they are today.

In a way, they were returning to what they had done decades earlier in England, where they met and where, for a time, Roy raised crops on 55 acres of land. Roy has been gone four years now—he died in July 2010—and although Sherry’s health is declining due to congestive heart failure, she’s benefiting from the medical expertise and support of The Community Hospice.

“I like the hospice concept of respecting people’s dignity,” says Sherry. After all, she’s still able to stay in her home, looking out on the beautiful plants that have always been such an important part of her life.

Most Community Hospice patients are able to continue living at home, where they’re most comfortable and where they’re surrounded by the people and things they love!