

SUMMER 2021

MONARCH

His Journey Home

FATHER ELMER
PREPARES FOR HEAVEN
PG. 4



A MAN OF

many talents

Seeing someone's home can give you a great sense of who they are. This was the case with Al Tupakavich when he moved into the Angela Hospice Care Center.

"We get so many remarks," said Al's daughter, Sue. "From the nurses to – just everybody – the same sentence keeps being used. *They've never seen a room look so homey.* It so reflects who he is and what our family is. It feels like home. It really does."

Al's room was decorated with photos of his family. His artwork adorned the walls, including personalized cards he made for his wife of 38 years. There was even a framed poem that he wrote, "Michigan," which was proposed as the state poem in 1996 by senators Loren Bennett and Walter North. But Al was perhaps best known for his musical talents.

Al had been playing steel guitar since he was a teenager. In the 1950s, after he was honorably discharged from the Army where he had been a cartographer, Al began playing with local band The Ramblin Boys and later The Melody Drifters. Then in 1964, he opened Victor Music Studio on Wayne Road in Westland. Al gave guitar lessons and had a small guitar shop there. It was recognizable by the yellow guitar out front – another of Al's designs. Al ran the shop 54 years, until he was 89, and was well loved in the community.

"We get calls from many of his customers," his daughter Sue explained. "Everyone in the community seems to know him. Everyone calls him sweet, the kindest man in the industry!"

At the Angela Hospice Care Center, when music therapist Heather Dean would come to visit Al, he was grateful for the chance to strum the strings of her guitar – and let her know if any strings needed tuning!

Al was admitted to the Care Center with COPD after a battle with pneumonia. He also had dementia and Alzheimer's, so some days were difficult for him. But Al's sweet and friendly demeanor still shined through.

"Like yesterday," Sue explained, "he couldn't really



SUE TUPAKAVICH SHARES THE LEGACY OF HER BELOVED FATHER, AL TUPAKAVICH

speak. If he can't say 'I love you' to me, we press our thumbs together. That's our symbol for saying 'I love you.'"

Sue raves about her dad – his artistic ability, his many accomplishments, their family jokes, and how proud Al is of his children and grandchildren. Al has certainly left his mark on his community as a beloved business owner, but even more so on his loving family.

"Nearing his last days, he communicated to me how thankful to my brother and I he was for all we had done for him," Sue expressed. "Brought me to tears. I told him it was the other way around."

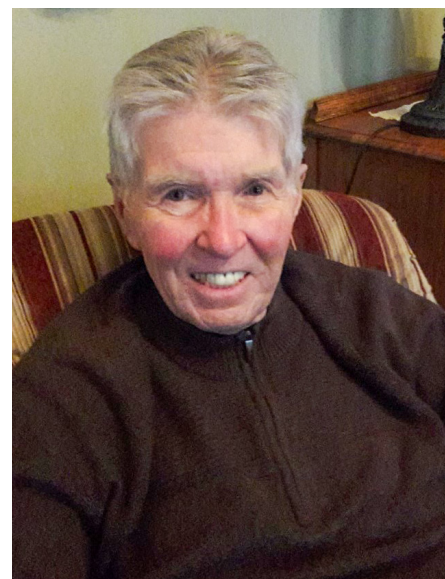
Sue is also grateful for all Angela Hospice has done for her father and their family.

"Through his journey at Angela Hospice, he was able to make peace and find his way to God," Sue shared. "He had built a special bond with Chaplain Richard who was able to help guide him through his journey."

Like a song, "Al's last days were filled with love and enjoyable moments."



COLLECTING MEMORIES



Tom Hess's infatuation with trains began seven decades ago. As a child, he lived in Dearborn on a street that dead-ended at the railroad tracks.

"When I was a little kid, I liked to watch the trains go by and I would walk down the tracks," he said. Seven-year-old Tom just had to have an American Flyer set.

"We ran it around the Christmas tree," he recalled. When his uncle gave him a hand-me-down set that belonged to his cousin, Tom set up a small layout in a corner of his parents' basement – a humble precursor to what would become his true masterpiece.

He was stationed at Fort Bragg, N.C., during the Vietnam War and happened upon a store closing out its inventory of trains. He was looking at a set he had always admired as a child when the shop owner noticed him. "You really like that," he said. "Make me an offer for it."

Tom hesitated knowing it was an expensive set. But seeing Tom in his green beret uniform, the shop owner told him, "For you – I'll give it to you for \$20." Tom bought the set and took it back to Fort Bragg with him. Then one of the other lieutenants gave him two more

sets he had in his parents' basement.

"Phil, Phil," Tom told him, "I don't need anymore. What am I going to do with all these trains?"

With six sets in his possession, Tom decided he would start collecting trains. Over the next 25 years, his collection grew to 150 sets – one of each American Flyer that was made.

In 1996, he designed a beautiful house to feature his collection, including walls of display shelves and a 40-foot long layout – a miniature city all painstakingly and devotedly crafted by Tom himself. He made buildings and trees, painted murals, and designed a custom bench system for the layout. From age 7 to 77, he amassed one of the largest collections of American Flyer trains. He even organized the Southeast Michigan S. Gaugers, a club for American Flyer collectors.

Tom's childhood love of trains grew into a lifelong passion. But when he was diagnosed with terminal cancer, he made the difficult choice to have his collection auctioned off.

"It breaks my heart to have to tear it down," he said, but it was important to him not to leave his wife with the burden of dismantling it.

Tom was also proud to know it would be featured online and in a national train collecting publication. "This way, when I'm gone, people will still talk about the layout," he said.

His friends from the Southeast Michigan S. Gaugers helped dismantle the layout. But before they did, they created a beautiful album documenting Tom's creation.

TO SEE THE PHOTOS, AND A VIDEO OF THE TRAINS IN ACTION MADE BY TOM'S SON VISIT [ANGELAHOSPICE.ORG/BLOG](https://angelahospice.org/blog).



TO MAKE A DONATION TODAY, VISIT [ANGELAHOSPICE.ORG/DONATE](https://angelahospice.org/donate).



HIS JOURNEY HOME: *preparing for heaven*



Every night before he goes to bed, Father Richard Elmer gets wheeled down by the nurse on duty to the chapel inside the Angela Hospice Care Center.

"I spend 20 minutes to a half-hour, just talking to Jesus, telling him I'm ready, Lord, so, anytime you want to take me, do so," he said.

Father Elmer arrived at the Care Center after being diagnosed with stage four kidney cancer. He was already familiar with Angela Hospice from visiting a fellow priest years ago. Now,

being in the Care Center, he's able to experience the care as well, and said while he's been to a number of hospices, Angela Hospice is far superior.

"When I came here (the Angela Hospice Care Center), I asked people not to pray for my recovery, I asked them to help me get the strength to prepare for the final leg of my journey, and that, of course, is heaven, hopefully," he said.

Born in 1928 – the same year Catholic Central welcomed its first freshman class – Father Elmer has played a large role both at Catholic Central and Wixom's St. Catherine of Siena Academy, where he was their first principal and chaplain.

At Catholic Central he was not only a teacher, but their director of athletics, director of guidance, principal, and first president. He was also a student there, where he served as class president and yearbook editor.

"When I was in my early thirties, they needed administrators. The community itself was short on them. I showed some promise there, at least they thought I did, and so they gave me a choice of three different places to go," he said. "I chose Catholic Central."

Father Elmer would leave Catholic Central for different career pursuits throughout the years, but he always came back, and he hasn't left since 1990. His most recent position was President Emeritus.

His journey to becoming a priest is just as unique, much like so many aspects of Father Elmer's life.

Ordained over 60 years ago on June 29, the feast of Saints Peter and Paul, Father Elmer found himself thinking about becoming a priest in high school after having been taught by the Basilian priests at Catholic Central. He graduated from high school and attended Assumption College, then, one night, made a decision.

"I had a dream of St. Peter, and he said in the dream, I can see it right now, he said, 'You are to be a priest,'" Father Elmer said. "That kind of sealed the deal."

While Father Elmer is aware of his legacy with so many former students – there's even a football stadium on Catholic Central's campus named after him – he hopes, if his legacy does any good, that it helps people get to heaven. But he does appreciate and is grateful for everything he's gotten, like the 300 cards that arrived for his last birthday.

Although Father Elmer has worked and lived all over the country, he said the place that's given him more peace and joy than he could've expected was right here at the Care Center.

"It's such a wonderful place... the care is just unbelievable. I can't think but that the Lord put me here because there's no better place," he said.

And Father Elmer is not only aware of how excellent the care is, but also how expensive it can be.

"As a Development Director myself, I know that, if people out there realized just the value of this place and what it does for people getting to heaven, I would encourage them to support Angela Hospice as generously as they can. Amen."



HONORING FR. ELMER

"Father Elmer has touched my life in a very personal way, as he has had a significant impact on my daughter Sam's faith journey. She was his daily sacristan and helped serve at daily Mass for years by his side. She struggles with her faith, as many of us do at times in life, and Father Elmer is a special person she trusts that continues to bring her back to Jesus and His love for her. He also mentored the Catholic Central football team, which my son, Danny, was a part of for years. He has had



a tremendous impact on the faith journey of many young men and women in our Catholic community, and as a mom, I am very thankful for his love and prayers."

– Kelly Campbell,
Angela Hospice RN Community Liaison

"Father Elmer has really impressed me in the way that even while he's still in this time of hospice... and kind of discerning why the Lord's brought him to this point, he's still taking his vocation to the priesthood very seriously, which is really awesome to me. He celebrates Mass in his room every day, and is so willing to offer Holy Communion to any of the staff that's Catholic and wants to receive.

And he's always so friendly and approachable with



everybody here. It's just really cool to see someone at the end of their life still taking what's most important to them as serious as he does."

– Joshua LaFave,
Angela Hospice Nurse

"I have been privileged to know Father Elmer for many years. His heart is genuine. His mind is sharp. His faith is so powerful. He makes me feel like all is right in the world when I am in his presence. And that smile and the twinkle in his eye brings all who know him pure joy. I feel that no matter who you



are, what your beliefs are, what situation you are in, Father Elmer respects you no matter what. And, more importantly, prays for you. He is a wonderful man."

– Helen Balmforth,
Angela Hospice Development & Special Events Manager

WALK OF REMEMBRANCE

With fall approaching comes traditions like going to pick out a pumpkin, hay rides, and watching the leaves change colors. At Angela Hospice, that time of year also means another kind of tradition as well, the annual Walk of Remembrance, which will take place in-person on Saturday, Sept. 18 at the Felician campus to mark its 14th year.



"We're thrilled to be able to gather safely and comfortably, and to be able to walk the grounds in memory of loved ones in a peaceful and beautiful atmosphere while helping raise funds for Angela Hospice," said Helen Balmforth, Development & Special Events Manager. "It's a very therapeutic experience for those who have lost a loved one."

For the last 13 years the annual Walk of Remembrance has offered a family-friendly event for all ages, and it will continue to do so this September, inviting families and individuals of all ages to join. While the day starts out on a more serious and calming tone, it always ends in a joyous atmosphere with activities such as rock painting, delicious treats like the Kona Ice Truck, and shared stories about loved ones.

For information about forming a walk team in honor of a loved one, please contact Development Liaison, Dana Casadei at DCasadei@angelahospice.us.

If you would like any other information about the Walk of Remembrance, contact Helen Balmforth, Development & Special Events Manager, hthalmforth@angelahospice.us.



TO SUPPORT ANGELA HOSPICE, OR TO MAKE A GIFT IN HONOR OF FATHER ELMER,

VISIT ANGELAHOSPICE.ORG/DONATE.



THE *greater* GOOD

Amanda Glaze has what many people would say is one of the toughest jobs imaginable. And yet... "I love it," she said.

As a social worker with Angela Hospice's My Nest is Best pediatric program, Amanda works with families facing one of life's most difficult trials.

But every day, she's able to see the difference the program makes, thanks to the support of Angela Hospice donors.

"I think donors giving money towards, you know, helping parents with funeral arrangements or helping parents with bills, that's one less thing that mom and dad have to worry about. They can put their focus on just spending time with a child," she said.

Amanda is also able to see the difference her care makes in their lives.

"I just love children – whether they are sick or not," Amanda said. "I know people, they say, 'You work with children who are dying?' And, it is sad. But on the one sense, it's rewarding to see mom and dad, where they're scared, nervous, anxious about what's going on, and then we come in and after an admission... I think just having the support, somebody they can call literally 24/7, is comforting to them."

THERE'S SO MUCH LIFE IN THERE

That transformation is core to the care Angela Hospice is able to offer these families, including providing services in their own home, eliminating trips back and forth to the hospital. This means they can be with their families and siblings, living life as normally as possible. Amanda recalled two recent admissions she and pediatric physician Dr. Nadia Tremonti did, with children from families of ten.

"Dr. Tremonti made a comment, 'There's so much life in there,'" Amanda reflected. "You never would have gotten that at the hospital, even before COVID, with tubes and monitors and all that."

In addition to Amanda's visits, My Nest is Best patients receive in-home visits from their nurse and additional members of the hospice team, including music therapist Heather Dean, who will often work with the patients' siblings as well, who sometimes may feel they don't get as much attention as the child who's sick.

The hospice team is there for the whole family, including grandparents and other relatives who may live out of state.

Whether family members talk to her, to friends and family, or to another counselor, Amanda said it's



"I never expected to work with kids... but when the current pediatric social worker decided to take another position... I was at the bottom of the totem pole by the time I got there, but nobody else wanted to take the opportunity, and I was like, 'I'll do it.' And five years later, here I am."

important that they talk to someone. For Amanda, when the situation gets tough, she can rely on her fellow social workers to help her through it.

"There are days where I'm like, 'Okay, why? Why am I doing this?' Because it's a hard day. But there's other days that I'm like, 'This is exactly, exactly why...' As much as it's hard, the joys from it are just as rewarding."

IF I HAD A MAGIC WAND...

"If I had a magic wand and I could stop cancer in children, I would. Nobody wants to see a child die. I can't control that, but what I am able to control is sitting with a parent as they're crying about how much they love their child, but they don't want them to be in any pain; to know that they're not alone; to hold a child while they're imminently dying, because mom needs to go in the other room to do something, but she doesn't want her child to not be with somebody. So those moments, yes, it's scary, it's sad. But there's also joy and love in it, as well. So it's something that I don't want to run away from..."

"It's not comfortable... but it's a parent's reality. And if we can help them through it, I focus on what I can do now versus the things that I can't."

SHARING *kindness*

Sidney and Wayne Bonvallet have always been the kind of people to ask for the recommendations of others. So, when it came to selecting a hospice for Wayne, they did just that.

"I've learned through my life that if you ask a lot of people for help, you'll get help. So I learned to reach out and ask people, what would you recommend?" Sidney said. "There were three people that I really admire and appreciate, and they all recommended Angela Hospice."

Wayne – who has age-related dementia and stage four prostate cancer – has been in Angela Hospice home care for about a month according to his wife, Sidney. And the experience has been everything they hoped it would be.

"Penny (Weeks) is our nurse and she's extremely helpful, very attentive to what's going on at home with Wayne, and explains things to me. I need to understand things," Sidney said. "Even the gals that shower him, Susan and Ashley, there's a kindness in them all that I really appreciate because to me, it's a very fragile period."

While Sidney and Wayne have received a lot of kindness from those who work at Angela Hospice, the couple are no strangers to sharing kindness as well, like they do through their 501(c)3 charitable foundation, Helping Hands Touching Hearts.

The Bonvallets started the non-profit 15 years ago after a trip to South Africa with their daughter and her husband. Since Sidney had been there before, she knew a lot of people and the needs of the villages.



WAYNE (LEFT) AT THE DADANI TECHNOLOGICAL SCHOOL, WHERE HELPING HANDS TOUCHING HEARTS STARTED A LIBRARY.

So, they decided to sew 150 school bags and bought 150 mosquito nets when the four went there on vacation, to get those items to people in need.

"As we learned more about what their needs were from staying there, then our mission evolved to working with them for education, health, hope, food, and clothing for poverty stricken people," Sidney said.

Helping Hands Touching Hearts recently finished building a STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) and vocation lab in South Africa. The building is complete and according to Sidney, will be occupied very soon after some minor additions, like cupboards.

This isn't the first time Sidney and Wayne have found themselves working together. The couple, who celebrated their 41st anniversary in June, met when they both worked at General Motors, and ran another business together before Helping Hands Touching Hearts.



SIDNEY (RIGHT) TEACHING WOMEN HOW TO SEW ON A SEWING MACHINE SHE GIFTED THEM.

Being able to share that experience of making an impact together, and understand exactly how the other one felt when helping someone that could not help them back is Sidney's favorite memory of their time doing their charitable work in South Africa.

Now, the couple is on the receiving end of that kind of help with the home care they're receiving from Angela Hospice.

"As the spouse, I can't even begin to tell you how I feel grateful for the way that each person we've interacted with or has been in our home has been a blessing," Sidney said. "The peace of mind from having them help us, and me being able to have someone to go to when there is an issue, it relieves me tremendously. So we're very happy."

TO SUPPORT THE CARING WORK OF ANGELA HOSPICE, VISIT [ANGELAHOSPICE.ORG/DONATE](https://angelahospice.org/donate)



LEARN MORE ABOUT MY NEST IS BEST AND HEAR FROM PEDIATRIC PHYSICIAN DR. NADIA TREMONTI AT [ASKFORANGELA.COM](https://askforangela.com)



Together again

While most of Angela Hospice's grief support programs remain virtual, a new pavilion on the grounds of Angela Hospice is providing the bereavement team with the perfect spot for meeting with kids and adolescents. Social Worker Sara Waters said it's been a real blessing in her work with young clients.

"With kids, a lot of the interventions that we do are hands-on activities, making memory boxes, doing collages, grief games," Sara said. "Just being in person has been a lot easier to do that. And the kids like it, too. They're so excited to be back... They're a lot more engaged."

"With kids, they grieve in bursts, and oftentimes their grief isn't shown by their words like adults. With kids, it's often displayed in how they play, how they engage with other children, their behaviors."

Seeing a grief counselor like Sara, or working with a music therapist, can give kids an opportunity to talk about their loved one who died. Kids often worry about upsetting family members at home by bringing up the person who died. But the process of sharing their feelings and memories with Sara can begin to open up communication with their families as well.

"I think that coming here for the counseling then pours into life at home, and being able to ask mom or dad, or even grandma and grandpa, questions and share memories," Sara said. "That child receiving grief counseling is going to benefit the whole family."

Through the generosity of our community friends and donors, Angela Hospice is proud to be able to



**SOCIAL WORKER SARA WATERS AND MUSIC THERAPIST
HEATHER DEAN VISIT WITH BRANDON PFEIFFER, AGE 14.**

offer free grief counseling to families throughout the community, whether or not their loved one was cared for by hospice. These services are available for adults, teens, and children.

"I think the biggest benefit for children's grief counseling is simply providing them a safe, fun place to share their feelings. I think that that is extremely important for the healing process," Sara said. "As sad as it is, kids feel isolated in their grief, especially among peers. So I think grief support groups for children are so beneficial – just for them to all come together and know that they're not alone, that there are other kids out there who have had a loss too."



ANGELA EXECUTIVE TEAM

Marti Coplai, President & CEO
Mark Hibbard, CFO
James Boal, MD, Chief Medical Officer
Stephany Gaston, Chief Clinical Officer
Diane Smith, Director of Ministry Engagement

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Peggy A. Cummins-Polinski, Chair
Dr. Deborah Dunn, Vice Chair
Esther Acosta
Bryan Besco
Sister M. Ramona Dombrowski
John Kanitra
Neran Shaya
Sister Mary Clarette Stryzewski
David Ward, Senior Ministry Advisor
Marti Coplai, President
Mark Hibbard, Secretary

**FOR MORE ABOUT ANGELA HOSPICE'S GRIEF SUPPORT PROGRAMS,
VISIT [ANGELAHOSPICE.ORG/GRIEF-SUPPORT](https://angelahospice.org/grief-support)**

MUSIC THERAPY GROUP FOR KIDS

For Ages 5-13 – This group provides a creative way for kids to explore their feelings in a fun, music-filled environment. It meets the third Tuesday of each month from 5-6 p.m. outside at the Angela Hospice Care Center.

CAMP MONARCH

Coming Fall 2021! This new day camp, made possible through a grant from the Livonia Community Foundation, will be full of interactive and engaging activities, including music, art, pet therapy, and more. Stay tuned for details!

ONE-ON-ONE COUNSELING

Call 734.779.6690 to arrange an appointment via phone, Zoom, or in person.