Hospice patient Marlis Brady says she’s feeling comfortable these days thanks to her hospice team. Here she is pictured with her daughter Dorinda Flannery, twin great-granddaughters Kayla and Chloe, and Dorinda’s poodle Darby.
Faith for the journey

Marlis Brady has a beautiful accent. There’s something quite elegant in the way she pronounces her consonants; and the rhythm of her voice, as it subtly rises and falls, produces an enchanting, peaceful effect – even as she describes the trials she’s faced in her 88 years.

Marlis grew up in the Rhine Main Valley in Germany during World War II, where hardship was not uncommon.

“You couldn’t get anything new. We grew up always saving things, repairing things,” Marlis explained. “I remember one winter I froze my toes because we didn’t have regular shoes… I was standing in line for milk too long.”

Food was scarce for families like hers, who didn’t have a farm of their own. But she and her brother helped at other farms during the potato harvest. It meant a sandwich each day for lunch, and an extra sack of potatoes at the end of the year. It was a way to help their family, before Marlis started to work for the occupying American forces after the war.

“When I turned 18, I could actually get a good job because I could work as an interpreter,” Marlis said. “Then I got a real dinner every day and so that was the way to go. It was what we all looked for, really.”

Then as soon as Marlis turned 21 – well, technically, it was the day after – she filed immigration papers for Canada. It took almost two years to get the papers, and in the meantime, she met her husband, John, there in Germany. (“In fact our first date was going to church, really funny,” Marlis recalled.)

At 22, Marlis emigrated across the Atlantic to Canada. John, born in the Bronx but raised in London and Dublin, later followed, and the two were married. But they knew Detroit was where the jobs were, so the Motor City was their destination.

Now one thing you should know about Marlis is that she is a remarkable woman. Consider that she earned her Master’s degree while she had five little kids at home. Or that she and John spent years sailing the Eastern Seaboard after retiring from the Old Shillelagh bar downtown – just one of the businesses they ran. Marlis is also remarkable as a devoted supporter of Angela Hospice, and has faithfully sent a donation every month for the last five years. Having given a total of 54 donations in support of patients and their families, her commitment to supporting Angela Hospice began in 2009, when she lost her son, John, Jr. She and her husband had enlisted Angela Hospice to help care for him in their home, as he battled lung cancer.

“We were very pleased how my son was being taken care of,” said Marlis. “His sister who lived in Vermont, she came and worked from home and she was his caregiver. It was actually all the sisters who came and helped him.”

John was just 54 years old when he died. Sadly, just five years later, another of Marlis’s children passed away – her daughter Barbara. Now Marlis faces the final round in her own battle with cancer. But she’s at peace with her decision to forgo radiation and the “three or four miserable months” it might bring.

She’s happy with her choice to get home care from Angela Hospice in her daughter Dorinda’s home, and she’s grateful she started using hospice early on.

“It’s wonderful,” Marlis said. “They always take very good care of me and I’m always very comfortable.”

Her nurse Jane Vass regularly comes to check on her, make sure her symptoms are managed, and that she is not in pain.

“Jane convinced me that it’s OK to take pain medicine,” Marlis explained. “You know, I grew up in the ‘you grin and bear it’ type of mentality. But she says I don’t have to grin and bear it, you can be comfortable. And that’s what I’ve been doing. She convinced me of that.”

Marlis said she’s been feeling much better now on a low dose of morphine, and it’s allowed her to spend quality time with her daughters, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, even if it’s hard for them to tell sometimes that she’s sick. But Marlis knows her time is limited, and it’s something she’s come to terms with, thanks to her Catholic faith.

“I know where I am going,” Marlis said. “Jesus has my back and I ask Him every day to take my hand and lead me.”

As she approaches the end of her life, Marlis is grateful to be comfortable, and to know she’ll once again see the son, daughter, and husband she lost.

“My husband died last year August, so I have three people waiting for me,” Marlis said. “I have my faith, and because of that I know where I am going.”
Trek of a Lifetime

You could say Jennifer Lake was a Trekkie since birth. She grew up watching *Star Trek* and knew all the episodes, all the characters.

“She loved science fiction,” said her mother, Marilyn Spence, who took Jennifer to see her first sci-fi movie as a child. “Books, movies…that’s how she got started.”

Jennifer had a brain tumor. In fact, she had been fighting tumors, undergoing surgery after surgery, radiation, and chemo, in a frustrating loop for 19 years. What started with a seizure when she was 26 years old, eventually evolved into a glioblastoma multiforme grade 4, the worst kind of brain tumor. But Jennifer was determined. She may have had a wound on her skull and enough medications to cover their dog so they could go with Jennifer.

That’s when Jennifer moved to metro-Detroit. She was proud to have her own condo, where she could be independent. It was just her and her little dog, Cricket. But too soon after that, Jennifer’s disease escalated. She had to move in with her mother and stepfather so they could care for her. Despite it all though, Jennifer’s spirits were pretty high.

“She was really a brave, brave person, and usually in a fairly good mood – except when I tried to mother her,” Marilyn laughed.

Jennifer received, and thankful that Jennifer made the decision to sign on early.

“Initially Marilyn and Glenn really hadn’t wanted to go, and they didn’t want Jennifer to go either. They knew it would be very hard for her physically. They were worried about her. And they were worried Jennifer’s friend would be overwhelmed by how much care Jennifer needed – that she didn’t really understand how sick Jennifer had gotten.

But with the help of her Angela Hospice team, it was settled. This trip Jennifer had been waiting for for nearly two years was about to happen. And after a series of losses that had pummelled her over the past three years – losing her husband, her condo, her health, and her dog Cricket who passed just before Jennifer got really sick – this trip was something just for her.

“The day we were leaving we were all in the car and I was sitting next to [Jennifer] in the back seat and she was crying. I said, ‘Why are you crying?’ And she said, ‘I’m so happy we are going,’” Marilyn recalled.

The highlight of the cruise was when Jennifer met William Shatner. “I was blown off my feet when I walked in...and there was Jennifer sitting on the sofa at four o’clock in the morning, all dressed by herself,” Marilyn said.

But preparing for the cruise wasn’t all smooth sailing. It took a lot of coordination, and Jennifer’s Angela Hospice Home Care team was happy to help.

“They came and reviewed all her medications with us, made sure we had brand new medications unopened to take with us to get through customs,” Marilyn said. “Yes, they spent an awful lot of time helping us get prepared, ordering a new wheelchair and all this.”

When all was said and done, they had a whole suitcase full of supplies.

Teresa Zarza, Jennifer’s nurse practitioner from Angela Hospice, also made a very important suggestion: that Marilyn and her husband Glenn go with Jennifer and her friend on the trip. At first it seemed impossible – the cruise had been sold out since 2015. And Jennifer really wanted to be independent. But Teresa insisted that Marilyn and Glenn go too. Jennifer’s hospice nurse even offered to watch their dog so they could go with Jennifer.

Marilyn called the cruise line and explained the situation, how sick her daughter was, and all the supplies she’d need.

“I thought, ‘Well, what are the chances of us getting a cabin?’” Marilyn said. “And they had a cancellation...a cancellation on a handicap room.”

Initially Marilyn and Glenn really hadn’t wanted to go, and they didn’t want Jennifer to go either. They knew it would be very hard for her physically. They were worried about her. And they were worried Jennifer’s friend would be overwhelmed by how much care Jennifer needed – that she didn’t really understand how sick Jennifer had gotten.

But by the time they got back home, Jennifer was not doing well at all.

“That first night we got home, I called at about two in the morning because Jennifer was in so much pain, and somebody was out within an hour and taking action, saying, ‘She needs a bed at the [Angela Hospice Care Center]...She has got to get a bed.’”

Early that morning, there was a room ready for Jennifer at the Care Center. Then 27 hours later, Jennifer passed away peacefully, while Marilyn and Glenn were in the room with her. She was just 44 years old.

Marilyn and Glenn were grateful for the care Jennifer received, and thankful that Jennifer made the decision to sign on early.

“We were encouraged to use hospice sooner because I guess a lot of people wait...I’m glad we did, because on your own, not knowing, there is only so much you can do,” she said.

Marilyn said that right after Jennifer died, her nurse and nurse practitioner came to the Care Center to say goodbye. She was impressed because she knew they worked in home care and weren’t usually in the center. But Jennifer had made an impression on her hospice team.

Perhaps it’s because Jennifer went through so many trials and tribulations – any single one of which could legitimately be called devastating – but she wouldn’t let them bring her down. She kept her spirits up and her hopes high.

“She had a very good attitude – she was really blessed,” Marilyn said. And she summed up her daughter in one word, repeated for the emphasis Jennifer wanted: “She was amazing. AMAZING.”
Letters to Hospice

Dear Angela Hospice,

I wish I could find the words that would fully express my thanks for all you did in the recent passing of my husband, Gary Henriksen. We had “In Home Hospice” care and it was so comforting to me to be able to make Gary pain free for the first time in a month as they were unable to do so in the hospital. The two gals who first came out were so helpful in explaining the meds, etc., and the one said Gary had days to weeks to live. I am so glad she said that because when I heard “days,” I called my daughter in Kalamazoo and told her I thought she should come home. Thankfully, she did as Gary only lived three days, but those three days were pain free, he was home surrounded by his family hearing us telling him how much we love him. His passing was so peaceful – we all told him we love him and then I said, “We all love you, Sweetheart. It’s OK to go – Jesus is waiting for you,” and he drifted away peacefully. I called Hospice and a gal came out right away and arranged it's OK to go – Jesus is waiting for you,” and he drifted away peacefully. I called Hospice and a gal came out right away and arranged the funeral home. Then one of your representatives came to the visitation – I was so touched. Thank you so much for your caring ways at a very tender time in one's life.

Sincerely,

Mary Henriksen

Laughter for a cause

Gentlemen, save the date for the highly demanded second annual guys’ night out, Burgers, Brews, and Bros to benefit Angela Hospice:

Thursday, September 28th, 2017
(Venue to be announced)

It’s sure to be a “brew-ha-ha” with a beer tasting, comedy show, delicious food, raffles, auctions, and more!

Last year it was a full house. So get it on the calendar now and let all your “bros” know!

Introducing: AVA

A new device revolutionizes home hospice care for Angela Hospice patients and caregivers

It was November 18, 2015, that the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation formally announced its intention to grant a $2.1-million endowment to Angela Hospice for a new telehospice program. Now a year and a half later, we’re witnessing the incredible results this program is having on the lives of hospice patients and their families.

At a dedication ceremony on Thursday, June 15, Foundation members and community supporters joined Angela Hospice representatives for a live demonstration of Angela’s Virtual Assist, or AVA, the easy-to-use tablet computer that allows patients and caregivers to connect face-to-face with a hospice nurse 24/7.

“Most of us think of hospice as low-tech, high-touch. So, can technology benefit those in hospice care? It absolutely can,” said Angela Hospice President and CEO Margot Parr. “Thanks to the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation we have a powerful new tool to help support the many needs of our hospice patients and their caregivers.”

Guests were treated to a video presentation featuring patients and caregivers who have used the AVA device, describing how it decreased anxiety and made it easier to address concerns.

AVA does not replace traditional hospice home care visits but supports and enhances that care. With the addition of the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation Telehospice Program, Angela Hospice is not only paving the way for a new method of delivering home care services, it’s also improving the care experience for patients and their caregivers through a variety of benefits.

“We love being able to leverage technology to serve so many more people in the area, especially while they are in their own homes,” said Mary Owen, Executive Vice President of the Foundation.

AVA units are available to Angela Hospice Home Care patients at no charge. For more information, call (888) 464-2341 or visit AskForAngela.com.

AVA’s benefits include:

• Peace of mind – knowing a nurse is always just a click away
• Reduced wait time – a nurse can be on screen ready to help in an instant, no waiting for travel time
• Ease of communication – the ability to show what is happening in real time, rather than trying to explain a situation
• Better symptom management – reduced wait time and ease of communication means symptoms are able to be managed more effectively and efficiently, for increased patient comfort
• Decreased anxiety – families have told us that having an AVA unit is like having a nurse in the home, always ready to help

| From left: Jeff Littmann, Life Trustee for the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation; Angela Hospice Board Chair Barb Hendrickson; Margot Parr; and Mary Owen. |

The Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation Telehospice Program and Triage Center was dedicated on June 15.

“*printed with permission*
For love of the game

Angela Hospice supporters make wishes come true for hospice patients. Chuck Hirchert is a perfect example.

An avid golfer since high school, this is the first season Chuck has been unable to play his beloved game, now that he is wheelchair bound.

As his wife Mares explained, Chuck got started golfing as a teenager, when he lived down the street from Mott Park Golf Course in Flint.

“He and his friend used to sneak onto the course. When they didn’t have any money, they played a few holes,” she said. “Plus they did a lot of ‘nature walks,’ as they called it, with their clubs.”

Chuck laughed at the remembrance. After moving into the Care Center in April, he and Mares decided to become sponsors of the Angela Hospice Golf Outing this year, using their motto “Partners for Peace.” And since Chuck couldn’t golf himself, they invited friends from the Michigan Publinx Seniors Golf Association, of which Chuck is a board member, to golf in his place.

It was January that Chuck was diagnosed with glioblastoma multiforme. And since then, the disease has taken over many aspects of their lives. So when they were invited to attend the dinner at the Angela Hospice Golf Outing at the historic Western Golf and Country Club, needless to say, it was a thrill for Chuck and Mares.

“This is the first dinner we’ve had out since his whole diagnosis happened, January 12,” Mares said. “So we don’t know how to act really. I mean we’re kind of…”

“…New to this!” Chuck interjected.

It was a special night out for the Hircherts, who were joined by their daughter Julie and niece Elizabeth as well.

Angela Hospice President and CEO Margot Parr dedicated part of her speech to the couple, highlighting Chuck’s love of the game, and the couple’s passion for peace work.

It was a special evening that came together thanks to donors who were eager to offer support, including funding special wheelchair transportation for the couple.

Mares and Chuck were delighted with the event, and being able to spend an evening together with their family and golf friends.

“It was the highlight of the last six months, really,” Mares said, “just to be out.”