

---

# Light Up a Life 2011

Dear Friends of Hospice of the North Country,

Life is full of irony. We live in a world where we are bombarded by messages from the various media. Through email and social media we can connect with thousands of people. We have opportunities to travel almost anywhere in the world. Yet our society has changed over the years and it is easier than ever to feel alone. Thankfully, Hospice of the North Country is here to make sure that you and your family are not alone at a most critical and sensitive time.

The staff and volunteers of Hospice of the North Country provide an invaluable resource for local residents. They provide care, reassurance, listen, help to open communications on important topics previously unapproachable and in general make the final weeks and days a much more pleasant time and a more pleasant memory for those left behind. However, we need your help. Our Light Up a Life Campaign is a meaningful and timely opportunity whereby you can make a difference.

Light Up a Life enables you to remember loved ones who have died while making a contribution that helps support the vital work being done by our employees and volunteers at our Malone and Plattsburgh offices. You can find details of Light Up a Life elsewhere in this newsletter. I urge you to consider supporting our vital not-for-profit services.

If you have doubts about the difference that Hospice of the North Country makes, please read the stories about Maggie Vensel and Margaret (Peg) Allen. We at Hospice were honored to be able to serve them as their life cycles came to an end. They were far from alone, and our being there did make a difference.

Now you can make a difference. I urge you to make out a check to Hospice of the North Country. Light Up a Life in memory of those past and to benefit many in the months and years ahead.



Cynthia Gardner

President, Hospice of the North Country Board of Directors  
Chairperson, Light Up a Life 2011

---

# Light Up a Life 2011

Peg Allen

Pictured right: Carol and her mother, Peg Allen.



I had the great privilege of taking care of my parents in their home for the remainder of their lives. Without the support of Hospice of the North Country I couldn't have done it, well, at least not comfortably.

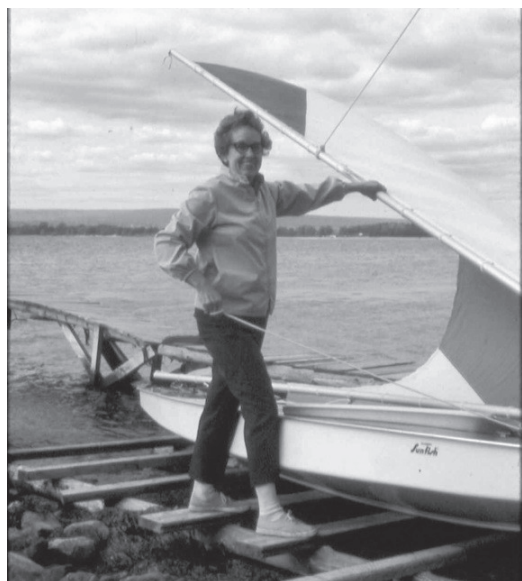
My father died very shortly after I got Hospice help for him. His decline was unexpectedly fast. I was up repeatedly during the nights and unable to leave him unattended during the day. My mother, although she had Alzheimer's, continued to live for several years after starting being under Hospice care. The people of Hospice were my 'higher power' throughout Peg's protracted decline. Knowing that I could call upon them, that I was not alone in this amazing but potentially scary journey into the unknown, gave me strength and peace.

Hospice workers deal with death and dying every day. Their wide experience has allowed them to cultivate equanimity while maintaining their compassion in every word and deed. They do not fear this very natural transition. And they maintain no denial. They are so real. My mother's death was one of beauty and dignity and the nurses and aides of Hospice made that possible.

Peg's Alzheimer's stripped her of her intellect, leaving her barely able to speak. She was unable to walk or even sit unsupported. She seemed to be even bereft of ego. She appeared to me, and all who knew her during those final years, as a soul exposed. Everything she was in the inside, that is to say all that she truly was, was uncovered, visible and tangible to us. The awe and joy one feels when seeing a newborn babe--this tiny tiny person, yet complete and pure--this is the same aura that my mother radiated. And she was so tiny, too! Yet her status as a mother and as a woman of advanced years also inspired something akin to reverence.

I am so grateful to have shared this amazing experience with Nurse Katie, Sister Mary Ann, and so many of the other nurses and nurses aides who held the same high standard of care and same deep love that I still hold for my parents. Together we were a team. I want them to know that what they do so quietly in the privacy of our homes creates a beacon of goodness that spreads throughout the North Country and possibly to the unknown worlds beyond!

Written by Peg's Daughter, Carol Allen



Pictured left: In the sixties, Peg bought a little Sunfish Sailboat and a book on sailing and taught herself to sail.



Pictured right: Peg celebrates a wedding anniversary. And Peg, ever the athlete, can still fit into her wedding dress.



# Light Up a Life 2011

Maggie Vensel

Nine children, nineteen grandchildren and fourteen great-grandchildren; THAT'S what our mother was all about. She was the core of our family; independent, strong, wise and loving. She was, at first, a stay at home Mom, but as we grew older, worked outside the home yet still managed to keep her thumb on what her children were up to. Maggie was a voracious reader who loved to cook; especially her wonderful, mouthwatering Sunday dinners. She was "Mom" to all our friends as we grew up; kids' running in and out of our house was the norm. She raised her family with a sense of normalcy that we have each tried to pass along to our families, but most of all she was devoted to her husband, our dad, Thomas Vensel, who passed away in October 1982.

In 2001, Maggie was diagnosed with cancer. In 2007, she had her hip replaced and while healing, fell and fractured her pelvis. Added to that she suffered from spinal stenosis. That's when it became apparent that simple tasks Mom had done effortlessly before now took longer, or were impossible all together. Mom was from the generation that was raised to take care of themselves so, in her eyes her job was to take care of us, not the other way around. Despite her Irish stubbornness, we knew Mom needed help with her daily life; but if not from us, from whom?

As Mom's physical health began impeding her ability to live a "normal" life, Hospice was brought in to aid in her medical and daily care. Naturally, Mom, who had been the "caretaker of all things" for years, was extremely resistant to having strangers managing her life. Little did any of us know the staff of Hospice would soon become our life line; the family Mom could confide in while still maintaining her role as "mother".

Hospice meant our mother could remain in her home, where she was com-

fortable, yet have access to caretakers and nurses regularly. While she had a unique ability to convince us that she was "fine", Hospice came to know our mother well enough to know when she was not and would contact the local family members despite Mom's protests. They would stay with her, even after their shift was done, until family arrived. If she seemed lonely, they'd stay an extra half-hour, or stop on their way home "just to check in". They brought her flowers, fruits and vegetables from their gardens, and baked goods. Mom would gossip with the staff; she advised them; she took interest in their lives and they took interest in hers (and ours, based on the knowledge Hospice has of us growing up - thanks Mom!). Hospice gave Mom life; not survival or existence, LIFE. They cared about her as much as we did and NEVER treated Mom as a patient. Because of Hospice's care we selfishly got to enjoy our Mom's company and wisdom much longer than we had a right to, or that doctors advised us we had.

On March 22, 2011, Hospice's innate ability to sense something different in Mom set in motion a series of phone calls that allowed the family, scattered from California to Virginia, to gather and spend precious, quality time with her. Hospice remained quietly present daily for three weeks, fielding difficult, some times unanswerable questions, reassuring us, crying with us, and even at times, laughing with us. But, ultimately these nurses and caregivers tended to Mom with dedication, gentleness and love. They remained steadfast in making sure Mom would pass with dignity, peacefully, and at home, surrounded by the love of her family as our mother wanted. On April 9, as Mom took her last breath, having seen almost all her entire family over the course of those three weeks, she smiled, knowing that her job on earth was done and our dad was waiting for her. She was 88.

As we look over the course of the three years Hospice has been with our family, it occurs to us that Hospice nurses and caregivers don't treat their clients or the families clinically, they treat them with respect, dignity, and compassion, they become part of each family; developing a relationship with the patient and family in preparing for the inevitable end of life with grace and compassion. The staff at Hospice enrich the lives of the people they touch; the North Country is very blessed to have this organization available to those who need it regardless of age. They are proof that angels walk among us.

Written by Maggie's Children who are pictured below: Front (L-R) Doug, Maggie, Gary. Back (L-R) Amy, Nancy, Betzy, Patti & Susie. Missing: Michael & Allen.



Pictured below: Maggie with Sheila Marlow and Jessica Lavarnway, two of her Hospice "angels".





# HOSPICE of the NORTH COUNTRY

**Light Up a Life 2011  
Month of December**

Champlain Centre North, Plattsburgh

**Sunday, December 4, 2011  
27th Annual Ecumenical Christmas Concert**  
St. Joseph's Church, Malone, NY  
4:00 PM

Visit us on the web at [www.hospicenc.org](http://www.hospicenc.org)

*We thank you for your continued support of Hospice of the North Country!*

## Board of Directors

Cindie Gardner  
PRESIDENT

Raeanne McLaughlin  
VICE-PRESIDENT

Rose Pandozy  
SECRETARY

Tom Rennell  
TREASURER

Debbi Barber

Michelle Denny

Judge Patrick McGill

Tom Conlin

Joanne Swiesz

Ginny Cuttaia

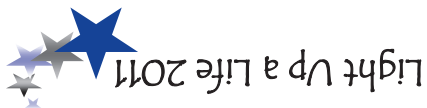
Mary Goddeau

## Medical Directors

Christopher Badger, MD

John Homer, MD

Wouter Rietsema, MD



Return Services Requested

358 Tom Miller Road  
Plattsburgh, New York 12901



NON-PROFIT ORG.  
US POSTAGE  
**PAID**  
PLATTSBURGH, NY  
PERMIT NO. 34