Authentically Present in the Moment...

With Help From **Hospice of the Foothills**

BY HOLLIE GRIMALDI FLORES

Death comes for all of us. For some, it is a quick and unexpected ending. For others, it is a longer journey. When death came for Alan Falstreau, it came with a triple whammy of prostate cancer and dementia at the height of the pandemic.

COVID-19 meant limited visits with family and friends. If not for Hospice of the Foothills, the journey for Alan and his wife of 44 years, Marylou, would be one they would be taking alone.

Marylou Falstreau said their time with Hospice of the Foothills (HOF) began several months before Alan died, through the Palliative Care Program in 2020. The medication Alan was taking to treat his cancer impacted his quality of life to the extent that stopping the drug was determined to be the best course of action. "His oncologist immediately suggested palliative care. We got started on that, and it was clear the writing was on the wall, within a month or so he entered hospice care," she said.

"This was in the middle of COVID-19, so my expectation was different from the way it turned out to be, but everything was different than I thought it would be," Marylou explained.

What was beyond expectation was the strong relationship between the couple and the Hospice of the Foothills team. "These people became our friends, and our family, and our support—they became everything because of COVID-19. Our kids came, of course, but we didn't have a lot of people other than Hospice coming and going."

Marylou is a renowned artist, who sells original art, cards, and other unique gifts, and is best known for her "Women and the Hourglass" series. She continued to run her wholesale/resale business, shipping orders in the mornings and after Alan settled for the evening. She was also able to watch her grandson two days a week. "The endorphins kick in and something almost supernatural happens," Marylou explained.

ALAN & MARYLOU FALSTREAU

The services HOF provided began with an evaluation with an RN to get a plan set and to teach Marylou how to administer medications through the stages, as it became more difficult. A caregiver came to shower him twice a week and would rub his feet with lotion (which turned out to be his favorite thing).

MARYLOU FALSTREAU
SEATED WITH HER ARTWORK

She doesn't want to sugarcoat the journey. While the couple was very connected, the relationship was a real one. She admitted that when he died there was a small sense of relief on one hand but also devastation. "He was my best friend. It's such a confusion. The feelings that occur. The feelings of grief are all over the place. It's so uniquely your own."

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> MARYLOU FALSTREAU

Marylou said a couple of times she called after hours. "The best part was I called when things were not good, and they came out and sat with me and talked as long as I needed to talk. They were lovely."

A binder was provided that explained what dying really looks like and indicators, along with a lot of other useful information. They also sent a spiritual counselor who Marylou said, "met her where she was."

When asked why the couple decided on Hospice of the Foothills to care for Alan at the end of his life, Marylou shared, "I feel strongly that it was a privilege and an opportunity, and I didn't want to miss it. I didn't want to turn it over and have it be medicalized. Hospice gives you medicines to relieve the pain, will hook up a catheter, but other than that, there wasn't any kind of medical treatment. They are saying this is natural, this is what happens when you die. It's not your natural inclination to just be with it."

Marylou said she appreciated the encouragement the HOF team provided, "They were so sweet. Every time they'd leave, (I think it was part of their training), they'd say, 'you are doing a great job' and I would usually say 'thank you,' but every now and then I would say 'I know I am! I am showing up for this!' because I decided I was going to do a good job."

It's obvious Marylou has done a lot of work and a lot of living. She admits receiving is not her strong suit, but she has a great deal of appreciation for all that HOF did for her. "I needed them, desperately. I couldn't have done it without them, especially with COVID-19. I depended on them. I had a group of friends. I had a community. I had experts, all wrapped up in these individuals that provided so many different needs. They were so beyond Hospice, in my mind. I didn't think of Hospice as an entity. I felt like this is my team. This is my community. They are here for me, no matter what. So, it was like being embraced. These were my people. And more importantly, they were Alan's people."

Marylou said Alan would light up a little by the attention of the workers. "You could see a glimmer of him wanting to charm, the man in him came out and he perked up a little bit. He'd be a little bit sociable. It made his life better. The Hospice people came and filled up this space with warmth and real concern, and they liked him. It made the end of his life better than it would have been if they weren't here. Oh man, without hospice..." she trailed off, she could not imagine it.

Hospice of the Foothills