

# Hospice let me be a daughter instead of a caregiver

By Kathryn Ellen Styers

*For 47 years and counting, VIA Health Partners, formerly Hospice & Palliative Care Charlotte Region, has helped families and loved ones find hope in life's waning days. Kathryn Styers has felt the love and comfort not once but twice – and now works to help others feel the same.*



Hospice was there for the last 2 years of Dr. John C. Ellen Jr.'s life. And what a life it was! Kathryn's father left Duke University, enlisted in the Army and stormed the beaches of Normandy on D Day. After the war, he finished up five degrees, then moved to Greenville, N.C., to teach history at East Carolina University. He was a true Southern gentleman, Kathryn says, never raising his voice. He and his beloved wife, Dorothy, retired to Covenant Village in Gastonia. When dementia set in, VIA Health Partners was there with extra nursing and CNA services to provide one-on-one medical and personal attention. Social workers tended to his needs and answered the family's questions. They even carried iPads and would use an app of birds singing so he could enjoy listening to their songs. VIA Health Partners Chaplain Walt Windley IV went from visitor to friend. Dr. Ellen died on Aug. 30, 2017. He was 96. Hospice RN, social worker and chaplain were with the family when he breathed his last, at home, at peace.

VIA Health Partners has now also served Kathryn's mother, Dorothy Ellen. Dorothy was married to John for 56 years. The talker in the family, she opened a dancewear shop in Greenville, N.C., and gave herself the nickname Dance Tycoon of the East. She smiled that precious smile of hers every time someone brought up Greenville or the dancewear

shop she ran for 40 years. Dorothy received hospice care for nearly 3 years. Nurses typically visited twice a week, social workers and chaplains twice a month. They enjoyed talking with Dorothy about her dancewear shop and looked at photographs from her past. That team became like family. Steve Harvey's daytime talk show and NFL football on TV helped to pass the time. But life could still get lonely. Hospice was a welcome visitor and friend, until the time she reunited with her husband.

The hospice story doesn't end there...

Kathryn has been an educator with VIA Health Partners for almost 11 years, visiting hospitals, nursing homes and doctors' offices in Cleveland, Gaston and Lincoln counties. Her job is to explain the services that VIA offers, including when a patient is ready for palliative care or hospice services. She gives a talk called Make The Most of Every Day. Though the end might be near, she tells her audience that a person's life can be filled with value, integrity and peace. Nobody can tell that story with more conviction than Kathryn, for she has lived it twice.

"Hospice has allowed me to be a daughter instead of a caregiver," Kathryn says. "A level of respect and dignity that your loved one deserves is what our hospice is all about. Hospice is hope."