

## *In Memory of Our Dear Friend and Co-Founder*

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### *We all inherit scripts and stories from our families.*

Dr. Robert Milch's inheritance included the struggles of immigrants and the shadows of anti-Semitism, but these adversities were outmatched by his family and his people's search for knowledge and beauty. With that legacy, he learned to live with purpose and lead with kindness, in devotion to family and with concern for others. Bob would go on to influence, move and motivate others with one flick of a word or turn of a phrase.

**CONTINUED INSIDE →**



Buffalo General nurse with Dr. Robert Milch, at the opening of the first dedicated palliative care unit.

He loved art, language, medicine and justice — but only insofar as he could find humanity in them.

He needed poetry, prose and language that was lyrical, and that captured the richness of minds and hearts. Of the care of patients, he wrote, “If you would meet the patient’s needs, you must go beyond the mere proficiencies of your training, listen to what you are hearing, see the world with their vision, and understand their fears, for their fears are the manifestations of their needs.”

Of course, having been raised well, Bob would have thought it imprudent to list his many achievements and accolades. And that is unfortunate, because Bob was an uncommon man who was either blessed or cursed with being better than most at just about everything, and adoration followed him throughout life.

Perhaps more important than the achievements or summits Bob reached were the paths he chose throughout his life. He always searched for the largest burden to bear, and he carried it each time — not for himself, but for others. Many years ago, someone asked me to describe what motivated Bob and I replied, “Well, he just sleeps better at night if he slays some dragons during the day.”

Where Bob found humanity lacking, he sought change with purpose and purity.

Why else would a talented young surgeon, at the height of his skill and prominence, leave

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the prestige of the operating room to care for hospice patients in their homes, patients beyond intervention or cure, patients in need of a simple presence? I always assumed that he had no choice — he was compelled by the potential for something more humane and he held a vision that few could see. So, he put down the scalpel, and with the same proficiency and determination as when he was holding it, he picked up the sword of advocacy. Bob went from being gowned and gloved to stealing supplies from the same hospital he worked at to take to patients’ homes.

In 1977, the dragon he set out to fight was in the form of a CEO at Buffalo General Hospital, and the injustice he rose against was patient suffering. That year there were exactly zero hospital-based Palliative Care Units in the United States. So, Bob approached the CEO about a dedicated Palliative Care Unit and the CEO expressed concern about revenue-generating bed loss. Like all heroes, Bob was inspired rather than deterred by being told “no.” So he signed a blank check and told the CEO to fill it in at the end of the year to cover the loss. That moment of defiance helped launch the momentum towards hospital-based palliative care, and today over 70 percent of U.S. hospitals offer palliative care programs. He also helped launch the first freestanding Hospice Inpatient Unit, situated on our campus in Cheektowaga.

In fact, Hospice Buffalo was the 11th established hospice in the nation. Today there are over 5,500 such organizations, which collectively served over 1.6 million patients last year.

In 1999, I sat across from Bob for a job interview, during which I observed the same level of undeterred advocacy. This interview would change my life. I asked Bob what qualities he was looking for in a doctor entering his field, and without missing a beat, he answered, “righteous indignation.” Bob’s advocacy for more humane care never stopped — same fight just different dragons...from advocating for universal healthcare to the Medical Aid in Dying Act. His writings are a plea to better align the workings of healthcare to the true needs of the patient, to get



closer to the patient's bedside and to understand the view from the bed. In a recent article, he began with a Spanish proverb: "As one moves from the stands to the arena, the perspective on the bull changes." He then wrote, "I cannot in good conscience dictate to someone else when they reach an intolerable point of suffering, when the ravages of irreversible disease demand only its endurance, often inconsistent with the values and philosophy with which one has lived." You can see why it is that he was built for such heavy work — with his fierce intellect, surpassed by an even bigger heart and of course his beautiful language. What was so defining about this article was how he ended it...with four simple words, "Bring on the bull."

One of Bob's greatest gifts was knowing when: when to listen, when to guide, when to express concern, when to laugh and when to hug.

My lifelong passion has been horses. Bob would often sit quietly as I went on and on about all things having to do with horses. One day I commented to him that I didn't realize how much he also loved talking about horses. He smiled and said, "I don't. I love you when you talk about horses." Many of the people he loved, he did so because of, rather despite, their frailties and shortcomings — he embraced those who walked the lines between madness and genius, those with struggles of addiction or depression, those who are often marginalized or misunderstood. Again, his belief was that our most redeeming quality is our shared struggle to remain humane.

One of my favorite memories of Bob is that whenever we had a new medical student or resident, he would block off several hours to sit with them — this was his sacred time, when he would truly get to know these students as people — their uniqueness, their hopes and their experience with loss. It always fascinated me how he emerged from these discussions with the same conclusion: each student was more remarkable than the next, more brilliant, more insightful. One week, he met the next Einstein, another week it was Schweitzer or Osler. He was always hopeful, seeing promise in everyone and enamored by each person's potential — he only recognized and gave credit to goodness. He more than taught, he inspired. In a speech to medical students, Bob memorably said, "When our work is at its finest, together we have seen in those

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entrusted to our care the emergence of the best of human nature — the courage, grace, dignity and love of which one is capable. To the extent that we are able to play a part in that wonder, we are ourselves elevated and transformed. It may be that recognition which should be foremost in what we need to teach, for what happens at the bedside is not just a function of what we know, but of what we are.”

How those we love leave us at the end of their lives is an extension of our relationship with them.

It matters; it informs and guides us as we struggle through grief and embrace their remembrance.

Bob’s end of life journey is not just a story to remember, it is one worthy of reverence. Bob left us with the same eloquence, principle and strength that carried him throughout life; he could not be reduced or defined by illness. Dying didn’t alter his core principles or passions. While in the hospital, he was distressed by the care he witnessed. Through his eyes, those in need always deserved care that was more dignified, more humane.

Bob never denied the reality of his impending death.

I believe he looked past the inevitable and chose instead to affirm life by caring for those around him, through countless gestures of love and grace. He showed us hope and love even while he was saying goodbye. True to the richness of his soul, he sought beauty. In the waning minutes of life, he recited Shakespeare. And of course, he found humor, even in the dark and lonely hours. Two nights before he passed, he must have been confused about time and texted me at 3:36 a.m. There were typos, so he kept retyping variations of the same message. After the third attempt, he texted “Maybe we should just go for lunch.”

Bob also remained dutiful till the very end.

He was incapable of being an imposition, which made him a horrible patient. He refused to call me for support during the night. He told his wife Linda that he didn’t want to wake me. His son

Mike remarked that his cause of death could be “failure to impose.” In his last hours, he openly expressed regret at not being able to finish his thank you notes.

As in life, he was compelled to express in words the warmth that was in his heart.

“

*“Listen for my voice when days are long, decisions are difficult, times hard, knowing that my love and encouragement endure forever...”*

He wrote beautiful letters to his children and grandchildren. One passage reads, “You will find me when you least expect to, in your words and gestures, your stories recollected and retold, when a sight or sound or smell calls our moments together in memory. Listen for my voice when days are long, decisions are difficult, times hard, knowing that my love and encouragement endure forever; your values and instincts are good — your inner voice sounds a lot like mine.”

On May 9th, Mother’s Day, he wrote his beloved wife Linda that, “My last conscious thought will be of you, and the last word on my lips will be your name.” As promised, when that moment called, he turned his head and gazed into her eyes — leaving us as gracefully as he lived. ■

*This piece was adapted from the eulogy given by Christopher Kerr, dear friend, mentee and physician partner.*



— Christopher Kerr, MD, PhD  
Chief Executive Officer,  
Chief Medical Officer

# A Beautiful Friendship

My friendship with Bob Milch started the way the movie *Casablanca* ended, as Rick and Louis strolled together into the mist after their courageous defiance of the Nazis: "Louis, I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship." We were introduced by Ira Byock, who, like Bob, was a pioneering and major figure in American hospice care. All of us agreed that the specialty of surgery needed to be included in the then nascent field of palliative care.

When we first met, I was immediately struck by Bob's contagious generosity of spirit and warm, slightly ironic humor. These qualities, along with his rapier-like intellect, proved to be essential throughout our collaboration, in which we applied the concepts of palliative care to surgical care. His handsome visage, impeccable manners and dress, along with his thoughtful speech, were additional assets that furthered this mission. Overall, he gave an impression of determined compassion. He had risked much professionally, departing from a highly successful surgical practice, to become a full-time advocate for patients with terminal illness. He often referred to us as "recovering surgeons" when we were later asked who we were. Interestingly, we were both sons of highly respected surgeons. I considered myself blessed to be the junior partner, working with one of the most experienced and respected practitioners of hospice care in the country.

For surgeons and non-surgical palliative care practitioners, the involvement of surgeons in hospice and palliative care seemed almost an oxymoron. With typical wit, he reassured non-surgeons in the new specialty, "We were the last to come to the table, but we have the sharpest utensils!" We became so linked in our work that we acquired and subsequently used several monikers such as Lewis and Clark, Banting and Best, and Abbott and Costello.

The foundational meeting for the future specialty of surgical palliative care left us elated. It seemed that everything we cherished in humanities and surgery had come together. We couldn't wait to get on with the lengthy wish list of projects and goals our fledgling group of like-minded surgeons had agreed upon. We gave each other a hug at the end of that day as I left Buffalo to return home. It clearly was a "beautiful friendship." The next day, auspiciously enough, was September 11, 2001.

Our fondest shared memory was the high noon moment when we had an audience with Dr. John Cameron. Dr. Cameron was then chief of surgery at Johns Hopkins, arguably the most famous department of surgery in the world. He was a redoubtable figure who was the personification of everything orthodox and sound in the practice of surgery. He had held countless leadership positions, was the editor of one of the most widely read surgical textbooks and had trained countless residents who subsequently became highly positioned academic researchers and chairpersons. We believed that if we could demonstrate to Dr. Cameron the necessity of systematically introducing the precepts and practices of palliative care to the practice of surgery, the culture of surgery would change. As we apprehensively waited for his entrance, Bob loosened the tension, saying, "Nice work, Sweetest. Here we are, two dufuses from Buffalo, in the heart of Hopkins, going to bat against John Cameron! Do you know where the fire exit is in this place?" It went well. Bob's experience and credibility with respect to symptom control and mentoring of residents was highly persuasive. Dr. Cameron could not have been more gracious and subsequently supportive. I was answering most of the questions, but he was watching Bob.

Only a mensch like Bob could have the compassion, intellect, and vision to seamlessly reconcile two fields as diverse as surgery and hospice/palliative care. Both fields changed forever.



— Geoffrey P. Dunn, MD, FACS  
Friend, colleague, and  
Bob's Costello

# Remembering Dr. Robert Milch

*“Doctor Milch played a vital role in providing high quality medical care to Hospice Buffalo patients.”*

— Don Shedd, Co-Founder, Hospice Buffalo Pioneer

## Leader

*“While I had known and admired Bob as a doctor and early Hospice advocate, I will always treasure my time spent as a colleague of Bob’s while at Hospice several decades ago as we designed, funded and built the now Milch Mitchell Hospice campus! I have nothing but deep affection, admiration, and respect for Bob; he leaves a very special and lasting legacy having touched, healed, comforted and influenced thousands in our community and beyond! He will be missed.”*

— Elizabeth S. Gurney  
Director, Corporate Philanthropy,  
KeyBank Director, First Niagara Foundation

*“It’s hard to reflect on my 24 years at Hospice without thinking about Dr. Milch. I feel truly blessed that I was lucky enough to work side by side with him. I will never forget all that he taught me about how to be truly present with people at the end of life. His presence at the bedside was a true gift to every patient and family whose life he touched.”*

— Cary Sisti, MS, RN, ANP-BC, ACHPN  
Chief Clinical Operations Officer, Hospice & Palliative  
Care Buffalo

## Mentor



*“It is rare to have had the opportunity to work with a person with so many brilliant qualities. Dr. Robert Milch is nationally recognized for devoting his life’s work to relieve suffering and provide comfort and support to the sick and dying. His reassuring nature and principled presence have left a permanent imprint on countless people in Western New York, as well as the larger national hospice and palliative care community. Throughout his career Dr. Milch combined wisdom, humor and spirited integrity to inspire those in his company. I will be forever grateful and blessed to have had the opportunity to call Dr. Milch my colleague and friend.”*

— Patrick T. Flynn  
Former President, Hospice & Palliative Care Buffalo Foundation

## Confidant

*“There are times in life when someone comes along and changes things for the good, and that was Dr. Robert Milch. He changed medical practice in the care of the dying patient and their loved ones in our community, and he changed every healthcare professional who had the privilege of working with him. I was one of them. It was a gift to have known you, Bob.”*

— Joyce Ortman, RN, Pioneering Hospice Nurse

*“Bob was a medical pioneer, who saw a better way to provide end-of-life care, and he dedicated the second half of his career to teaching a generation of health care providers to embrace Hospice. What a wonderful gift to our community, our country and the world. He shared his wisdom, humor and kindness at each bedside in a loving way.”*

— Edward F. Walsh, Jr. CPCU, CIC  
Chief Executive Officer, Walsh Duffield Companies, Inc.

*“I can’t overstate the tremendous influence Dr. Milch had on my life. I will always be grateful to Bob for bringing me to Hospice Buffalo 35 years ago. That gentle smile...that warm touch...that quiet confident comment... He was my role model...my mentor...my friend...I will miss him greatly.”*

— Jock Mitchell, Emeritus Chair, Hospice & Palliative Care Buffalo Board of Directors

## Pioneer





*“You matter to the last moment of your life, and we will do all we can, not only to help you die peacefully, but to live until you die.”*

— Dr. Cicely Saunders,  
Founder of the Hospice Movement



*“I recall spending an afternoon with Dr. Milch at Buffalo General some years ago. I learned more about the meaning of hospice care that day than I could have imagined, as well as a perspective on what good medical care means. I think of Dr. Milch as the ‘Father’ of Hospice Buffalo.*

*I believe Chris would be quick to say Dr. Milch was a tremendous mentor, and that he, and we, were lucky to have had so much time with him. Dr. Milch’s wisdom and kindness were particular attributes, but there was much more.*

*Dr. Milch will surely be missed, but Hospice Buffalo is his legacy, and one can probably think of few things that could be more important.”*

— John Reinhold  
Financial Advisor, Senior Vice President, UBS Financial Services Inc.

*“He always searched for the largest burden to bear, and he carried it each time — not for himself, but for others. Where Bob found humanity lacking, he sought change with purpose and purity.”*

— Christopher Kerr, MD, PhD  
CEO, CMO, Hospice & Palliative Care Buffalo

*“Such an incredible man, and what a legacy he left. Forever grateful.”*

— Ryan Zebro, Hospice & Palliative Care Buffalo  
Foundation Chair



*Friend*

*“To try and capture the essence of Bob Milch in words is not only a daunting task but, perhaps, an exercise in futility. To describe the impact that he has had on my life and the lives of countless others is even more of a challenge. He embodied those qualities that are essential to do this work well, and I am a better physician, having worked by his side. His intellect was perhaps outmatched only by his compassion and fierce advocacy for the most vulnerable among us. He is missed beyond measure as we strive to carry on his mission.”*

— Megan O’Shea Farrell, MD  
Hospice & Palliative Care Buffalo Physician

*“Rest in peace, Dr. Milch. Thank you for the many ways you gave and impacted my family over the past 30 years. May your family find comfort in knowing how much you will be missed, loved and respected... A true champion.”*

— Cynthia Hand, Dear Friend

*Advocate*

*“Bob was one of the finest people I’ve ever known – in many ways – a prophetic voice – committed to justice, to providing care and comfort to all who need it, and to making this a kinder, better world.”*

— Nancy Nielsen, MD, PhD  
Hospice & Palliative Care Buffalo Board Member and Senior Associate Dean for Health Policy, University at Buffalo’s Jacobs School of Medicine & Biomedical Sciences

*Educator*

*“Grief never ends...But it changes. It’s a passage, not a place to stay.  
Grief is not a sign of weakness, nor a lack of faith...It is the price of love.”*

— Author Unknown

## Grief Reflections

To love someone is to invite them in to be a part of you and to give of yourself to be a part of them. When we love another deeply and intimately, we integrate our lives, hold and care for one another in each other’s embrace. To love someone is to give and receive, from and within, this held place in one’s heart.

To grieve someone you love is to grieve this held place, this ultimate embrace — both the holding and the being held. To grieve someone you love is to grieve your essential relationship, your essential way of functioning in and relating to the world.

Grieving the lost embrace of loving and being loved by someone is not letting go, replacing or forgetting. It is within the imprint of that embrace that your loved one lives on.

As the year draws to a close and a new year begins, we anticipate the potential of new beginnings, growth and forward movement, while marking the passage of time and change. We strive to reconcile what may come to be with what once was. We reflect on our experiences and consider the acceptance of what we no longer need to hold and can let go, while recognizing all that will remain held and maintained as an essential part of who we are — the people, experiences, memories, and expressions that are a part of us that can never be taken away.

In this recognition, let us seek to discover the ways in which our loved one remains with us and the ways in which our relationship with our loved one remains intact — in heart, in mind, in experience, in memory and in how we continue to live our lives and create the next chapters of our story.

Let them accompany us in thought and feeling, in the extraordinary and the ordinary of each day, and in the comfort and nurturance of the love shared. Although our loved one is no longer living, the existence of our relationship with them, the impact of their place in our lives and ultimately, their presence, remains.



— Abigail Unger, LCAT, MT-BC  
VP Psychosocial Services

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*“But grief still has to be worked through.  
It is like walking through water.*

*Sometimes there are little waves lapping about my feet.*

*Sometimes there is an enormous breaker  
that knocks me down.*

*Sometimes there is a sudden and fierce squall.*

*But I know that many waters cannot quench love,  
neither can the floods drown it.”*

— Madeleine L’Engle



Affiliate of Hospice & Palliative Care Buffalo

WilsonSupportCenter.org

150 Bennett Road, Buffalo, NY 14227

Phone: (716) 836-6460

Email: [GriefSupport@PalliativeCare.org](mailto:GriefSupport@PalliativeCare.org)



# Hospice & Palliative Care Buffalo Welcomes New Clinicians to the Medical Staff



## Nicole Golding, MS RN AGNP-BC

Nicole Golding was promoted to a clinical position with Hospice Buffalo in March, after completing her Adult-Gerontology Nurse Practitioner degree at Daemen College in 2020. Her background includes 16 years of nursing experience, with more than 7 years as a hospice RN working on-call and in admissions. She will be working both in the Inpatient Unit and as a member of the hospice home care team. Ms. Golding says, *"Working for Hospice Buffalo is a privilege and an honor; I love being part of the end-of-life experience for patients and their loved ones."*



## Hannah Windsor, FNP-BC

Hannah Windsor was promoted to a clinical position as part of the Home Connections team in March, after completing her Family Nurse Practitioner degree at D'Youville College in 2020. Her previous work includes two years' experience as an on-call RN for Hospice Buffalo, and as a nurse at Buffalo General and Sisters-St. Joseph hospitals. She will be seeing patients in their homes as a palliative care consultant and says of her new position, *"I like being the support for patients and the connection between them and their doctors."*



## Tanya Orellana, MD

Dr. Orellana completed her Hospice and Palliative Medicine fellowship at the New York Presbyterian-Queens program prior to joining Hospice Buffalo as a home care physician in July. She is a graduate of the Jacobs School of Medicine and the Internal Medicine Residency program at University at Buffalo and is thrilled to be returning to the Buffalo area. She brings with her a passion for home care and says, *"I want to be close to patients and their families, meeting them at the bedside and where they live, while helping patients be comfortable and make the most of their lives."*



## Fausat Oke, MD

Dr. Oke completed her Hospice and Palliative Medicine fellowship at the University at Buffalo in July, before joining Hospice Buffalo in August as an attending physician in the Inpatient Unit. She worked as an internist practicing in both hospital and outpatient settings in Lagos, Nigeria for more than 5 years before moving with her family to the United States and completing an Internal Medicine residency at Brookdale University Hospital Medical Center in Brooklyn. She brings a wealth of experience to her new position and says, *"I am delighted to join the remarkable team at Hospice and Palliative Care Buffalo."*

# Volunteer Spotlight

Hospice & Palliative Care Buffalo is fortunate to have hundreds of volunteers who give of their time and talents in so many different ways. Whether it's providing leadership as a board member, assisting in the Inpatient Unit, providing companionship to patients at home or working one of the many annual signature events, our organization could never accomplish all we do without the hard work and commitment of our volunteers. In this issue of Journeys, we are featuring one of our leadership volunteers — our treasured board member — to share what drives her to give of herself. Our patients, their loved ones and our staff thank you for the impact you make on the Hospice & Palliative Care Buffalo community every day.

## The Pleasure and Honor of *Serving*

"I give my time to things I believe in, and ensuring that people with serious illness can live as productively as possible and have the best days ahead of them with less pain is definitely something I strongly believe in," exclaimed Nancy H. Nielsen, MD, PhD, Hospice & Palliative Care Buffalo board member and Senior Associate Dean for Health Policy, University at Buffalo's Jacobs School of Medicine & Biomedical Sciences.

Dr. Nielsen has experienced a full life-long career within the medical community, but she says that one of her most fulfilling duties has been serving on the Hospice & Palliative Care Buffalo (HPCB) board for the past seven years. She thinks of it as a pleasure and an honor to give her time to an organization that provides such unique services to seriously ill patients and their families. "The services offered here in Buffalo are not standard programs offered at other hospices around the country," explained Dr. Nielsen. "We offer spiritual support, grief services and expressive therapies which use arts and massage to help nurture people. These amazing psycho-social services are provided through philanthropic support, thanks to our many donors."

Dr. Nielsen recognized early on, through her employment at Buffalo Medical Group, and through the important pain management pioneering work of Dr. Bob Milch there, that the medical community in Western New York was in dire need of the education and training provided by hospice, a movement which began in England. "I cared for and treated many patients with serious illness and learned, before long, that it was so important to help medical students learn how to help relieve symptoms," said Dr. Nielsen. "I felt helpless when I saw patients in pain, and hospice care provides us with more tools in our toolbelts to help do what's best for patients to achieve their best life and best comfort."



Nancy H. Nielsen, MD, PhD

Amazed by the remarkable people who work at HPCB, day in and day out, Dr. Nielsen feels privileged to get to know them and to witness all the good that they do. "I've learned so much by serving on this board, especially in regard to policy and legislation, and how the invaluable hospice benefit works," commented Dr. Nielsen. "I am hopeful that advocacy will continue for further positive legislation."

Another true gift that Dr. Nielsen mentioned that comes from HPCB is the research that Dr. Christopher Kerr and his team have conducted and shared across the country in his book, *Death is But a Dream*. Dr. Nielsen commends the team for taking the time to listen to patients' recounting of their dreams in order to find greater meaning in life's journey and how reassuring all of this can be when one is nearing end-of-life.

Dr. Nielsen smiled, while she reflected and said, "It is for all of these reasons that work toward a patient's best comfort and best life that I am honored to serve on the board."





Frank,  
Thank you for your service!

WE HONOR VETERANS

## A Salute of *Gratitude*

*Lynn Riker, Director of Outreach for Hospice & Palliative Care Buffalo, recently had the opportunity to visit with Frank, a patient in our Home Connections program. Frank shared his sincere gratitude for the home-based support and care coordination offered by Home Connections. His quality of life has improved due to better symptom management, a greater understanding of his disease and routine visits from a team of palliative care experts.*

Frank, a Vietnam War Army veteran, had been struggling with debilitating pain, weakness, loss of appetite and recurring infections related to his prostate cancer. In March of 2020, Frank was referred to Home Connections, our home-based palliative care program. Home Connections offers a team of nurse case managers, nurse practitioners, social workers and a palliative-care-trained physician, who all work together to manage symptoms in the home, avoid hospital admissions and help improve communication between patients and their many health care providers.

Although Frank has a great deal of help from family and friends, he lives alone and continues to require assistance in managing his care and symptoms. The one medication thought to be the most effective for him was much too costly, so Frank continued to suffer with uncontrolled pain. With effective collaboration between his Home Connections team and the VA, it was identified that Frank was eligible for veteran benefits, which he had been unaware of prior to our involvement in his care. Fortunately, Frank was able to obtain the medication that was previously too costly, and this resulted in vastly improved pain control.

The Home Connections social worker conducted a Needs Assessment and was able to connect Frank with Meals on Wheels, and knowing Frank wished to avoid unnecessary visits to the emergency room, she secured a life alert to expedite assistance, should a need arise. In addition to regularly scheduled visits, Frank and his family know they can call Home Connections anytime, 24/7, to speak with a nurse. This extra layer of support provides Frank and his family with peace of mind.

Frank is quick to share how much he appreciates the Home Connections program, especially his nurse, Damarys. When Frank first enrolled in Home Connections, he stated that the level of pain associated with his prostate cancer often rated an 8 or 9 out of 10. Since his pain is now better managed, Frank is feeling better, his appetite has improved and he has regained some of his strength, allowing him to be more independent. Frank said, "My nurse Damarys really knows me, not just as a patient, but as an individual. She genuinely cares. She is thorough and professional. Enrolling in Home Connections is one of the best things I have done to better manage my illness, my weakness, and my pain. I am grateful for the care and support, and so is my family."

As mentioned previously, Frank served in the Army during the Vietnam War as a supply specialist, a clerk, and a helicopter gunner. Later, he worked at the Ford Plant. Though a private man, Frank would want you to know that being a father, grandfather and great grandfather means the world to him. His love and unwavering commitment to his faith gives him the strength to care for himself, and to care for others as a minister in his church. The Home Connections team helped improve Frank's pain control and quality of life so he can focus on what means the most to him.



— Lynn Riker  
Director of Outreach, Hospice  
& Palliative Care Buffalo

# Donor Spotlight

MARY FRIONA & PAULA FRIONA

## A Life Well Lived, Lessons Well *Learned*

A Priceless, Loving Legacy



*And now, the end is near;*

*And so I face the final curtain...*

*I've lived a life that's full:*

*I've traveled each and every highway;*

*And more, much more than this,  
I did it my way...*

*I did what I had to do and saw it  
through without exemption.*

*I planned each charted course,  
Each careful step along the byway,*

*And more, much more than this,  
I did it my way...*

*I've loved, I've laughed and cried;*

*I've had my fill, my share of losing...*

— from "My Way" by Frank Sinatra

That's the ever-popular, classic Sinatra song that was playing in the Hospice Unit room that daughters Paula and Mary Friona vividly recall as their beloved 80-year-old father, Philip Friona, peacefully passed away four years ago. "That was Dad's favorite song," fondly remembered Mary. "How fitting and apropos for him to pass while these lyrics played on. He did live life 'his way,' and he taught his four children and twelve grandchildren the important life lessons in 'his way.'"

Philip, an Air Force veteran, who served in Korea and later grew a local family construction and pavement business, found himself as a single dad, left to raise four young children. The business was started by his father, who Philip loved working with and learning from. Daughter Paula now reminisces about how important family, fun, philanthropy and a strong work ethic were to their dad. Both girls shared memories of their dad piling all the neighborhood kids into their Lincoln Continental to cruise for ice cream and loudly singing "Benny and the Jets." "He was home every night for family tv and board games," recalled Paula. Everyone who knew Phil marveled at his strong patriotism and love for our country.

He taught good old-fashioned life lessons that the four siblings have never forgotten and then passed on to Phil's twelve grandchildren and seven great grandchildren. Mary giggled and explained, "Other kids were learning math and science from their parents, and we were learning how to pick a trifecta and fill out a football pool." She added that he was always big on doing the right thing, loving and being loved. He believed in making memories. "He would call and tell us all, 'C'mon, grab the kids and let's go to the Bahamas,'" shared Mary. "Next thing we knew, tickets would show up! It was just one of the many ways he was so generous!"

Phil's generosity did not end with his family. His giving was an extension of his passions. He loved babies, kids, Veterans, and just helping people in general," said Paula. After his passing, the kids felt strongly in keeping his name and mission







Phil surrounded by his four children

alive, so they started **Totally Buffalo Cares**, a 501(c)3 organization that focuses on bringing hope and help to those in need—particularly around all holidays throughout the year, by offering gifts, food and supplies to those who may need uplifting—all in the spirit of their Dad’s memory and giving way.

Phil unfortunately became ill with dementia and a chronic heart condition. He was living in a Florida nursing home, when son Phil went to visit. He noticed his dad’s deteriorating health had taken a turn for the worse. Philip was rushed to the hospital. The siblings that he had so lovingly taught and raised were now faced with a decision about what to do, suddenly asking themselves what “his way” would be?

They weren’t sure how to respond when asked if they wanted him go into hospice care. They felt devastated, sad and panicked; however, from the second they arrived in hospice care, all four of them immediately felt comfortable with their decision. “They were so sweet and compassionate,” remembered Mary. “They explained medications and what to expect, and I will never forget the nurse telling us to cherish and enjoy this time with him...The four of us, son-in-law, daughter-in-law, and many of Papa’s



From left to right: Mary and Paula at their **Totally Buffalo** store

grandchildren gathered around his bed for the next three days, reminiscing and laughing about all of the fun memories he created for us over the years, while Dad’s favorite Frank Sinatra hits played on in the room.”

Mary and Paula described how unbelievable it was to feel the power of peace when you know the most important person in your life is at the end of life yet still comfortable. “They came in and swooped away the worry,” said Paula. Mary added, “After his passing, the hospice nurse came in and placed a beautiful purple orchid on his chest. Hospice care gave us the greatest honor in being able to be with him until the end.”

It is for these reasons that the four Friona children feel strongly that their Dad’s memory lives on through **Totally Buffalo Cares**. They have been helping Hospice & Palliative Care Buffalo around the holidays for years because they know the importance of helping others through their emotional, physical and spiritual pain. They have donated funding as well as countless hours of time through volunteerism and committee work. Hospice & Palliative Care Buffalo is so grateful for all they do and for all their dad did to help them learn to love “his way.”

# Staff — Who We Are

SHANISE HIGHSMITH, LPN



Shanise Highsmith was taught by her parents: Do the right thing, and do it with all your heart. Shanise embraced this philosophy at a very early age, and as she grew older, she knew she had to choose a career path that would allow her to apply those lifelong lessons.

As a result, she became a certified nursing assistant and began her career in a skilled nursing facility. It was there that her personality, compassion and skilled care for the frail elderly was duly noted by the hospice staff, who were assigned to residing patients there.

Shanise was always drawn to the dying patient, whose needs she felt uniquely qualified to meet, not because of her training in class, but because of those lessons instilled, early on, at home. Shanise remained there for almost three years, and eventually made a change to come to Hospice & Palliative Care Buffalo in the Hospice Inpatient Unit. Shanise was thrilled to follow her passion, working with end-of-life patients, in another organization, where she felt her aide skills could be utilized, appreciated and respected as an integral part of the healthcare team.

It took no time for Shanise to acclimate to her new role, becoming one of the Inpatient Unit's

most beloved nursing assistants. The patients and families, along with her colleagues and managers, all recognized the strengths she possessed, undergirded with a sense of integrity and commitment to the mission.

Shanise received daily accolades and stellar annual reviews, and yet she found herself longing for more. She knew she had not fully reached her potential and dared to entertain the thought of becoming a nurse. This longing was not a "one per household" event, however. Her mother also felt the calling to become a nurse, and they enrolled together! Today, both Shanise and her mom are licensed nurses, and they wear their designations with pride.

Despite the change in her role and responsibilities, Shanise made a commitment to her colleagues that she is not willing to forfeit the opportunity to provide personal care to her patients, as she did in her previous role. She remembers the nurses who were never above offering a hand to help when she was an aide and she vowed that if she ever became a nurse, she would do the same. She has kept that promise and considers her role as an LPN (licensed practical nurse), one that combines all her skills — both as an aide and a nurse — all for the benefit of patients and their families.

Shanise is currently in the process of orienting to her new skills as an LPN, and those who are working alongside her say she is tackling her new role with the same ease and enthusiasm as she did when she first came to work for Hospice & Palliative Care Buffalo. Her preceptor, Jenny Wojdyla, has been instrumental in her training, and enjoys seeing the "lightbulb moments" when Shanise successfully completes a task independently.

Denise Pellegrino, Director of the Inpatient Unit fondly notes, "Shanise shines! Behind that beautiful smile is a woman who is compassionate, respectful, eager and driven. She works with her whole heart." When asked if she feels satisfied with her career path as an LPN, she delivered one of those smiles and said, "I think there's more!"





## Congratulations to Hospice & Palliative Care Buffalo's Cary Sisti, Chief Clinical Operations Officer

Cary was chosen as a recipient of the 2021 Women of Influence Award by Buffalo Business First. From a distinguished group, 26 women were recognized for their business acumen, contributions and community spirit. Cary was deservedly chosen as one of the 26 award winners! We are so proud!



## Making a Difference for Cancer Research

Congratulations to Team Hospice & Palliative Care Buffalo! Our team represented the organization well and finished the Roswell Alliance Foundation Empire State Ride — riding every mile of the 520-mile route from New York City to Niagara Falls, while climbing every hill, and coming in as one of the top 10 fundraising teams.



Thank you to all veterans for bravely doing what you're called to do so we can safely do what we're free to do.

# TGIW...Thank Goodness It's Wednesday!

## A Volunteer Story

To many, Wednesday is a day of the week, like any other. Some consider it the middle of the week, knowing it is that much closer to the weekend. For two of our volunteers, Shirley and Georgiana, Wednesday is the best day of the week!

Shirley and Georgiana are patient support volunteers. They have both been with Hospice & Palliative Care Buffalo (HPCB) since 1995, giving their time to working with our patients and families in the Hospice Inpatient Unit (HIU) on Wednesday mornings. Starting just a couple of months apart from one another, as perfect strangers, Shirley and Georgiana found that their volunteer assignment soon turned into a treasured friendship.

Shirley had a personal experience with hospice that first led her to volunteer at HPCB. Shirley's daughter-in-law, Rosi, had a terminal illness and passed away in hospice care. Shirley said, "In seeing the care that both Rosi and my son received through hospice, I had decided then that I wanted to be a hospice volunteer in my retirement." Shirley retired one month later and joined the HPCB team as a hospice volunteer, the following year.

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*"In seeing the care that both Rosi and my son received through hospice, I had decided then that I wanted to be a hospice volunteer in my retirement."*

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Georgiana had been a nurse and always had an interest in hospice care. "I have always been more medically inclined and drawn to more medically related volunteer opportunities," Georgiana recalled. In the 1990s, Georgiana had a younger family and was still working part-time. They lived not far from Como Park Blvd. "One day," continued Georgiana, "I was driving home and noticed a sign for the Hospice Mitchell campus. It was like a sign and message for me, so I decided to start volunteering. I was very fortunate that my employer allowed me to have Wednesdays off so I could come and volunteer."

Every Wednesday, week after week, Shirley and Georgiana divided up the patient rooms in the HIU. Shirley took the rooms on the left and Georgiana took the rooms on the right, providing companionship and support to patients and families. Georgiana would often run into patients she once cared for as a nurse while volunteering. "What is nice about being a volunteer is that you have no time constraints like you would when you work a job. You are able to work at your leisure. If you want to spend a little more time with a patient, you can do so," Georgiana said.

Staff would often save tasks for them, knowing that every Wednesday morning, they would be in and ready to help. "It was a labor (using the term very loosely) of love," said Shirley. If either volunteer was ever spotted without the other, they were often met with the question, "Where's your buddy?" To which the response was, "In a patient's room."

Georgiana chuckled while sharing that she was always apprehensive to go into a patient's room that had a pet in it. In those instances, Shirley would step right up, go into the patient room and always come out saying, "You will be able to go in that room, the pet is harmless." Volunteer duties have shifted over the years, and some days were busier than others, but Shirley and Georgiana always came together at the end of their shift to say, "It was another good day."

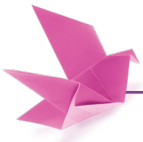


Reflecting on over 25 years of volunteer work at HPCB, Shirley expressed, "Georgiana is the only volunteer partner I have ever had. I have learned so much from working alongside her." Georgiana said, "Shirley and I were able to work alone, but always supported or reminded each other of anything needing to be followed up with. We blended and worked so well together. It was just meant to be for us."

They both shared their fondness for the staff they have had the opportunity to know and work with over the years, including Dr. Robert Milch. Both recalled how "professional and gentlemanly" he was, sharing that he would always say "hello" and ask how they were doing. Georgiana recalled a time when she was dining at a restaurant: "Dr. Milch was there, and he took the time to come say hello to me and introduce me to his wife."




From left to right: Georgiana and Shirley working in the Hospice Inpatient Unit, enjoying a moment with our therapy dog, Hudson



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*"My heart is so full of love for everyone involved [at HPCB.] I have been so lucky to have known so many nurses, aides, doctors, LPNs and staff over the years."*



Shirley also shared, "My heart is so full of love for everyone involved at HPCB. I have been so lucky to have known so many nurses, aides, doctors, LPNs and staff over the years. So much of my life has revolved around Hospice and I have been a part of it for so long; it truly feels like a homecoming when I am on campus."

"When you volunteer at HPCB, you look at it in such a different way. You develop such a compassion for people," commented Georgiana. "It is amazing how many people, friends, neighbors and family members you run into that you know from our community. It is not a sacrifice to volunteer. It is an honor."

Volunteering at HPCB not only connects volunteers and patients. Rather, it connects our community as a whole. Unique bonds are formed at all levels. Volunteering introduced Shirley and Georgiana as strangers but has led them to a wonderful lifelong friendship that they both describe as, "Like family." ■

2ND ANNUAL  
**Winter Solstice Time  
of Remembrance**

*A virtual program*

**Sunday, December 19th,  
at 4:30 p.m.**



Affiliate of Hospice & Palliative Care Buffalo

Please join us for a virtual time of remembrance in honor of our loved ones and in recognition of our shared grief and loss.

The link to the virtual program will be available on December 19th. Visit [WilsonSupportCenter.org](https://WilsonSupportCenter.org).



"I would like to thank the Hospice staff for the great care they gave in my wife's last days. They were compassionate and sensitive to my needs. They showed up on our 54th wedding anniversary, and surprised us by giving us flowers and a cake and by singing to us. This is something I won't forget.

*Thank you and God bless you for all the wonderful work the Hospice staff does."*

— Adam



## Thank You for Your Support

Thank you to everyone who supported the 2021 Chiavetta's Chicken Dinner, we sold 1,000 dinners — see you next year!





# Thank You to Our Partners and Sponsors

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## Beer & Gin Partners



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## Thank You for Your Summer Affair Support

Thank you to everyone who supported the 2021 Hospice Summer Affair. Although we could not enjoy our summer party in person, this event still raised over **\$25,000** for Hospice & Palliative Care Buffalo. We hope to gather in person next year, so save the date for **Thursday, July 21, 2022 at Resurgence Brewing Co.**

Presented by

**M&T Bank**  
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Thank you to everyone who participated in the 2021 Hospice & Palliative Care Buffalo Harvest Fest, A Gathering of Giving. Whether you volunteered, purchased raffle tickets, happy hour baskets, program ads or sponsored this at home event, we are so appreciative of your support.



## DIY Sponsors:

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- Hodgson Russ Attorneys
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Saturday, December 4th, 5:00 – 5:30 p.m.

The 2021 Light-A-Life Tree Lighting Ceremony will take place on the **Hospice Mitchell Campus at the Wilson Support Center: 150 Bennett Road, Buffalo, NY 14227.**

We plan to hold this event in person. However, if conditions worsen due to COVID-19, we may need to host a virtual experience. The full ceremony will be recorded regardless and sent to our Hospice Community on **Monday, December 6, 2021.**

For the most up-to-date information on this event, please visit [HospiceLightALife.com](https://HospiceLightALife.com).

Supporting Sponsors and Partners:

**M&T Bank**  
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## Light-A-Life *Bell*

The Bell has become a cherished collectible and a beautiful remembrance for family and friends who have lost someone they love. The Bell serves as a treasured reminder for loved ones who were cared for by Hospice & Palliative Care Buffalo. With your gift of \$55 or more, you will receive the 2021 bell inscribed with your loved one's name.

Order online at [HospiceLightALife.com](https://HospiceLightALife.com)

Questions? Contact: [events@palliativecare.org](mailto:events@palliativecare.org) or call (716) 989-2010.





## Hospice Angel Fund in Action

The Hospice Angel Fund, begun by Phil Hubbell, in memory of his beloved wife, Jayne, has become a critical component in our ability to provide the most encompassing care and compassion for our patients and families. The community support of this initiative has been incredible. We are pleased to share that, with your generosity, we have added another service

to the Hospice Angel Fund that will help our clinicians provide the essentials for our patients and families. Opened this summer, the Hubbell Cupboard has been stocked with common requests our clinicians receive from those in our program, who are in need of things like towels and linens, toiletry and nutritional items, baby monitors, etc. These are items needed daily, that when without, can cause undue strain during already challenging times. With the Hubbell Cupboard on campus and filled, our clinicians have access to a myriad of tangible resources, making it possible to provide these items quickly and efficiently.

Many thanks to the Friona family and their organization, Totally Buffalo Cares, along with the Josephine Goodyear Foundation, for providing the items and funds to initially stock the Cupboard. Are you interested in learning more about the Hubbell Cupboard and learning how to support this important priority? Contact the Hospice Foundation at (716) 686-8090.



## Hospice Buffalo & Angel Ornament Sale

The Hospice Foundation is kicking off its annual holiday promotions with the Hospice Buffalo & Angel Ornament Sale. Back by popular demand, the Hospice Buffalos will be sold for **\$10 each**. Purchase a buffalo to give as a gift to a loved one or you can donate your buffalo back to an Essential Care for Children patient. You can also purchase our angel ornaments to decorate

your tree! These beautiful ornaments will look heavenly amid any holiday decor! They are sold for **\$5 each**.

Pre-order your angels and buffalos by calling the Special Events Department at (716) 989-2010, or email [events@palliativecare.org](mailto:events@palliativecare.org) to schedule your pickup now through December.





## It's Possible to Double or Even Triple Your Gift to the Hospice Foundation with a Matching Gift!

Several corporations across America recognize the value of their employees' donations to nonprofit agencies and offer matching gift programs to further increase the value of their donations. Many companies even match gifts made by retirees and spouses or award money for your volunteer hours.

Check with your employer to see if they participate in a matching gift program. You can learn more by contacting Ashley Bereziuk at [abereziuk@palliativecare.org](mailto:abereziuk@palliativecare.org) or call the Hospice Foundation at (716) 686-8090.

“Do You *Match?*”



**HOSPICE**  
**Helpers**

### COMMUNITY EVENTS UPDATE

We are so grateful for our Hospice Helpers, who continue to help us with our fundraising efforts. Thank you to the following community groups and individuals who organized events to benefit HPCB from May through July. Events raising over \$250 are listed below.

Event	Organizers	Total Raised
Raise the Dough	Paula's Donuts	\$20,000
Buffalo Marathon	Buffalo Marathon	\$1,000
Soup Fundraiser	Potter Career & Technical Center: Culinary Arts Department	\$850
Taste of Buffalo	Taste of Buffalo	\$1,500
12th Annual Ironhorse Motorcycle Run	Sammi Sperduti, Brian Kloiber & Reverend Carl	\$6,753
EE/BB Golf Open <i>In Memory of Joanne Ludka</i>	Joe Eckl & Friends and Family	\$11,200



**THANK YOU TO OUR FACEBOOK FUNDRAISERS FROM  
MAY – JULY 2021 WHO RAISED OVER \$250!**

Denise in Buffalo  
Julie Carr

Kate Goldberg  
Lisa Coran Massaro

Nanette Parry  
Wendy Richardson-Buchert

# Please Consider Making a Gift *Today*.



Mary Friona and her dad, Phil

In an inspiring story of love and generosity, our fall appeal features Philip Friona, his four children and their experience with hospice care. For a moment, the Friona children struggled with the decision to allow their father to receive hospice care. Their concerns were swiftly quieted with the compassion that accompanied the care both Philip, and they, as a family, received. To learn more about their experience — and make a gift in support of Hospice & Palliative Care Buffalo — please visit [bit.ly/FallAppeal2021](https://bit.ly/FallAppeal2021). Your philanthropic support helps us continue to care for individuals suffering from serious illness, as well as their families and caregivers.

## Did You *Know*?

Did you know that if you hold an IRA (individual retirement account) at the age of 72, you are required to take a minimum distribution — even if you do not want or need the funds? Are you familiar, though, with a qualified charitable distribution? A qualified charitable distribution (QCD) allows individuals who are 70 ½ years old or older to donate up to \$100,000 total to one or more charities directly from a taxable IRA instead of taking their required minimum distributions. As a result, you may avoid being pushed into a higher income tax bracket and prevent phaseouts of other tax deductions, although there are some limitations.

If you are interested in creating a lasting legacy with Hospice & Palliative Care Buffalo or learning more about a QCD or other planned giving vehicles, please let us know.

For more information, call (716) 686-8090.





# together in *dignity.*

Thank you to those who have chosen to support Hospice & Palliative Care Buffalo patient care through memorial and tribute gifts. This is such a meaningful way to sustain our mission while offering an expression of one's sympathy and respect to family members and friends.

To the loved ones of those remembered, we extend our sincerest condolences.

Listed below are one-time gifts of \$100 or more received from January 1 – June 30, 2021 that were made in memory of a single tribute. Please know that with proper information provided at the time of your donation, notification of all gifts, regardless of amount, is sent to the family of those being remembered.

If there is an error or omission, we are sincerely sorry. Please contact the Hospice Foundation at (716) 686-8090 so we may address this.

## *in memory of...*

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Mr. Gregory Jackson

### **Herman G. Achtziger**

Mr. & Mrs. Brad H. Hafner

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### HOSPICE & PALLIATIVE CARE BUFFALO 2021 EVENTS

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2021

**Light-A-Life Memorial Tree Lighting Ceremony**

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2021

**Virtual Winter Solstice Time of Remembrance**

### HOSPICE & PALLIATIVE CARE BUFFALO 2022 EVENTS

FEBRUARY 28 – MARCH 5, 2022

**Spring Bouquet Sale**

SUNDAY, MAY 15, 2022

**Hospice Memorial Walk**

THURSDAY, JULY 21, 2022

**Summer Affair**

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 21, 2022

**Harvest Fest**

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2022

**Light-A-Life Memorial Tree Lighting Ceremony**



## November is National Hospice & Palliative Care Month

Please advocate to help those with serious illness live life as fully as possible. Share your Hospice story on our Facebook page.

## Mail / Email Update

- To receive the Journeys newsletter electronically, email [info@palliativecare.org](mailto:info@palliativecare.org)
- To receive community and event updates, email [info@palliativecare.org](mailto:info@palliativecare.org)
- For volunteer opportunities, email [volunteer@palliativecare.org](mailto:volunteer@palliativecare.org) or call (716) 989-2014
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