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GWU Alumna Shares Life Lessons in New Book “Living Among the Dying”

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Office of University Communications

June 6, 2014

Multiple Sclerosis (MS) Survivor Lynn Hamrick Imparts Hospice Experiences

Written By: Jackie Bridges

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SHELBY, N.C. – In the 18 months that Lynn Hamrick has been at Wendover Hospice House in Shelby, N.C., she’s learned more about living than dying. “When I came to Hospice, I felt like people sometimes have the wrong idea,” she reflected. “They automatically think you are at death’s door, but I found out the people here are focused on making your life better. Hospice is not a place of gray gloom and whispered woes. It is a place of caring and living and peace.”

Hamrick, who completed her undergraduate studies at Gardner-Webb University, said Hospice provides an extra dimension of support for her and her family. “Here, I can get all the care I can possibly need but have the freedom to spend quality time with my family,” she said. “They are relieved and not overly burdened with caregiving, so the time I spend with them is special.”

She shares the lessons she’s learned and describes her life and 23-year battle with Multiple Sclerosis (MS) in a book she has written, “Living Among the Dying.”

Writing a book is something Hamrick, 52, has always wanted to do, said her husband, Mark. “The book is a real triumph considering she typed each letter one at a time with her eyes,” Mark shared.

Hamrick used an Ecopoint Eye Gaze Computer, which allowed her to select each letter from the keyboard. It is painstakingly slow. “I had it in my head, and if my eyes could type as fast as my brain, I could have written it faster,” she said.

“Lynn can no longer move below her neck, but we will have a very dear friend to write any request from Lynn or the person buying the book and I will be there to stamp Lynn’s signature,” Mark said. “The stamp was made from a signature from when we first got married back in March 1985 (29 years ago). We dated eight years, so we have been together 36 years.”

Hamrick, who taught school for 13 years, doesn't exaggerate when she says that she has always loved to write. "My grandmother found a postcard that I had written and mailed when I was four years old," she said.

She's not sure how she did it—whether she had help or not—but there on the card is the note, "I hope you have a very nice Christmas." When she was in the seventh grade, her teacher, Jane Scherger, gave her the next boost of confidence. "She said, 'I love to read your writing,'" Hamrick remembered. "I think that was the first time I realized that I had a real love for writing."

At Crest High School, she took creative writing. The teacher, Frances Kiser, asked her to write an essay for her. "That made me feel honored," she said. "In college (at Gardner-Webb), I loved the classes that required term papers. I would rather write a term paper than take a test."

Over the years, she wrote essays and poems for the family to celebrate special occasions and as a new first grade teacher, she broke the ice by writing something for her school. "When I started teaching and I was trying to make friends with the teachers, we were doing accreditation and I wrote a poem for the school," Hamrick said. "After that, they would always come to me when they needed something written. I have files and files of poems, essays and thoughts."

After spending time at Hospice and with help from her pastor at Elizabeth Baptist Church in Shelby, N.C., Dr. Rit Varriale, the timing was right to finally publish a book. "Our pastor has a publishing company," she shared. "And Westmoreland Printers is printing the book."

Working with Lynn and Mark to publish the book has given Varriale a greater appreciation for the couple. "Together, Mark and Lynn have kept their faith in the Lord and their love for one another," Varriale offered. "There aren't many couples who could endure like they have. There aren't many women who, given the context, would strive to find the best in life like Lynn does. There aren't many men who would be as faithful as Mark has been over the last 29 years."

He said the book is "a glimpse into Lynn's thoughts and feelings while being in residential care at Wendover Hospice."

"Our desire is that the book would benefit people who are receiving care at the end of life," Varriale said. "Perhaps in some way readers can, like Lynn, find love in the midst of loss, joy in the midst of sorrow, peace in the midst of pain, and life in the midst of death."

For more information on how to purchase a copy of Hamrick's book, contact Elizabeth Baptist Church at (704) 482-6339.

Located in Boiling Springs, N.C., Gardner-Webb University's purpose is to advance the Kingdom of God through Christian higher education by preparing graduates for professional and personal success, instilling in them a deep commitment to service and leadership, and equipping them for well-rounded lives of lasting impact, Pro Deo et Humanitate (For God and Humanity).