

One step toward heaven

MARSHVILLE

I think it's fair to say that all of us in the past have been invited somewhere and when we got there, it certainly wasn't what we expected. We may have gone just because of our spouse. They may even have had to plead with us to go. All we can visualize is ho-hum food and boring conversation. Instead, the food we ate was so outstanding, we ask for the recipes. Oh, and the new couple your significant other introduced to you: He's going to show you how to analyze your garden soil at home. And best of all, she's giving your wife private belly dancing lessons!

That "words can't describe it" type of experience is exactly what awaits both patients and family members when they arrive at the Wayne T. Patrick Hospice House in Rock Hill, S.C. From your first encounter, through your last, you determine the entire staff must have majored in compassion and caring. Two quotes from patients/family members were: "It's not all doom and gloom as you transition from this world to the next." Another said, "It's one step toward heaven."

A few weeks back, I mentioned that my dad had contracted two terminal blood diseases through repeated exposure to certain chemicals. His hospital stay in January required 35 pints of blood. (It's a good thing my personal blood donations have been around 40 units.) After a downturn in his condition, he was able to go to the Wayne T. Patrick Hospice House. It is there and elsewhere that Hospice organizations are changing people's ideas about death and dying. I have been involved with hospice many times through the years, but never as up close and personal as this time.

The first time I drove to Hospice House (following directions), I turned into the long driveway, but thought I must be at the wrong place. This was because lining the driveway on each side was approximately 20 purple-leafed redbud trees. These draw your eye like nectar attracts hummingbirds even when they're not blooming. Without exaggeration, I can say that the parking area as well as the extended landscape resembles a botanical garden more than anything else. Adjacent to the parking lot is a multi-level patio. The focal point is a very large gazebo that is used in many ways. Where you find illness, you will find stress, anxiety and tension from patients

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and family members. To combat those things naturally, there are several water features including two very large freestanding fountains. Whether bubbling from large "jars" or cascading down the four-tier fountains, the gentle flow of water can help you forget where you are and why you are there.

As my wife and I walked around, I realized great care went into the selecting and planting of the Hospice landscape. Shrubs, trees and flowers were placed together in groups of three, five or seven. Sometimes, you'll notice the landscape designers at a really nice place have used the same plants almost everywhere. The problem is after several years if these same plants contract a disease or problem, all of them are affected. Here, diversity was the goal and they achieved it. There were tea olives, Koussa dogwood, weeping yaupon hollies, Little Gem magnolias and outstanding crabapples. When they chose shrubs, they selected white, pink, and purple crape myrtles, summer blooming spireas, azaleas, gardenias, Indian hawthornes and abelias in dwarf form, yews, lorapetalums and nandinas. There was also one of my favorites, variegated pittosporium, among others.

Perennials should always fit into this type of area and they made room for some great ones. There were mounds of white Carpet roses, dianthus, creeping phlox, lavender and yellow daylilies. There was also a fairly unknown drought resistant plant known as gaura. Its common name is Whirling Butterflies because the airy flowers are on long slender stems and seem to float above when the wind blows. Other plants I noticed were Silver Dragon lirioppe, large clumps of Ribbon grass and probably 25 vines of Winter Jasmine, used as a groundcover. In what I consider very special places were Lady Banksian thornless roses and Armandii clematis that bloom in January and February.

In addition were large urn-type containers spilling over with mounds of either trailing petunias

or spreading verbena. The only annuals I recall were two to three beds of white and pink begonias. Did I mention all of this was before you even entered a door?

Upon your first step inside The Wayne T. Patrick Hospice House, you notice a long wall that holds awe inspiring framed and matted paintings by patients or patient family members. It is dedicated to their very first Hospice patient. On the way to my dad's room there was a full glass door that led to a small, special garden. It was the only area enclosed by a gated wall. Curious, I found it is a wonderful children's garden specifically for small children whose parent or other family member is a patient. It has small hills for little feet to run and climb as well as whimsical benches and chairs in the shape of a butterfly. In addition, for children are sessions to help them deal with the anxiety and fears they have. Perhaps the most moving things I have ever seen are two to three walls holding framed pictures the children have drawn and painted expressing how they feel about this major event in their life. (Extremely powerful!)

Upon entering Room No. 4, nothing you see would emphatically state this room was prepared for the sick and dying. It is so different from a hospital room for there are cabinets, a microwave, a dorm fridge, a loveseat, chairs, and even a ceiling fan. (If the patient is an outdoor or garden lover, the design of the room may make it even easier for them.) Double louvered doors open out to allow the bed to be moved to the room's private patio. Close by, you can let your eyes explore whimsical metal art, Knockout roses, Japanese maples, hostas, crape myrtles, daylilies, and large containers holding New Zealand flax and cosmos. There is even a hummingbird feeder and stand. Obviously, I haven't listed all the plants in this special and unique environment. Based on what I saw though, there is a succession of different plants and flowers blooming on and on. It reminds me when we've been to certain theaters to see a play and discovered there were no "bad" views.

When God had set the date and my dad's stay had ended, I pondered Hospice House being "One step toward heaven." Seeing everything I've mentioned and more, plus unlimited care and compassion, it was more like "There's just one step remaining until heaven."

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