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Seasons of Life

A Bereavement Newsletter from the VNSNY Hospice and Palliative Care Program

Winter • 2016

Volume 21 | Issue 1

"My Dad, Immortalized On a Postage Stamp"

Debla H., adult daughter of one of our former Hospice patients, Luis H.

The fact that I am crying while I write this is significant. Two months ago, my Dad was on his deathbed up at Haven Hospice. He was ready to be on his way but we didn't know that at the time; it hadn't sunk in yet. Everyone in the family was, like 'OMG how am I going to live after he dies'. Suddenly, this lady walks in, and introduces herself as VNSNY volunteer Nancy Gershman, memory artist. "I provide a wonderful, service for families," she told us. "I will make you a picture of a memory for which you have no photos."

As a personal historian and digital artist—Nancy was instrumental in bringing my father back to life by rebuilding the man, accomplishment by accomplishment, in what looks like an actual commemorative postage stamp. Had we not made this picture, all we'd be left with would have been piles of photographs, and nothing to tell our grandchildren or great grandchildren about how many lives were touched by my dad: a blind and great man from Cuba.

While it's a strange thing to say, working with this memory artist made grieving a lovely experience for our entire family — a family that doesn't often agree; lives in seven countries and in more than ten American cities.

This is what happened:

- 1) Nancy interviewed us for the big stuff and pressed to get the smaller details just right (which was a therapeutic process, especially seeing Dad in a bad way).
- 2) Family and friends privately reminisced while sifting through photographs Nancy had asked for (again, very therapeutic for everyone involved).
- 3) In two days, Nancy took our photos, and came up with a concept equal to the man: turning Dad's life into a commemorative postage stamp.

Nancy comes up with a different idea for every family's "Healing Dreamscape" because this artwork is meant for the family of the hospice patient, to ease their grief before and after the patient dies. Some become pictures of wishful reality, like vacations the patient had to cancel because of illness. Some are literally pictures of an event or an experience in someone's mind. Others are simple portraits, putting family members together who expressed regret they didn't have enough time to express their love.



VNSNY Hospice Volunteer and memory artist Nancy Gershman combines family photos and memories to create a "Healing Dreamscape" like the one above of Debla H's father that looks like a commemorative postage stamp.

In this day and age, with our fast paced lives and technology taking over so many facets of our life ... with the difference between the physical & digital world already becoming blurred, we run the risk of losing our humanity. Maybe that's why I am especially grateful for this Dreamscape I can hold, that gives me the opportunity to celebrate Dad's life every day, instead of solely mourning his death. I cry today, but not from sadness. These are happy tears ...

It's ironic that even after my dad lost consciousness and died, he united our family. For this, we will be ever so grateful.

Please help me share this story with others who might also require Nancy's help.

Her website is www.artforyoursake.com/healing