

The Patriot Ledger

Hospice home kept sisters together during COVID-19



Marcia Wilkinson, left, with her late sister Sally Horne of Marshfield at Longwood Gardens, Kenneth Square, PA. Dec 2018- R. Norman Wilkinson

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The Patriot Ledger

Posted June 17, 2020 at 12:15 PM

HINGHAM -- Sally Horne had made it through 25 years of complications from treatments for cancer. She always held onto hope and this past winter, after another recurrence, she believed she would return to her home at Spyglass Landing in Marshfield.

But by late March, it was clear she needed round-the-clock care that could not be provided at home. Her younger sister, Marcia Wilkinson, 76, began looking for a hospice home. “The minute I walked through the door of [the Pat Roche Home](#) in Hingham I knew it was the right place,” Wilkinson said. “I could see that attention to every detail was taken seriously, from COVID-19 to meals, pain meds, administration and asking me how I was doing.”

Horne became a resident there March 24 and as COVID-19 began to spread quickly across the state, hospitals, nursing homes and hospice homes began closing their doors to visitors, even in end-of-life situations.

Wilkinson badly wanted to remain by her sister’s side. Horne, called “Tiny” for her petite size, was once a stewardess for American Airlines, married, raised two children, and later worked at Babson College, in insurance and as a Mary Kay consultant. She previously lived in Dover and moved to Marshfield in 2000. “She loved her place there,” Wilkinson said.

The sisters and a younger brother, William, were close, had already had meaningful conversations about their lives and shared a deep faith.

Wilkinson and her husband Norman live in rural Pennsylvania; in March they came to Marshfield to be with Horne. They were staying in Horne’s home and had no contact with others. They drove daily to [the hospice home in Hingham](#) and back to Marshfield. In effect, they had been in quarantine for several weeks.

With those precautions in place, the hospice home staff allowed Wilkinson, wearing a mask and staying at a distance, to continue to visit her sister in her room for two hours a day. In the final days, she was able to be with her for six hours. Horne, 81, passed away on May 7. During the final hours Wilkinson was allowed to move from the chair at the foot of Horne’s bed closer to her side.

“She suffered a long time and she was a valiant soldier and I will always miss her, but she is in the right place right now, I know that,” Wilkinson said.

A former nurse and an Episcopal priest, Wilkinson described the care and attention her sister received as “impeccable.” She wanted to share her experience so that others might understand how meaningful hospice care can be and to thank NVNA and Hospice for its diligence.

“They were so on top of things, the staff who were lovingly caring for her, and I wish everybody could have their last breath be like hers,” Wilkinson said. “This should be a model for transition in life.”

As Wilkinson visited, she soon developed a trust that all her sister's personal needs would be met. "I didn't have to be an investigator or advocate," she said. "She was cared for 100 percent and I felt relief, I felt gratitude and that we were all part of a team working together."

One of the difficult times came when Horne realized she would not be going home as she had hoped. "Is there something going on here that I don't know?" Horne asked a nurse. The nurse sat down with her and they looked over Horne's medical chart and notes. "My sister finally connected the dots that she wasn't going home and was in the process of transitioning," Wilkinson said.

"When I visited, she said, 'This is the end of the road, isn't it?' I said, 'By all the signs, this is going to be your time right now and you are not going to get strong enough to go home.'" After that they were able to talk about their faith and "matters of the heart and not just her physical condition."

On the last day of her life, Horne had a smile on her face and Wilkinson, not knowing what was the cause, simply said, "You've seen something wonderful." "Yes," Horne replied. Later, her brother told Wilkinson that he had prayed "for the Lord to show himself to her."

"All I know is there was some kind of a reassurance for her and it was a beautiful gift to her," Wilkinson said. "I hold onto that. She truly did not die alone."

For more information about the NVNA and Hospice and the Pat Roche Home, [click here](#).