



tree of life

2019 WREATH STORIES

Each year, local organizations that benefit from Hospice Giving Foundation support are invited to share a story. The touching stories from these wonderful organizations are included in the following pages.



One of My Best Decisions

from *The Alzheimer's Association*

In 2010, my husband was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. The next year, Parkinson's. Confronted with the many challenges to take care of him, I felt overwhelmed. In one single month, I took him to the doctor or hospital 27 times because of many ongoing medical problems.

One day I noticed a newspaper ad for a caregiver meeting at the Alzheimer's office. I went on a Monday evening. It was one of my best decisions. I found common ground where I could talk about my feelings, receive positive support and give my input or be a sounding board for others.

We took strength from each other in those meetings and from the information we received from the Alzheimer's Association. It helped me deal with my husband's anger and confusion. People shared their struggles with feeding, bathing, sleeping, wandering and with slowly losing the person you spent your life with.

In June of 2018, my husband's life journey ended. I continue to attend those Monday night meetings to give my support, encouragement, and input to others. And at 76, I continue to rediscover myself.



The Prom Queen

from **Central Coast VNA & Hospice**

Our Superstar was a 10 year old girl – beautiful inside and out – with terminal brain cancer. Throughout her fight for life she would often speak about her dreams to someday see the Eiffel Tower and attend her high school prom. She wondered what her prom would look like. Sadly due to the severity and progression of her disease, it seemed these dreams would never come true.

But thanks to her school, community, and many other angels a very special prom was organized for our Superstar. The theme was “A Night in Paris”. The gym was magically transformed into Paris including the Eiffel Tower! She wore a beautiful, sparkling prom dress that she absolutely loved. She was the beautiful ‘Prom Queen’ that she always dreamed of. Her mom said this of her daughter, “...she collected pennies from a local fountain to help other children with cancer. Even in her worst days she smiled and kept a positive attitude. I don’t know where she gets it from. She is a fighter and a Superstar.”

After getting to know this family I realized that I knew exactly where she got these qualities from - her mother. Her mother fought hard all the way to the end, yet she greeted hospice with a smile and a positive attitude every time. We feel so honored to be a small part of this wonderful family’s journey.



Baby Jose

from **Coastal Kids Home Care**

Jose Luis Aguayo was born with spina bifida and hydrocephalus. As a baby, Jose had surgery to help his spine grow more normally. He uses a gastric tube for his nutrition and comfort oxygen at night to support his lungs. It was unclear whether Jose would survive the surgery at all, and if so, whether he would have any mental function afterwards.

With many services that have helped him meet his milestones and excellent care from his 19 year-old mother, uncle, and grandmother, Jose is now almost 3. He claps, moves his head towards voices he recognizes, smiles and moves when his name is spoken, and coos as his family cuddles him.

Baby Jose is still fragile and his prognosis is unknown. His loving family takes every day as a gift and spends as much time with him as they can; doing fun things when he is well enough to leave the home. They have learned how to take care of Jose's complex needs at home with very few hospitalizations.

Coastal Kids Home Care is a beneficiary of **HGFOUNDATION** 



Brothers at Camp Erin

from *Hospice of Santa Cruz County*

Two brothers, Jorge and Luis, aged 14 and 6, were referred to camp by a school counselor. They had lost a brother in an accident a year and a half ago. Prior to the camp weekend, they had had no grief counseling. Their parents were initially hesitant about having the boys spend two nights away, as neither had been to a sleep-away camp before. The younger boy was especially nervous to sleep at camp, but felt reassured that his brother would be there to say goodnight to.

This was the first opportunity they had to consider all of the feelings and changes that had arisen as a result of the loss of their sibling. On Friday when they arrived, both were on the quiet side, observing rather than engaging. The Luminary ritual on Saturday night was a highlight for both, allowing the opportunity to say goodbye to their brother in a different way.

As the weekend came to a close, it became evident that Jorge had made deep connections with the other campers in the teen cabin. Sunday morning, Luis was delighted by the Furry Friends visit—smiling and petting our dog visitors. They both expressed interest in returning next year, and their parents expressed appreciation for this experience.



The Mother, The Fighter, The Advocate

from Hospice of the Central Coast

Branny Carrasco died in September at the age of 37. Branny is survived by her two sons, husband and numerous other family members. She left behind a legacy of strength, love and positivity.

She loved adventure, novelty, music, and helping those in need. She honorably served as a US Navy Corpsman for 8 years. Branny co-founded the San Francisco Chapter of Debbie's Dream Foundation, working to change medical practice in the US to more effectively prevent stomach cancers. She fought to increase awareness among Veterans and service members, advocating on Capitol Hill.

Branny was many things, but she was a better mom more than anything. Her dedication to her children shown through every day. She strove constantly to demonstrate positivity in the face of an impossible situation, taking the toughest days and making them fun. She took every opportunity to make memories with her children and husband; exploring distant lands to give her children a global perspective, appreciation of other cultures, and special memories. Branny's spirit is unmatched and the beauty of her soul reached everyone around her.



Aiden and Aubree

from Jacob's Heart

Having two young children born a year apart is challenging. But, when both of your children are diagnosed with cancer within one week of one another, the challenges are nearly unbearable.

Aiden (3) and Aubree (2) were both diagnosed with retinoblastoma, a cancer that starts in the retina, the very back part of the eye. It is the most common type of eye cancer in children, and is generally treated with surgery, radiation therapy and chemotherapy.

In spite of the emotional and physical challenges, Aiden and Aubree are courageously fighting the cancer monster...together. In the midst of treatment, you can find these two coloring and reading their favorite books to one another. And whenever possible, you'll find them playing outside with their beautiful smiles radiating the deep bond they share.

The support from Jacob's Heart has been vital. Aiden and Aubree's parents appreciate the support groups, groceries, gas cards and Art from the Heart. Most importantly, without family nearby, Jacob's Heart has been a safety net of support and love for the entire family.

Jacob's Heart is a beneficiary of **HGFOUNDATION** 



Phoenix & The Phoenix Fund

from *Natividad Foundation*

Jess and Noah were ecstatic about their forthcoming baby boy, preparing for his arrival in the spring of 2020. Jess had some abnormal findings when she saw her doctor at 24 weeks. She was admitted to the hospital immediately in the hopes that delivery could be delayed until Phoenix was at least 26 weeks along. Jess went into labor two days later. Phoenix was born in the early morning and lived for a short time before passing away. Phoenix is loved by his parents, grandparents and all who know the Grimes Family.

As part of their healing, the Grimes Family started The Phoenix Fund at Natividad Foundation. They are raising money to give moms who don't have a baby to take home some of the things she needs in the first few days after giving birth. Even though these moms don't have a tiny child to care for, they still go through the labor and delivery experience and need supplies like breast pads. Phoenix's grandfather is also hand carving tiny wooden urns for the ashes of other families who lose a baby too soon.

Phoenix inspired everyone surrounding him to provide comfort to others who experience loss. He lives on as a light of hope and healing for those who are grieving and remembering tiny lives lost too soon.

Natividad Foundation is a beneficiary of **HGFOUNDATION** 



Why I Support Papillon

from *Papillon Center for Loss and Transition*

October 1st was 5 years since my beloved husband Richard passed away. My mom died three weeks later. I will forever be grateful to my friend Barbara, who told me about Papillon Center for Loss & Transition. The quality of ongoing support and education that I received at the most painful time of my life was extraordinary. To this day I am part of the 'Transition' group, who support each other in the evolving day to day experiences that arise after the loss of a loved one.

I have been so inspired by my experience at Papillon, that I have become involved as a volunteer. This has been a new endeavor for me, and I continue to be motivated by being a part of an organization that is creating change for individuals in our community.

I have come a long way in the last five years. Experiencing support at a time like this can make a huge difference in one's journey. It certainly did in mine.

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Faith and Perseverance

*from **Partnership for Children***

When my wife was three months pregnant, we got an ultrasound. The doctor told us that our child would have severe health issues and recommended ending the pregnancy. Miguel was born with Beckwith-Widemann's Syndrome, Gastroschisis, Macroglossia, and high-risk pulmonary issues. He had a large tongue that made it hard to breathe and required a tracheostomy as an infant. Treatment included a tracheal tube that Miguel had to have for up to three years, and that limited his ability to make sounds.

Miguel would be at the children's rehabilitation center for the next 2 years. It was hard for our family. When Miguel was two years old, they surgically reduced his tongue size and when it was time for him to come home, we learned about Partnership for Children. For the past four years, our family has been receiving rides and gas assistance from Partnership for Children.

When we receive rides, I am able to spend the travel time with Miguel and focus on him. For appointments where I am able to drive, we get much needed gas assistance. During the holidays, all our children receive gifts, pajamas, warm hats, and books from Partnership for Children as well. And just recently, Miguel was awarded Student of the Month at school.