



Reiki and Hospice Work

BY MARYANN LONERGAN

A FEW YEARS AGO, I received a call from a woman at a local hospice organization. She identified herself as the Hospice Volunteer Coordinator and asked if she might come to one of my Reiki shares and speak to my students about volunteering to provide Reiki to hospice patients in their homes or institutions. So, I invited her to the next share and told participants she would make a presentation. After her talk, folks asked a few questions about the length of the commitment and frequency of visits. Something about her words really moved me, and after a few days of discernment, I decided to volunteer. Providing Reiki at no cost to those dying was a natural spiritual balance to having a thriving Reiki practice. After a few weeks of training, I received a new title—Certified End-of-Life Specialist.

I've been volunteering with this group for several years now. It's a beautiful way to use your Reiki skills as a volunteer. When you approach a new client, some families know about the benefits of Reiki. With others, I've had to educate them about what Reiki is, how it works, and how it can help their loved ones. As with most clients, the best way to explain is to have them receive a Reiki treatment. Usually, during the first visit, there is a bit of trepidation about what I will do. After that, patients and their families see and feel the benefits and appreciate the connection. I want to share a few of my experiences with you.

Eric was a man in his late 50s who had amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, also known as Lou Gehrig's disease (ALS). I visited with him every week for over six months. His previous Reiki practitioner had retired, and he was excited to be offered Reiki again. I worked on Eric while he sat

in his motorized wheelchair. He was always so happy to see me, loving our Reiki sessions, and described seeing a brilliant white light and feeling pain and stress melt away. He also said he had the same sensations during my sessions as when the chaplain came to pray with him.

I listened as he shared many life experiences and beliefs, and I was in awe of the beautiful person he was. It was one of my favorite days of the week, spending time in the peace of his home with his dogs at my feet and his husband smiling at us whenever he passed through the room. He was not afraid

to die; he just wanted to live and enjoy life and his family as long as he could. And he did. I felt so blessed to have been a member of his treatment team.

Martha was in her 60s and also had ALS. I only got to visit with her four times. At first, she was a bit afraid of what I would do to her. So, I began by asking about her spirituality and her beliefs. As it turned out, we had much in common, and she became more relaxed and willing to try Reiki. After the first session, she was hooked.

I listened to how difficult it was for her, being such an independent person, to rely so much on others. She had a great sense of humor, and I enjoyed working with her. Reiki was so different from the other services she was receiving; it was so much more personal. And she enjoyed the peace and relaxation during our sessions.

One day, when I arrived, she was distressed. My guides prompted me to tell her she had a beautiful spirit. When she asked how I knew, I told her I sensed her very peaceful energy and could see the light in her eyes. She told me it helped and couldn't stop thanking me for my comments and the time I'd spent with her.

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Luis was a young man in his 30s with a wife and three children. He was bedridden and had a tracheostomy tube to help him breathe. He wanted his wife to be present during our first session because he didn't know what it was about. Afterward, I also gave her a short Reiki session, which she appreciated.

He and I could never really talk, but he blinked once for "yes" and twice for "no." He had a screen with which he could communicate, but we found little need to talk, though there were days when I got him smiling. Luis really loved his Reiki sessions. Most times, he fell into a deep sleep while I was working on him. One day, I had an idea. I had read Mrs. Takata sometimes attuned family members, so they could continue to provide Reiki between her visits. With their consent, I gave Luis and his wife Holy Fire® Placements. I felt he could call in the healing energy whenever needed, and she could provide Reiki to him, herself, and her children as often as possible. They were happy to continue that process between my visits. Because of schedule conflicts, I had to hand off Luis' care to another volunteer for a few months. One day, I received a call from my hospice coordinator asking if I could visit Luis because he was close to transition. I had the privilege of seeing him one last time, giving him Reiki, and expressing how much visiting him meant to me. I wished him a peaceful transition. He passed the next day, and I know the Reiki assisted in that process.

Pat, a woman in her 50s, could not speak, but she had a beautiful smile and gave me a thumbs up for "yes" and moved her hand back and forth for "no." Her nursing assistant was always present during my visits if Pat needed anything. At my first visit, I explained how the session would work and feel and kept checking in with her to see how she was doing, and each time, she gave a big thumbs up. Pat was pretty frail, so I used a hands-off technique in sessions. Every week when I arrived, she had *Law and Order* on the big screen television, and we watched until she drifted off under the influence of Reiki energy. She looked forward to her weekly sessions even though she was slowly declining, first sitting in a lounge chair and, finally, only in her hospital bed.

When I met Nancy and her husband, she wasn't sure what I would do to her and told me she'd just kick me out if she didn't like it. I said, "Okay. No one has kicked me

out yet," and began. During the session, her legs cramped, but by providing Reiki, they eased up quickly. I could see and feel her sinking into her bed during the session. When it was over, she was so very relaxed and couldn't stop thanking me for coming. Before I left, I gave her husband a quick Reiki session, so he'd have a better idea of what was going on. He loved it. I could only visit her for several weeks before she passed on.

My most recent hospice patient, Elizabeth, was an amazing woman. She shared her work and family history with me, and over our meetings, she provided some wonderful recipes for me to try. She used to be a chef and had come down with stomach cancer. During our visits, she didn't want Reiki or me to put my hands on her, so I sent her Reiki with my eyes and my presence, and we'd spend 30-60 minutes just talking and being present. Her energy always improved during our sessions, and I know she took in what I sent her more subtly.

Sometimes, I wonder what I can do for those in hospice. I don't offer a cure, just my presence, a listening heart, and the gift of relaxing, healing energy. And according to the residents, that's quite a lot. As with most volunteer jobs, you get back much more than you give. Providing gentle touch, pain relief, relaxation from stress and anxiety, and help at the time of their transition is such a beautiful way to share the gift of Reiki healing. I'm so grateful I decided on the opportunity to do hospice healing work when it presented itself to me. Please think about offering your Reiki services to a hospice organization. I highly recommend it as a fulfilling service opportunity. ■

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