

## **Who was Gordon Benson?**

On Tuesday, January 14, 2004, Gordon Benson, a newly-trained, enthusiastic volunteer for OSF Hospice, left the Knox County Nursing Home in Galesburg, Illinois with a huge smile. He'd just completed his first patient visit -- and was proud of reaching his goal of sharing his "many blessings" with those in need. In fact, even before this first Hospice visit, he'd called his "mom" to let her know he'd finally been assigned his "first patient." He was very excited.

He shared his energetic personality and zest for life with a couple of patients that day...one woman in a wheelchair was just sure she knew him...and he visited with her for a while. The staff at the facility enjoyed Gordon, too. He remarked that everyone there was really nice. He was very happy that he'd decided to do this special work...and couldn't wait for his next assignment.

Sometimes God has other plans for our lives.

Just four months earlier, Gordon -- just 82 years young -- had walked in to the OSF Home Care office in Galesburg and offered his assistance as a volunteer. He'd been very active in his church and with programs like Cursillo and was especially aware of his fortune in life. "I've been very blessed," he said at that initial meeting, "and I just want to give back." A retired geologist and engineer with IDOT, he'd spent years building bridges for the state of Illinois, and now was offering his services to spend time "one-on-one" with patients preparing to cross their final bridge to be with their Lord. OSF Hospice volunteer coordinator Judy Driscoll welcomed him with open arms.

For the next thirteen weeks, Gordon attended volunteer training for three hours each Tuesday. He only missed a couple of sessions...once to take his wife, Corinne, whom he affectionately referred to as "Mom," to get a new pacemaker; another time to rest from a short bout with the flu. OSF Hospice staff members fell in love with him and could not wait to witness him share his gentle, warm personality with their Hospice patients. It was a match made in Heaven!

That bright, cool January morning, Gordon got the opportunity to visit his first patient. Upon arriving, however, it was obvious that the patient was not well enough for a visit. Perhaps sensing the disappointment for this first-time volunteer, the man apologized to Gordon, who immediately but compassionately replied, "I understand." The tone of his voice was so genuine and reassuring that even Judy turned to him in awe. She knew then that Gordon was going to work out very well. With just two words, this "rookie" Hospice volunteer had demonstrated how love can be given by simply offering oneself completely to another ... with no expectations in return. This was his gift to this patient. Despite the limited encounter, it was, ironically, the perfect visit, the perfect reaction. No manual could better depict this example of human compassion.

After completing their morning at the facility, Judy and Gordon stepped outside to the bright sunshine of the afternoon. She was so proud of him. She reminded him of all the

people he'd touched that day...the patient he couldn't even visit; the woman in the wheelchair who sought him out for companionship and conversation; the facility staff. "Whenever you go in there," she encouraged, "you'll not only touch the lives of our hospice patients, but of everyone you talk to! Hurray, Gordon! You did it!" His smile shone ear to ear.

Sadly, it was to be Gordon's first and final patient visit.

Just hours later, traveling home on a rural blacktop near Dahinda, Illinois, and only a few hundred feet from his home, Gordon Benson somehow lost control of his car and began his next journey with God. A rescuer at the scene discovered his OSF Hospice volunteer badge under his coat as she worked to save him. She reported that Gordon had sustained traumatic injuries, but was conscience. When she asked if there was someone she could call, he replied, "My Father...in Heaven." She prayed with him as she continued her efforts to assist him. OSF Hospice, and many others, lost a true gift that day.

Who was Gordon Benson? He was an inspirational father to three boys and a "special" husband of 58 years to his beloved "mom," Corinne. He was just one man, yet so much more than a chance acquaintance. He was a reminder. He was that light of Christ that rests in all our hearts that reminds us of the preciousness of life...of the goodness of life...of the potentials in life. He was a testament to the importance of service and stewardship in life and an inspiration to the witness of God in all we do. He was a man who gave much more than he received and who will be missed. Let's honor him through our work at OSF each day.

"Drop a pebble in the water; just a splash, and it is gone;  
But there's half-a-hundred ripples circling on and on and on,  
Spreading, spreading from the center, flowing on out to the sea'  
And there is no way of telling where the end is gong to be."

By James Foley

*Written by Jon McKee, with contributions by Judy Driscoll.*