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## Something More: A client's perspective on hospice

By BOB HARRISON  
For Public Opinion

I had heard about Elmer long before I met him. All of the hospice staff chirped happily about this wonderful person till I could hardly wait to meet him in person. It happened this week. I discovered his full name is Elmer Harriger and he certainly lived up to his pre-billing among the staff.

Hospice of the Good Shepherd Director of Community Relations Melanie Furlong and I found Elmer residing in a pleasant and quite roomy home in the Fayetteville area. He was being cared for by the friends with whom he lives and by hospice. I was surprised to find that his friend was his "family" and just happened to have been a schoolmate from the 1950s when they both went to Scotland School for Veterans' Children. And now, the friend Jerry, and his wife Linda had opened their home to care for Elmer in his final days. He has now been with them and with hospice for more than a full year.



Harriger

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We were really surprised to find that though he is on oxygen full-time and taking an array of medications, Elmer is temporarily feeling better and is planning a farewell trip by air to see his buddies in Vermont and California ... alone!

After receiving the plane tickets as a gift from a friend, he immediately and joyously began planning this final journey. Hospice has already arranged for

people to meet and help him during his journey and have also made plans for supplies of oxygen and a wheelchair to be provided for Elmer at his two destinations. What a huge relief for him to know that hospice is taking care of these matters for him.

This is an unbelievably upbeat 60-some-year-old man. He has lung problems and also suffers from congestive heart failure. He is never far from an oxygen breathing apparatus and often finds it necessary to pause to recover a breath before continuing to talk. He sleeps in a hospital-style bed in his neat room at home.

Yet, he smiles a lot. He is ever so appreciative of all the people who are working so hard to ease his life a bit.

About hospice, Elmer says, "We all just hit it off right away."

He spoke in glowing terms of Angie Pickel, his social worker. He just loves his aides, Donna Hoch and Patty Rhine and nurse Cathy Schwab as well as Hospice Medical Director Dr. Classen, who had worked on his behalf with the doctors at the VA Hospital in Martinsburg, W.Va., when he suddenly appeared in their critical care facilities. It was through her that Elmer was again able to return to his beloved home.

In addition to his church, Elmer gets a lot of spiritual comfort and guidance from Adam Leeper, the chaplain at Hospice of the Good Shepherd, who is another favorite. Volunteers also visit, and take him shopping. One regularly brings him his special cappuccino.

He said, "There were times that I've been discouraged. I've felt that I couldn't do any more. What can you say but 'yes' to these helpful, caring people who urge you on with 'you do what you can, Elmer, and I'll do the rest'?"

Elmer Harriger is a Korean War vet, has operated restaurants in Montana, Oregon and California, and was a long-time Pinkerton Security Agent.

And now the end is in sight. He has been in and out of hospitals, including the Veteran's Administration Hospital, and has been cared for by the best persons and facilities. He wants his final care to be at home, surrounded by his loved ones. Hospice is making this possible.

If you have ever wondered if your life is as good as it could be, a visit with Elmer Harriger might give you a new outlook on life.

Elmer would love to hear from any readers who would like to drop a card or a note to him. His address is Elmer Harriger, 224 Waverly Court, Fayetteville 17222.

- *Bob Harrison is writing this column as a Hospice of the Good Shepherd volunteer in gratitude for hospice experiences during his late wife's illness. For additional information call 264-8178 or toll free 1-800-840-9081, Web site, [lutheranhomecare.org](http://lutheranhomecare.org) or e-mail [mfurlong@lutheranhomecare.org](mailto:mfurlong@lutheranhomecare.org).*

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