

# FLYING HIGH

## ONE FAMILY'S STORY

Hospice of Salina provides compassionate end-of-life care

BY BETH VINSON

**W**e all have that one thing we love to do—a passion that we turn to every time we need an escape from reality. For some, it may be riding horses, running or mountain climbing; for others it may be spending quiet time reading, writing or sewing. For Doug Miller, that passion was airplanes. He would describe it to his wife, Becky, as this: “When you are up there in the sky there’s nothing else. You’re in another place.” So it was only fitting that before he died, his family and the staff at Hospice of Salina made sure Doug was able to fly one last time.

### COMFORTING SUPPORT PROVIDES SECURITY

Doug and Becky’s story began more than 40 years ago, when he was in the Navy and she was his high school pen pal. They wrote one another for three years before meeting. When they finally met, they each knew they had just met their best friend.

They married and had two children—a son, Pieter, and a daughter, Elizabeth. Doug was an electrical contractor in Salina and was even voted Salina’s favorite electrician for the *Salina Journal’s* People’s Choice Awards. Later in life they were blessed with three beautiful grandchildren. It was the perfect love story until the devastating diagnosis that Doug had stage 4 pleural mesothelioma, which would take his life just nine months later.

“When we got the diagnosis, we were in total shock. This just couldn’t be happening,” Becky

says. “Doug tried to fight back, but after four rounds of chemotherapy, we knew there was no cure in sight.”

Doug and Becky began talking about hospice care with the staff at Hospice of Salina.

“It was so comforting to talk to them, to know there was someone I could call,” Becky says. “That same day they brought a hospital bed and an oxygen purifier to our home. They were so supportive and I felt secure knowing they were there for us.”

Doug’s decline continued and a month later a close friend convinced him it was time to enter inpatient hospice care. Doug had always been very proud and independent, so it was no surprise to his family that he wanted to walk into Kaye Pogue Hospice Center on his own, with no assistance. Now that Doug was receiving inpatient care, Becky could go back to being his wife, which she enjoyed, rather than his caretaker.

### GOING ABOVE AND BEYOND

“The staff treated Doug with such dignity. They went above and beyond. That’s just who they are,” Becky says. “They’re wonderful people with lots of hugs.”

Hospice of Salina, an affiliate of Salina Regional Health Center, focuses on everyday successes with each patient in mind. Staff members want patients to experience that special passion in life while they still can. Whether it was bringing Doug an apple pie simply because it was his favorite, letting him take a whirlpool bath whenever he wanted or arranging for him to fly



*Doug Miller passed away eight days after taking his final airplane ride, which was made possible in part by the staff at Hospice of Salina and the Live Life Fund.*

an airplane one last time—it’s how they measure success.

The staff pulled a few strings with Doug Bradley, owner of Bradley Trucking, to borrow his plane. Bradley’s son Jesse, who is a licensed pilot, offered to pilot the plane with Doug. It took some time and preparation getting Doug into the plane and seated comfortably. Doug was joined by Pieter, who has an equal passion for flying, as well as his hospice nurse. Becky and the rest of the family and staff from Hospice of Salina stayed on the ground and watched in anticipation as Doug taxied the plane down the runway.

When the plane suddenly stopped on the runway, Becky was disappointed, thinking that perhaps Doug was just not strong enough to pull this off. It was a strange twist of fate that the wife who had always been fearful of flying and never wanted her husband to get his pilot’s license was silently cheering him to get the plane in the air. Liftoff came within minutes, and Doug was piloting the plane. Family and staff were elated he had had the opportunity to do this one last time.

Later that same night he told Becky he was ready and he was at peace with dying. Eight days later, Doug Miller passed away. ❏

# GH:



Becky enjoys the framed photos the staff at Hospice of Salina gave her of the airplane ride. "This place is not a place of sadness, it's a sanctuary," Becky says. "The hospice team brought peace to us and allowed Doug to die with dignity."

## CONSIDER A DONATION TO THE LIVE LIFE FUND

Hospice of Salina sees each person as the person they have always been and not as the patient they have become. The Live Life Fund gives Hospice of Salina an opportunity to celebrate those things that have always been important in a patient's life, such as birthdays, anniversaries, holidays, a favorite ice cream on a summer day and favorite hobbies. Please consider partnering with Hospice of Salina by donating to the Live Life Fund. Donations can be made by:

- + Going online at [hospiceofsalina.org](http://hospiceofsalina.org)
- + Calling **785-825-1717**
- + Mailing a check to Hospice of Salina, 730 Holly Lane, Salina, KS 67401

Please indicate the donation is designated for the Live Life Fund.

If you are a business owner and would like to partner with Hospice of Salina, please contact Caron Kipp, Community Outreach Coordinator, at [ckipp@srhc.com](mailto:ckipp@srhc.com) or **785-829-1143**.