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We fell in love with him...”*

“I like to help people, and this is a time when people really need help and encouragement and compassion,” says Mary Zander. She and her husband Bob have been Hospice of Mercy volunteers for three years, providing companionship to patients, giving rides to doctor’s appointments, and buying groceries for the Hospice House. They

also serve as “11th-hour volunteers” – sitting with patients who are near death through the night so that family members are able to rest.

Bob, “the night owl,” stays from midnight until 3 or 4 in the morning, when he is relieved by Mary, “the early bird.”

The Zanders developed a special relationship with a man they visited in a care center for more than a year before his death. “He was a crusty old farmer who didn’t talk much,” says Mary. “We fell in love with him, and I felt that we were his advocates.” He loved to be outside, and they often pushed him in his wheelchair, being careful to avoid the bumps that caused him pain. Mary remembers being gratified when he told her, “You did a damn good job!” Another patient was wracked by convulsions, but would grow calm when Bob held her hand.

Every situation is different, the Zanders say, and they’ve learned to begin by listening to the patient and family to learn their wishes. In each situation they try to provide an affirming presence, along with much-needed social interaction for people who are isolated. “When you go in and talk to someone, there’s a little glimmer on their face that says, ‘Somebody cares about me,’” Mary says. “I hope they find it as rewarding as I do. When you look in people’s eyes, what you see speaks volumes.”

BOB & MARY ZANDER, HOSPICE VOLUNTEERS

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