

At last . . .

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as a management training specialist, she started gathering like-minded people into what became, five years later, the Monadnock, N.H., Hospice. Six years ago she brought the model to the Upper Valley.

"For 25 years," says Kirn, "hospice has been operating outside the system—telling it, 'You're not doing it right.' . . . Eighteen years ago, I stood on a stage and said, 'If we do this well it's possible that we may have to give it away someday.' Well, today I'm happy to say I'm *not* giving it away: I'm taking it to the next level—something we couldn't do without [DHMC] involvement and without larger funding. It's just so rewarding to see that now, 20 years later, medical schools, along with hospitals and cancer centers, are finally 'getting it' that what hospice has been doing is truly important."

And in northern New England, they are all doing it together.

My sister-in-law was adamant about not wanting to die at home: she didn't want her husband to forever sense her fading presence there. But in the end, she had even greater reservations about spending more time in a hospital room wired to monitors and IV lines. And so she chose to stay at home, crocheting the last squares for the "granny afghans" she'd begun for her two grown children the week she received her diagnosis.

The children arrived 10 days before the end, to join Andy and their beloved poodle, Emily, at Sarah's bedside. In the last week, as Sarah came to be "more there than here," a calm and reassuring hospice nurse explained and ministered to Sarah—and to us, gently interpreting for us the language of death and giving us small, meaningful tasks to do, while we still could.

One of Sarah's last visitors was her sweet, strong, sensitive oncologist, who held her hand, thanked her for the privilege of being her doctor, and told her it was all right to go. "Which way?" she asked, from behind closed eyes. "Whichever way you need to," he responded.

It was not an easy death, and it was not accomplished without hard work and unanswered questions. But although she never wished to leave us so soon, Sarah left us on her own terms. "And that," as Robert Frost put it, "has made all the difference." ■

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