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Hospice
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Living With Dignity Redefining Hope®

Working His Way Through Grief— A Male Perspective

by Ana Hays

After his wife Kelly died of brain cancer while on service at Hospice of the Valley, Sutton Roley worried that his two sons (ages 10 and 13), without some sort of help or program, would carry the burden of their mother's death for the rest of their lives.

"So one day, I suggested to my boys, that we should go over to Hospice of the Valley and see what they had to offer," said Sutton. "They asked me what the options were and I told them about the Middles and Teens groups and one-on-one counseling. After consideration, my sons chose to meet together with Bridget at the Community Grief and Counseling Center."

In the beginning, Sutton's intention was for counseling to help his boys and his therapy was work. "At the time, I was president of my company and all I did was put my nose down and elbows up and work hard. I was a workaholic and when I wasn't working, I was home with the boys. That was my therapy," said Sutton. "But as time went by, I sought help for myself and scheduled sessions at the Center."

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Attending counseling sessions and working through his grief have made Sutton a proponent for men who are grieving to seek counseling. "Men go into their caves," said Sutton. "Guys are different and, in our culture, men aren't supposed to cry, aren't emotional and have to be strong. Typically men don't want to deal with grief. Because they

don't want to talk about it, I find they don't want people asking them questions. They prefer to sweep grief under the rug and forget it was ever there. And of course, sooner or later, it's going to come out and you are going to have to deal with it. It's inevitable.

After what I went through, I say the healthiest and the easiest way to do it is to address grief and work your way through it. Otherwise it will take years. And who wants that? At some point in time, you are going to have the opportunity for another relationship. Do you want to go into that relationship still carrying your grief baggage or do you want to deal with it and be ready to embrace the relationship?"

Now a volunteer at the Community Grief and Counseling Center, Sutton spends his time encouraging other men to take advantage of the programs and services at the Center and to tell their story. "Talk about what's gut wrenching, intimate, things that touched you most, and your hopes and dreams. Keep talking," said Sutton. "Grief is about releasing and eventually you get to a point where you can tell your story in a detached way. For me, that's what I found to be the best way to grieve and heal." ❧

For more information on services provided by the Community Grief and Counseling Center, contact 408.559.5600 ext. 5460.



Sutton R.

A Dog's Life!

by Ana Hays

There is one thing we all can be certain of—that we will die. Yet knowing this are we prepared? Most of us do not take the time to tidy up our affairs. Simple things like creating an Advanced Health Care Directive or designating a friend to adopt our pets if we are no longer able to care for them.

Such was the story of Maggie, Bella, Strider, and Tiffany; four dogs living with their devoted owner, who considered them family and loved them beyond measure. When it became apparent to the Hospice of the Valley team that the patient was no longer able to provide all the care they needed and that these rambunctious dogs would soon need a new home—who did Victoria Wild, director of volunteers call? The Pet Companions!

Off they went; Hospice of the Valley's dedicated Pet Companion volunteers to assess the situation. They were introduced to a Chihuahua named Tiffany and three Labrador mixes, Maggie, Strider and Bella. "When we arrived at the home, we had to gain the patient's trust. It was very important to the patient and meant

a lot that we find a home for his dogs. But the dogs were very active—not aggressive—just needing socialization," said Nancy.

"They were big dogs who had gotten away with being big dogs. And they just needed the discipline of someone telling them they couldn't be like that," said Judy.

"On that first day we visited with them, we weren't sure how often they were getting fed, as the patient tired easily," said Nancy. "We took them outside and the patient was pleased with how they responded to Mary, Judy and I. We came daily to make sure they were fed and walked them on leashes. Each day as the dogs got more used to us, we gained more of the patient's trust."

Luckily Tiffany, who was over run by her rambunctious canine companions, was adopted early on by a friend. However the task of finding a home for the other three remained. Pictures of the dogs were taken and sent via email to friends, family, humane societies, and Labrador rescue organizations. Challenges ensued! Bella needed to be spayed. The dogs were not purebred. Luckily for Maggie she looked like a



Left to right: Bella and Strider take a walk

purebred and was soon adopted by a rescue society.

With Bella and Strider remaining, it was time for temperament testing to ensure they could be safely placed in another home. "There was an organization in Emeryville that said if the dogs passed their temperament tests, they would consider them for a foster home," said Ann. "So Judy and Nancy packed Strider and Bella in the truck and off they went on a road trip. The dogs passed the temperament test, but because the organization had so many dogs to process quickly, they required socialized dogs. Bella and Strider proved to be too shy and... were sent home."

Speaking with and emailing countless shelters and dog rescue organizations, Ann finally happened upon a low-kill shelter in Santa Cruz, who told her that even though the dogs were from Santa Clara County that they had openings and would take them. "So we gathered up their beds, toys, balls, food and let their owner say a gentle goodbye," said Nancy. "The patient instructed us to take everything that belonged to the dogs, toys and all!"

"And we drove Bella and Strider over the mountain to Santa Cruz. When we arrived they informed us that the shelter couldn't take them because the two spaces available were needed for dogs in Santa Cruz County. But the patient has already said goodbye we exclaimed. You can't send them back we pleaded. Eventually we persuaded the shelter to keep them," said Judy.

The next day as luck would have it again; a couple who had expressed



Bella settled in her new home

interest in Strider and Bella emailed Ann to tell her that they wanted to adopt the dogs. "Because the dogs were now in a shelter, they would spay Bella," said Ann. "This was perfect for the couple, who were students, because they didn't have a lot of money."

An adoption process that began on December 3rd ended successfully on December 16th due to the dedicated, loving, caring and tenacious spirits of the Pet Companion volunteers and hospice team that supported them along the way.

"This is what Hospice of the Valley is all about," said Victoria Wild. "It's about people coming together as a team to support patients and family members—even the four legged variety!"

Hospice of the Valley is happy to report that all four dogs are content, well loved and enjoying their new homes. ✨

For more detailed information on Hospice of the Valley's Volunteer and Pet Companion programs, contact the director of volunteer services at 408.559.5600.

Living with Serious Illness

Are you caring for someone with a serious illness? If so, Hospice of the Valley has created a resource website to help individuals and families cope with living with advanced disease. Whether you need tips on handling the medical and physical aspects of care (e.g., pain management, nutrition and eating), are concerned about emotional or spiritual issues (e.g., grief, hope, family issues), or simply want to know about important legal and financial decisions, this website addresses your needs. Visit seriousillness.org/santaclaracounty.

