



Racquel Stewart vowed to care for her brother Roan when he got sick.

How Community Hospice Helped a Sister Through Her Brother's Journey

He was the oldest of four siblings and she was the baby, but Racquel Stewart and big brother Roan were as close as twins. They knew everything about each other. But there was one thing that Roan kept from his baby sister - his lung cancer diagnosis in 2019. In time, the cancer spread to his brain and throughout his body.

In 2025, Roan entered into care with The Community Hospice. When Racquel found out, she worked with Hospice to move him home with her and her three kids. She vowed to take care of him herself.

Hospice provided supplies, a shower chair, and other necessities. Racquel says she didn't know much about Hospice at first, but soon learned all

the ways that Hospice would support her mission to care for her brother. "He had the best, best, best team," she says. Hospice also provided massage and music therapies. Racquel says her brother got teary when the music therapist played old gospel songs. Racquel says she wanted to do everything on her own. "I didn't think about the amount of work. I did everything by myself - changed him, bathed him, fed him. I wanted those moments with him" but her first experience with someone close to her dying was hard. She sought emotional support with a Hospice grief counselor. "The first few weeks I was crying and crying, and then I was mad, but talking has really helped." As Roan's condition worsened, he no longer talked or

recognized people. In July, he passed quietly, taking his last breath in Racquel's arms. She says it was hard seeing him like that, but she was also grateful. In January, she turned her gratitude into action, training to become a Hospice volunteer to help other families. "Roan gave me a new strength I didn't know I had," she says. Racquel wants to use her experience to become a certified nursing assistant to help more people. "I hope he's proud of me," she says.

♥ Can Hospice Help Someone You Love? Please Call Us At (518) 724-0242.

Community Hospice Foundation Board Members Bring Focus to Care Mission

The Community Hospice Foundation is grateful for the dedication and leadership of its volunteer Board of Directors, comprised of a group



**Sudeep Ross,
MD, MBA**

Born in India, Dr. Sudeep Ross moved to Africa at the tender age of 3, and at one point lived in the Country

of Somalia. He came to the United States in the 1980s but landed in the Capital Region in 2017 when he became chief medical officer of St. Peter's Health Partners Medical Associates.

Today, Dr. Ross is the medical director of quality improvement for Fidelis. He also serves as a longtime member of The Community Hospice Foundation Board and chair of the Hospice Education Committee. He recounts how then Foundation Executive Director Steve Manny

of community leaders who are committed to ensuring that our programs continue to meet the evolving needs of patients and

turned up in his office one day and the two soon found things in common, sealing his board role in 2018.

Dr. Ross says he had seen patients in need of Hospice care back then but hadn't known about all the wonderful services that Hospice offers until he came on board, such as music therapy to help comfort patients. A music enthusiast himself, Dr. Ross says that "music is therapeutic for anyone," but admits that he had never thought of it "as a use in hospice." Since his time on the board, Dr. Ross notes that the awareness and use of hospice have increased incrementally as a whole in our country, but there is still work to do.

As chair of the Hospice Education Committee, Dr. Ross is energized by the resurgence of the group

families. We deeply value their time, energy and commitment in advancing our mission of care.

post-COVID and what he sees as newfound momentum. Where members once focused solely on provider education, he says the new expanded team has added the charge of community education to spread awareness. "This is one of the most exciting things I've done on the board for the last 8 years," says Dr. Ross. "This is not retrospective. This feels more future facing. With everyone weighing in with ideas, anything is possible. Everyone's opinion matters. Everyone is committed."

Noting the significance of the committee's charge, Dr. Ross is impassioned about the impact the group can have on people's lives. "If we are ultimately successful, people who wouldn't otherwise have reached out to Hospice will."

Unsung Heroes: Community Volunteers Make Heart of Hospice for Patients & Families

Teenagers and retirees do it. Pre-med students and professors do it. Singles and couples do it. Sisters, even mothers and sons do it. We're talking about the hundreds of amazing volunteers who give their time selflessly to help meet the needs of the patients and families served by The Community Hospice.

During National Volunteer Month in April, Hospice wanted to shine a light on this incredible group of unsung heroes who are essential to support our programs. Although federal regulations require hospices to provide 5% of their total patient

care hours in volunteer services, we are blessed with a large volunteer team providing nearly double that amount! Hospice volunteers support patients where they are - in their homes, nursing homes, and local hospitals. They help with a wide variety of tasks for patients, talking with and listening to patients and caregivers, to helping deliver beautiful bouquets to brighten their days, to writing cards, or simply sitting quietly and being present with them. Some volunteers help with light tasks like housekeeping, laundry, meal preparation, or transportation. For

families, volunteers help provide respite so caregivers can attend appointments, get groceries, or tend to other tasks. Volunteers attest that the experience is meaningful, being present for someone in their journey and helping ensure dignity to those at the end of life.

"It doesn't take a medical background to become a volunteer," says Amy Scarlett, manager of volunteer and complementary services for Hospice. "What matters most is a caring heart and a real desire to help others. The ability



**Alisa
Cianfaranis**

She joined The Community Hospice Foundation Board in May 2025, but Alisa Cianfaranis

had learned about Hospice care early on. "I had a very personal experience during the time my mother was sick and someone suggested Hospice." Alisa's mom, Debbie, had been diagnosed with ovarian cancer 14 years ago. She fought a courageous battle for years until the cancer reached a point where there was nothing else doctors could do medically.

Debbie chose to go on Hospice, a decision she kept from her family for months until that Thanksgiving. Alisa recounts that she was scared because it meant that her mom was dying, but Debbie explained that Hospice would help her navigate the scary times, make

her comfortable towards the end, and make her top priority possible - being at home with family.

Alisa says she was in "shock" to see Hospice in action. "They do everything to make you better! People were coming to read to her. There were nurses, chaplains, and they stayed through the up and downs and the moments of sickness so that she could be in her home and have family around her," says Alisa. Before that, Alisa says her mom was in and out of the hospital and she and her sisters had to take turns staying with mom. She says with Hospice, mom was able to be in her own bed, walk around her home, go outside, and be with family. "Hospice was here to support the person still trying to be the mom, wife, grandma. They were her support. They let her say what was scaring her," adds Alisa. Debbie passed peacefully at the end of January 2012. She was just 57.

"They were the most amazing people for those two months,"

says Alisa of the Hospice team. "She passed in her room, with all the family there having Sunday dinner." Alisa vowed to give back. For the past 11 years, she has helped with various Hospice efforts, from spreading the word to assisting at fundraisers. "I can't be someone next to a bedside," she says, "but I can fundraise." Last year, for Giving Tuesday, Alisa spearheaded a \$5,000 grant to Hospice from Pioneer - NY Charitable Foundation, one of her organization's five grants given to nonprofits. Pioneer employees donate funds throughout the year. Employees nominate prospective agencies to receive the grants which are chosen by a volunteer employee committee.

For Alisa, her mom's journey and her own efforts to give back have come full circle. "When I applied (for the grant), it brought tears to the group," says Alisa. "For people to learn about programs like this, this makes me so happy," she says.

to simply listen is also invaluable to validate or acknowledge what patients and caregivers feel and to build trust so that they are comfortable sharing without judgment." Amy adds that a couple of hours a week, or whenever you can lend a hand, could mean the world to a patient or family in need.

"I started volunteering for Hospice because I wanted to pay back some of the debt I owed them for the amazing loving care they provided my wife on her final life journey and the emotional support they provided me," says John DeFrancesco. "I didn't realize, however, the amazing fulfillment I would receive as a result of my volunteer experience. I have received so many genuine expressions of thanks from patients

and their supporting families that it makes me realize that I have received much more than I have given. I feel so blessed that I have met so many special patients and learned so much about their lives. Volunteering, and the loving support I have received from the volunteer

coordinator staff and my fellow volunteer family has made life worth living again."

For more information or to volunteer, please contact Amy Scarlett at (518) 724-0281 or email AScarlett@communityhospice.org.



Cheers to our most recent class of Hospice volunteers who completed the training course. The group includes 20-plus volunteers, including students attaining experience as they pursue education and training, a college professor, several state employees, retirees, and individuals who have had personal experiences with Hospice in their families.



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Every Step Makes a Difference: Join the 25th Anniversary “Walk for Hospice”

Lace up your sneakers for The Community Hospice’s **25th Annual “Walk for Hospice”** set for **Saturday, June 13**, check-in 9 am, walk 10:30 am (rain or shine), at Siena University, Latham. Walk as an individual or part of a team to honor or remember a loved one. Enjoy a complimentary luncheon by Wagon Train immediately following the walk. Live musical entertainment by **The Refrigerators**. Proceeds benefit patient programs. Everyone who donates and registers for the walk will receive a complimentary 2026 Walk T-shirt! New this year, those who raise \$200 or more will earn their very own Route Sign to be displayed at the walk! To register, please visit <https://www.walk4hospice.org/>.

