

To Melanie Costlow and Endless Journey Hospice:

You're never prepared to lose your mother. You're especially not prepared to lose your mother at 27 years old. Among a new marriage, a new job, and a new mortgage, handling the complications of a dying mother was not on my young adult to-do list.

However, there I was. As a child of divorced parents and with a sister with special needs, I was facing death with my mother head-on and alone. It was the most isolating and terrifying experience I've ever been faced with. I'd been partially managing mom's life since 2017, but starting in the summer of 2019 I was the primary caregiver of most all of her needs. She moved into an assisted living facility in late October.

I came into the Endless Journey office in early December 2019, after mom's assisted living facility recommend it was time because of mom's increasing care needs. Visiting hospice organizations around Christmas wasn't exactly my idea of "happy holidays". But there I was, with my new husband, sharing with Endless Journey staff about my concerns and where to turn next. Probably cussing more than I should have, oops.

With comforting words and genuine smiles, Endless Journey staff got me on board. I work in the geriatric care field and was planning on doing some "shopping around" with hospice organizations. However, when we walked out of the doors we knew we were going with Endless Journey.

Mom's time on hospice started secretly. Her feisty attitude didn't want to hear the word, so we called folks coming in "just some extra help". But after a few weeks of massages, guided meditation, special showers and pampering, Mom was asking for an Endless Journey Hospice t-shirt. Like most things, if Pam liked it, she would be the biggest cheerleader for it.

Mom only saw the good things—which I am grateful for. She saw the comfort and smiling faces and warm touches and hugs. However, mom's case was actually particularly difficult and offered challenges that left many upset.

I watched the Endless Journey Team, lead by Catie Schram, navigate the difficulties of working with a new facility. From food shortages, miscommunication, poor attitudes and low willingness to help, and overall lack of understanding, Mom's facility was not doing their part and Endless Journey was left to pick up the pieces of their mistakes.

Catie Schram was always a voice of reason for me—lost in the world of aging care and death. Between logistics of shower days and changes in medication, Catie professionally guided me through the steps in a language and demeanor I understood and was comfortable with.

Eventually Mom was asked to leave her facility at a heartbreaking time. We knew she didn't have much time left, yet, she was given a 30-day notice from her facility, throwing me into an emotional fallout of fear and confusion. All I wanted was to sit with my mom, in quiet and peace.

The social worker Kevin helped ease my mind by researching skilled nursing facilities and helped gather the proper paperwork and information over to them. This helped me. He was even present on the day of the move when I couldn't be there. He took over boxes and made sure Mom get into her new facility safe and sound.

We got 11 amazing, peaceful, sunshiney days with mom at her new facility. I took her out in the back courtyard to read on her second day there. Little did I know that would be the day I heard the last word she would speak—"wonderful".

Throughout the first week of March 2020, nurses, healers, staff, and friends came by from Endless Journey each day. I sat by her side most of each day and watching someone come in with a big smile and warm communication was so comforting for me. Mom was relatively non-responsive for over a week, but she would give an eye-twitch or small face gesture when she knew someone helpful was in the room.

On her final days Cathy Larson came in to work with mom on Healing Touch. Throughout Mom's life, she had suppressed many heavy and difficult traumas in order to keep moving forward and keep the family together. However, now in her final days, I believe she had a lot of processing to do. Mom went 11 days without food and water—only a week off from the world record. The lady had business to work on.

Cathy helped her through this. She opened and cleared her chakras, she offered prayers and wisdom without words. Mom was completely unresponsive now, but Cathy knew she was still processing internally and Cathy helped soften the suffering.

On Monday, March 9th, Cathy called me in the morning and said with peaceful words, “it is time”. I had been dreading getting that call but it was given so softly and calmly that I wasn’t afraid.

My husband, my father, my God-family, and I gathered in Mom’s room that Monday afternoon around 3PM. She looked beautiful (she really did throughout her whole dying process; I should have asked for her skincare routine!) thanks to her bath aide Jeanette’s incredible work. Her skin, hair, and nails were beautiful just like she always kept them. Her outfit and bedding were neat and in place.

After sharing a few laughs, prayers, and stories—my father decided to offer an apology to me (something no one saw coming).

After his apology and a hug, I went over to Mom to whisper in her ear what had happened. But as I bent down and put my hand on her heart, her head moved. Mom hadn’t been able to move her neck in weeks. But she turned her head gently on the pillow, offered a smile, and was gone.

Her spirit left through the open window on that chilly, wet, spring day.

Please celebrate and thank all of your staff, but most significantly in Mom’s case: Catie, Keivn, Jeanette, and Cathy.

The work that Endless Journey does is hard to measure. How do you measure Mom’s smiles? How do you measure my peaceful heart? How do you measure gratitude? I’m not sure. But I do know that the Endless Journey team helped me survive while my mother died. Something I wasn’t prepared for emotionally, physically, or spiritually. Not only did the Endless Journey Team offer their services for my mother to have a dignified death, but they offered their kindness to me watching this happen.

Please use this gift from mom to continue to help others.

I know living life without mom will be different. It already is. But I know her love and her spirit are endless.

Thank you and Namaste,

Lindsay VanZee, daughter of Endless Journey patient Pam D’Amour

