Dear Friends,

Hospice isn’t just about dying peacefully. Hospice is about living until you die.

When hospice patient, Kim Olson Hraba, realized she was approaching the end of her life, a simple wish rose to the top of her list: visiting the lions at Capron Park Zoo—a favorite past-time she once shared with her grandson, who died unexpectedly several years ago.

Kim, 58, confided her wish to her nurse, JoAnn Gray, who passed it along to the Community VNA Hospice team. What happened next was nothing short of the stars aligning. It happened that another member of the team had a connection to staff at the zoo, and so they set a plan in motion. With Kim’s cancer advancing quickly, time was of the essence.

Early in the afternoon of August 30th, members of the hospice team (with support from a local fire department) transported Kim from her second-floor apartment to the zoo. “The entire day came together beautifully, even down to the weather,” says Erica D’Agostino, the hospice nurse who accompanied Kim and her husband, Bill.

Though the ride to the zoo was a short one, Kim’s energy level was diminishing quickly. The party was greeted at the entrance by the zoo-keeper and quickly escorted “back stage,” where Kim’s energy suddenly rebounded upon seeing the lions. Ramses, Nyalla, and Kayla—the prideful trio—customarily did not gather in a group; however, they seemed to sense Kim’s presence and all sat calmly in their cages at her feet.

For close to an hour, Kim, Bill, and the lions enjoyed each other’s company. No one said so, but there definitely seemed to be another presence with them that afternoon.

The day went better than Kim, or anyone, could have imagined.

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At the end of the day, we all want to have lived our lives in a way that makes us feel that we’ve made the most of our time here. It’s just human nature. Some patients may want to visit new places. Others may need to reconcile with family and friends. Each patient has their own unique set of wishes that they hope to fulfill—like visiting lions.

It is often the little things in life that are the most cherished. For those facing a life-limiting illness, doing so may not be quite so easy, particularly when the primary focus is often on easing the pain and distress that often accompany a diagnosis. Fortunately, Community VNA Hospice does all it can to ensure patients live a life that is both meaningful and fulfilling. Delivering compassionate care with a focus on dignity, comfort and respect is paramount.

Kim died peacefully at home on September 25, surrounded by family.

We invite you to make an annual gift to Community VNA’s Hospice Fund, so that future hospice patients may face their journeys with the same amount of courage demonstrated by Kim, and, to ensure our Hospice team continues to provide compassionate end of life care—regardless of a patient’s ability to pay.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of support. Let us all be shining stars of hope, love, and kindness.

Sincere regards,

Michael J. Murphy
President, Board of Directors

P.S. When you make your gift, we will add the name of your loved one to a silver star. At our December 8th Holiday Tree Lighting Ceremony, we will invite you to place your star on our Tree of Life, or we can do so for you.