



VOLUNTEER NEWSLETTER

Volunteer Spotlight: Maureen LaBelle

I first noticed the twinkle in Maureen LaBelle's eye during a Zoom Support Meeting. Her twinkle came though the pixels during that remote meet, and during each interaction I've had with this longstanding volunteer. When asked about being interviewed for the Volunteer Spotlight, Maureen readily agreed, saying that it would help her prepare her own obituary. You don't hear that every day. But then again, willingness to talk about life and death goes to the heart of hospice and hospice volunteering...so why would I be surprised that Maureen would see this interview as an opportunity to prepare for her own death? Read on to learn more about this remarkable volunteer:



What attracted you to become a hospice volunteer?

My journey to becoming a hospice volunteer started many years ago, when my husband died. A hospital chaplain sat with me as Gene lay dying, and Charlie (the Chaplain) brought me so much comfort. After Gene's death, I told Charlie that if I could be present for anyone at end of life, as he was for me, I would. I made a decision then - to become a hospital chaplain. It took many years to reach this goal because I was busy raising four young children, and I didn't have a college education. I went back to school, taking one or two courses at a time, until I got my degree in psychology and religious studies.

From there, I got certified with the National Association of Catholic Chaplains, and completed my CPE (Clinical Pastoral Education). After 26 years, I received my credentials to become a hospital chaplain, which I did for 20 years.

Within my role as hospital chaplain, I ministered to patients/families, supported staff, scheduled priests to provide the sacraments and responded to codes in the ER. Those experiences will always be with me. But I couldn't have done my job without volunteers. I recruited, trained and supervised a team of 30 Eucharistic ministers who volunteered in the hospital.

This issue:

Volunteer Spotlight
PAGE 01

2021 - Dementia Training –
A La Carte!
PAGE 04

Volunteer Calendar
PAGE 05

Hope Through Community
PAGE 06

The Journey of Gardening
PAGE 07

In Gratitude
PAGE 08



These volunteers were great gifts to the patients, visiting, providing Holy Communion, and referring issues back to me when they heard of concerns. My hospital volunteers inspired me to become a volunteer after I retired.

Upon retirement, I gave myself a good year off to process and think about where I wanted to share my gifts of listening and compassion. I'm drawn to people at the end of their lives, when people have a need to tell their story. I didn't want to return to volunteer where I worked because they'd still consider me a chaplain.

Hospice seemed like a good match for me, and after 20 years as a hospice volunteer, that's proven to be true.

Pre-COVID, how did you volunteer at MVH?

I got my start as a hospice volunteer with the Visiting Nurse Association of Lowell, before it became Circle Home. During that time, I visited hospice patients in nursing homes, as well as their own homes. I also made bereavement calls to families. When Circle Home merged with Merrimack Valley Hospice, I felt drawn to volunteer at High Pointe House. During the pandemic, I've had a remote patient assignment, providing weekly companionship via phone visits. In the past few months, I was asked to co-lead a remote bereavement support group for widows and widowers with MVH Bereavement Counselor Whitney Hall (editor's note: Whitney had an article in the last edition of the Volunteer Newsletter). Facilitating a bereavement group over Zoom has been a wonderful, humbling experience.

At last night's meeting, I told the group, "I feel honored to be on your journey".

What has your favorite hospice experience been thus far?

I've had many favorite hospice experiences. It's a privilege to be with people as they go through their dying process. I do have two experiences that stand out, though:

I remember one very dear elderly couple I met at High Pointe House. They were both in their late 80s. The wife was slowly dying over the course of some weeks. Her husband would come every day, sit by her bed and hold her hand. I joined them as they shared parts of their life story together, making sure there was Kleenex available as the tears ran down their faces. Their deep love for one another...you could feel it when you walked into the room. I felt honored to be with them, to hear of their joy and pain, as they said goodbye to each other. I remember supporting the nurse afterwards, as we processed the patient's death; she really cared deeply about this couple. I'll never forget that experience.

Another patient at High Pointe House was an avid gardener. One nice day, the patient asked me if I'd take her outside. I checked with the nurse, got approval, and brought her outdoors to sit by a bed of flowers. Being outside in the fresh air reminded this patient of her own garden, of how important gardening was in her life.

There, she shared some of her story with me: her chaotic family dynamics, her estranged children who didn't know she was dying, her infrequent visits by only one daughter. In her loneliness and separation from her family, she trusted me with her feelings and story. It seemed to bring her some healing and peace of mind to know that someone would listen. I feel it contributed to her being able to let go and die in peace.

I just love the staff at High Pointe House. They're very open to volunteers there. Danica, the social worker there, is wonderful.



What might people be surprised to know about you?

People might be surprised to know that I have an addiction to exercising. Before COVID, I worked out at the gym 5 days a week... and now I've adapted my exercise venue to the outdoors. After this interview, I'm going for a hike in the woods. I've learned that I love being in nature...it feeds my soul. I also enjoy baking bread – my top three breads are whole wheat, cinnamon and Irish soda bread.

Actually, I come from a family of bakers. My two brothers owned bakeries! And now all my granddaughters know how to bake bread - I taught them.

What have you been doing to stay healthy during the pandemic?

To stay healthy during the pandemic, I've been taking advantage of the supports that hospice offers: doing Calm Breathing Zoom sessions on Tuesday offered by David (another hospice volunteer), as well as Eric's weekly volunteer meetings on Wednesdays. I walk 4-5 miles 5 times a week and visit the ocean once a week (Salisbury Beach or Plum Island). I also have zoom meetings with my family.

Do you have any advice for the new folks who are going through our remote hospice volunteer training?

Listen to your inner wisdom and let it guide you. Practice good self-care. If you have concerns or questions, MVH has wonderful, understanding, and caring volunteer directors - reach out to them.

Thank you for sharing your story with us, Maureen! You are a treasure!



COVID Vaccinations



For those of you who have received their COVID vaccinations, please let us know!

Kindly send a copy of your CDC card or other documentation to Jean Carney at jcarney@homehealthfoundation.org.

Newsletter Editor:

Eric Redard
Volunteer Services Manager

Associate Editor:

Allison Manheim Caplin
Volunteer Services Coordinator

Design / Layout:

Ken Casey
Volunteer

Contributors:

Jean Carney
Volunteer Services Coordinator



2021 - Dementia Training – A La Carte!

We're excited to offer a different way for volunteers to complete the annual Dementia Training requirement this year. Dementia Training will be offered with a la carte options!

You will be able to select 4 hours of training that you're interested in, choosing topics and modes of learning from an extensive list of offerings: perhaps you'd be interested in viewing a series of TedTalks or movies, or you might prefer to read from a selection of articles or books (followed by submitting a written response to what you've seen/read).

Another option on offer will be attending a 2 hour, in-person training offered in September at the Lawrence office entitled "Using Poetry with People Living With Dementia". This training will be facilitated by Volunteer Coordinator Allison Caplin, who brings years of experience to this topic, having led poetry groups at a skill nursing facility. The goal of this training session is to provide you with another "tool for the toolbelt", offering poetry as another way to connect with your hospice patients who have dementia.

We're looking forward to rolling out this new approach to Dementia Training, and hope that you enjoy this different format. Our plan is to post Dementia Training a la carte options on the education website in the near future. Stay tuned!

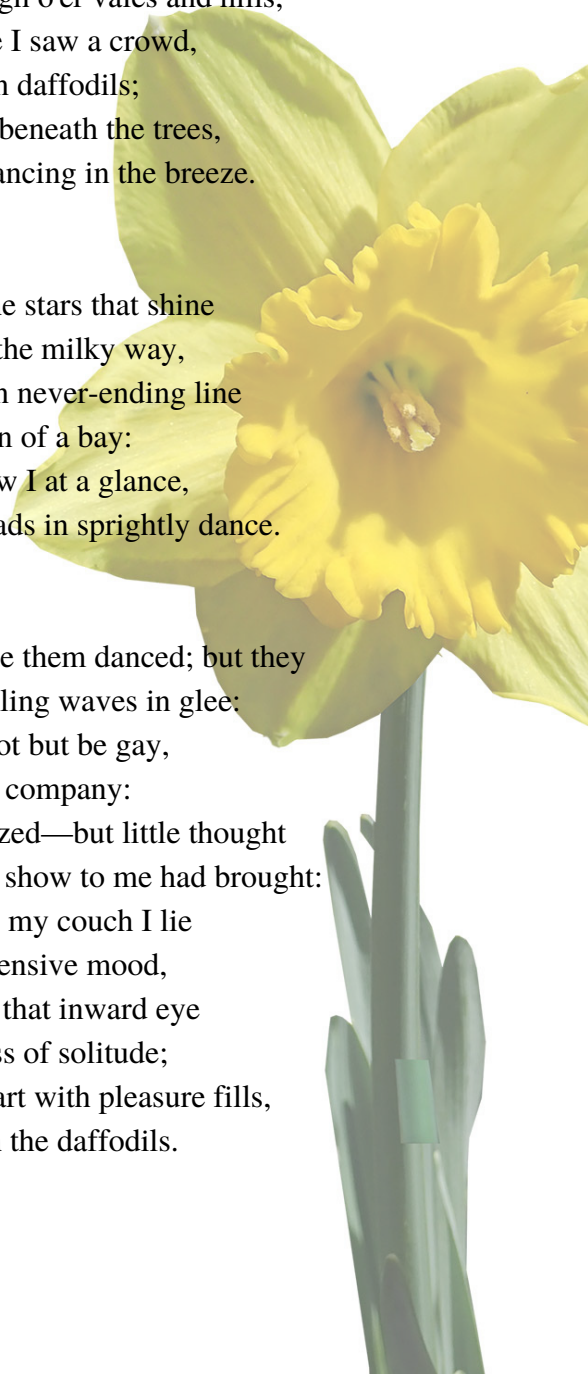
Daffodils

William Wordsworth

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the milky way,
They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay:
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

The waves beside them danced; but they
Outdid the sparkling waves in glee:
A poet could not but be gay,
In such a jocund company:
I gazed—and gazed—but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought:
For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.





VOLUNTEER CALENDAR

April

1 Reorientation Training for all HPH Volunteers
10:00 - 11:00 am
Thursday

6
Tuesday
Deep Breathing
9:45 - 10:05 am
Reorientation Training for all HPH Volunteers
5:00 - 6:00 pm

7
Wednesday
Reorientation Training for all HPH Volunteers
9:00 - 10:00 am
Support Group
10:00 - 11:00 am
special focus on Art as Therapy (TIME CHANGE)

13
Tuesday
Deep Breathing
9:45 - 10:05 am

14
Wednesday
Support Group
10:30 - 11:30 am

April 19-23 Volunteer Appreciation Week

Watch for special events scheduled throughout this week for volunteers.

20
Tuesday
Deep Breathing
9:45 - 10:05 am

21
Wednesday
Support Group
10:30 - 11:30 am

27
Tuesday
Deep Breathing
9:45 - 10:05 am

28
Wednesday
Support Group
10:30 - 11:30 am



Hope Through Community: Words and Images in Response to a Global Pandemic

Our own MVH volunteer, poet/creative writer/psychologist Cheryl Perreault, recently published a book entitled

Hope Through Community: Words and Images in Response to a Global Pandemic,

along with artist/writer Cynthia Franca.

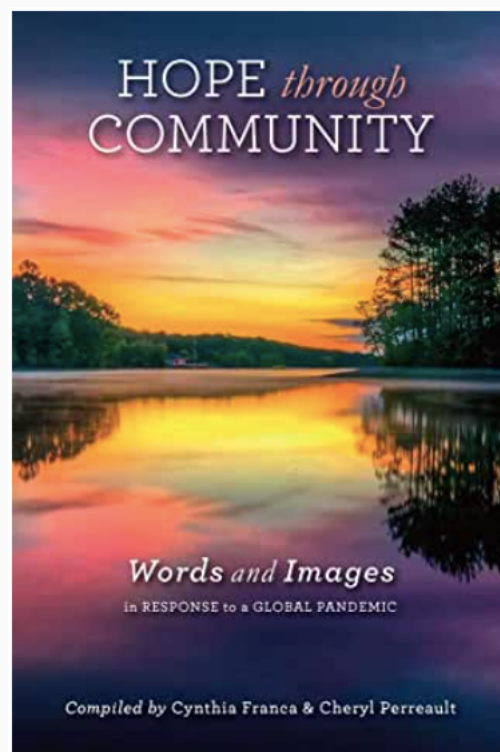
Their book is an anthology of poetry, essays and photographs contributed by 33 contemporary artists around the world as they harnessed their creativity to navigate life during lockdown. In an article reviewing the book, Betsy Ellor wrote:

“This collection offers a tapestry of authentic, interconnected voices offering unique and uplifting writing on the concept of hope in response to global pandemic. United these voices are representative of the many threads of community which, when woven together, inspire us to look inside of ourselves, holding each other up, and looking ahead for better times to come”

<https://www.wordsunboundstudio.com/latest/francaandperreault>

Check out the virtual book launch to get a little shot of hope as the contributors as they read their work:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dI3xepRbgP0>



"Be the reason someone smiles. Be the reason someone feels loved and believes in the goodness in people."

Roy T. Bennett, The Light in the Heart



The Journey of Gardening

by Jean Carney

Having grown up in the outskirts of Bangor Maine, there were all kinds of gardens including the ones around my parent's yard. There were perennial flower gardens, vegetable gardens, fruit trees and berry bushes. Back then gardening was not a high priority for me, but I enjoyed the fresh produce and flowers. In my late teens, my grandmother coached me as I planted petunias for her in her garden, but we never talked about how petunias produce their own seed and may reseed the ground for future growth. That lesson came later in life.

I always loved flowers – their scent, color, texture and how they brighten a person's day. It wasn't until a friend of mine had lost his wife to cancer that I realized gardening was something I enjoyed doing. His wife was a gardener and she had A LOT of perennials and raspberry bushes around their home.



One day I noticed the daylilies were being choked by an invasive vine, so I offered to help him with the gardens. I knew some things about gardening, but I learned a lot from her gardens and appreciated the opportunity to learn from what she had created.

A few years later this same friend of mine who had lost his wife introduced me to his friend who also enjoys gardening. This fellow gardener became my husband and together we have added a few more gardens to our yard with the help of our imagination and a rototiller. In our gardens we keep learning new things, trying new things, continuing to do what works and eliminating what doesn't work ... and the journey continues on.



In Gratitude

One of my favorite cartoon characters growing up (and it continues) is Winnie-the-Pooh. What's not to like? The hardest decision he has to make is which bee hive and honey pot to stick his paw in, and which friend in the Hundred Acre Wood he would visit that day. There was also something calming in Sterling Holloway, and Sabastian Chabot's voices, that could bring quiet, calm, security, and comfort to any person no matter what their age. Life is simple in the land of Winnie-the-Pooh. A place where the small things in life have more meaning and purpose than the grand adventures.

'Sometimes the smallest things take up the most room in your heart.'

W. T. Pooh

I think I get asked to reflect on 2020 at least twice a week now. It's getting tiring, annoying even. I don't feel the need to relive quarantine, use the words, "pivot," "in an abundance of caution," and "lockdown," in every conversation. (Sorry, had to get that out of the way)

However, what I do want to do with regards to this past year is say thank you to everyone, for continuing to be a volunteer and volunteering in whatever capacity to which you were able.



Eric Redard
Volunteer Services Manager

During 2020, up until now, it may not seem like you were doing anything as a volunteer, but remaining a volunteer speaks volumes. Presence matters, whether it is sitting quietly next to a patient or sitting quietly at home ready, willing and able, to answer the call to service. Thank you for being there. Thank you for completing your training to stay up to date.

Thank you for your kind phone calls and emails to check in on us. Being there may sound simple and seem like a little thing, but it speaks volumes.

April is Volunteer Appreciation Month and the week of the 19th is Volunteer Appreciation Week. We hope to have some activities during that week for everyone, and maybe even a surprise so please stay tuned.

On behalf of Home Health Foundation and everyone in Volunteer Services, (Jean Carney, Allison Caplin, Peggy Scavo, and myself), we want to thank you for all your efforts, great and small, whether you think you made a difference or not. As we learn from Winnie-the-Pooh, sometimes the small things, like just showing up and being there, can fill hearts to overflowing.