

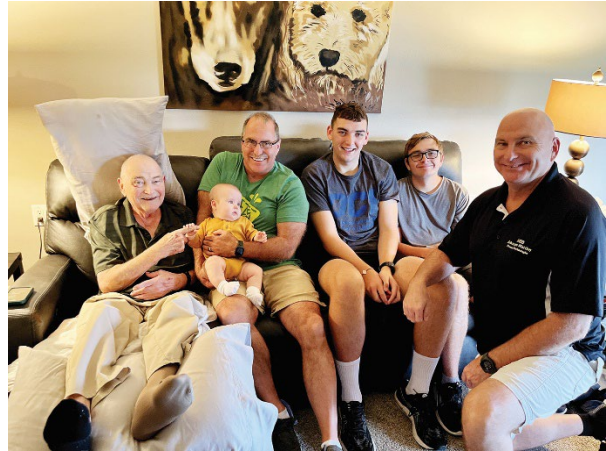
The Ultimate Experience of Love

Larry Shollenbarger's hospice journey

By [Stephanie Abel-Hohenzy](#)
shohenzy@cvhospice.org

Larry and Mary Shollenbarger's love story began in May of 1980. Four months later, they were married at the United Methodist Church in Fayette. It was their zest for life and their kind souls that meshed perfectly. They lived in Waterloo and spent their days traveling, boating, skiing and loving their family and friends with their whole hearts.

"I was lucky I got Brett and Stan, his sons, in the deal," said Mary. "Stan liked me because I drove a sports car, and Brett because I had an Irish Setter – and I continued to supply him with doggies until he was old enough to have his own." Right away, they clicked and Mary could tell that their Mom and Larry had done a super job raising them, even after going through a divorce.



This day was a special one for Larry, which included a visit with four generations of his family.

In the early 90s, Larry was diagnosed with prostate cancer. He was 52 years old. They removed the prostate at that time, but doctors were uncertain whether they were able to get all the cancer. With no chemotherapy at that time, the cancer came back in 6 years. He underwent radiation but then in another 5 years, it came back again. He then underwent hormone treatments. By 2015, the cancer had invaded other areas which then required painful procedures. "Larry never complained," said Mary.

In 2018, it invaded his bones. He underwent oral chemo but tried to continue living his life to the fullest.



"He loved to play golf with his buddies, and he always loved his Scotch," added Mary. "He read recipe books like novels and enjoyed genealogy, college basketball and hanging out with his family and friends. He also had a Wednesday morning breakfast club where the problems of the world were discussed (not solved)."

In February 2022, they visited Mesa, AZ, and that is when the pain began to increase. Doctors prescribed pain medicine, but it wasn't helping much – to which Mary said, "We basically managed to live with it until coming home in April."

Larry then continued his ongoing relationship with Mayo Clinic, making 10 or more trips over the next several months. By this time, palliative care doctors were involved, trying to manage Larry's pain but did not have a lot of success. Meanwhile, Mary was the best caregiver she could be, picking up medicines, monitoring them and him and doing

whatever Larry needed. It was hard for her to see him in such pain. He had always been so independent and to see him helpless was exceedingly difficult.

Meanwhile, Larry's positivity kept shining despite the pain he was enduring.

"Larry asked this new palliative care doc when he could play golf again," said Mary. "She told him, 'Larry, the pain in your back is caused by the cancer, and it is destroying your spine. I don't think you will ever play golf again.' I saw his eyes die; I don't know how else to describe it."

By July 2022, Mayo Clinic had approved an experimental procedure that could possibly prolong his life by 6-8 months. While visiting there, Mayo suggested Larry have his spine cemented, which he did, but it still didn't help the pain. At that time, the palliative care doctor also talked to Larry about personal choices and quality of life. That is when Larry made the decision to call Cedar Valley Hospice. He was done with the trips to Mayo, done with procedures and done with the stress. He wanted peace.

Soon, Larry had his own hospice team of experts, who came into their home, managed his pain levels successfully and helped to calm him. For Mary, this was a relief having "professional problem solvers and caregivers" at her fingertips. Now she could just focus on being "the love of Larry's life." For the next three months, Larry surrounded himself with family and friends, making lasting memories – especially at the Cedar Valley Hospice Home.



Larry and Mary loved visiting family in Arizona. Here they visited their niece in 2021.



Larry's longtime friends Don Faris and Clark Goltz surprised Larry when he was at the Hospice Home for a short stay in August 2022. The two friends were on their way to Irish Fest, where they had volunteered.

"The Hospice Home is so filled with peace and love... and their staff welcomed all of us with open arms," said Mary. "Larry, of course, brought his Scotch, which he continued to research and taste test high-end, single malts... So, we sure had a lot of fun with that."

Larry's hospice journey ended on October 24, 2022, nearly 30 years after his first diagnosis. He died peacefully at the Hospice Home. Larry's youngest son, Brett, and his family along with Larry's siblings and many friends were able to enjoy their final days with Larry. Mary called his journey "the ultimate experience of love" and expressed deep gratitude to Cedar Valley Hospice for their care and compassion.

"I am not sure what we would have done without your guidance and your support," said Mary in a letter she wrote to Cedar Valley Hospice. "Each nurse, aide, doctor, nurse practitioner, housekeeper and volunteer will forever be in my heart. I especially loved your visits that often brought us laughter. You made his final days

comfortable and happy. You truly are remarkable people and having you there at the end was truly a gift. I will sing your praises forever.”

To learn more about Cedar Valley Hospice and the services they provide, visit cvhospice.org, call 800.626.2360 or watch its informative videos on the YouTube channel at youtube.com/user/cvhospice/videos.