

## Hospice services create strong bond between two women

By John Hale

(Created: Wednesday, November 15, 2006 3:58 PM EST)

WATERVILLE — Cynthia Pepper Morin, who has ovarian cancer, says her hospice volunteer, Cherie Wenzel, is like a sister to her.

"She's someone I can confide in outside of family. She's a shoulder I can cry on," said Morin, 49. "You can vent your frustrations with her. She's someone who can be strong when you can't be strong. I hope she'll be there for my kids when I die. The personality of a person who goes into hospice should be a good listener, soft-spoken, nonjudgmental."

Wenzel, of Mount Vernon, has been working about one hour a week with Morin, who makes her home in Belgrade, for the past six months. Most of that time, Morin has been hospitalized at Thayer Hospital in Waterville.

"It's a real gift to be invited into someone's life and into their family when they are very, very vulnerable," said Wenzel, who is a volunteer with Hospice Volunteers of Waterville. "I feel very, very blessed."

Wenzel said many weeks she's done things with Morin's 13-year-old son, Alex, that Morin couldn't do, like take him to appointments. "Volunteers do pretty much whatever patients ask. It could be light housekeeping, or it could be just talking," Wenzel said.

"I think she's done as much with my son as anything," Morin said.

Recently, Morin wanted to start working on photo albums to leave for each of her three children.

"So Cherie got a bunch of supplies together and we got started," Morin said.

Wenzel said, "We started it in the hospital. We had a lot of fun."

Morin is a native of Providence, R.I. and moved to a Belgrade dairy farm with her family when she was 10. She was one of seven children and she worked on the dairy farm for a year and waitressed for several months after graduating from Messalonskee High School in 1975.

In 1977, she went to work for the Augusta Police Department where she worked for more than 26 years as a dispatcher for police, and later for fire and rescue calls. She also worked 17 years as a reserve police officer.

In 1982, she married Augusta Police Detective Alfred Morin. They were married 20 years before they got divorced and they had three children — Holly Morin, 22; Angela Morin, 21; and Alex Morin, 13.

"I've got a big family and they're very supportive," Morin said. "But even with them, you still feel very isolated. The drugs they've tried have been less and less effective."

"You're trying to handle all these side effects of the drugs you're on, the emotional side effects and the physical side effects," she said.

Of Wenzel, Morin said, "It's good that she has a son about my son's age and she's about my age. We have things in common."

Wenzel said, "We try to make good matches."



Cynthia Pepper Morin of Belgrade, right, gives her hospice volunteer, Cherie Wenzel, a comforting hug in Cynthia's hospital room at Thayer Hospital in Waterville.

Morin's once-striking head of red hair has been reduced to thin wisps of blonde hair by repeated doses of chemotherapy. She has a tube coming from her nose to drain bile from her system.

"I haven't been able to eat for a month now," she said.

Morin gets nutrients from a bag of milky-like substance that feeds through a tube into a large vein in her arm.

"I'm just trying to stay alive," she said. "I'm doing five days of chemotherapy and staying off of it for two weeks."

She has battled with the cancer for more than four years.

She was diagnosed with a form of ovarian cancer called extra ovarian papillary serous carcinoma on Aug. 18, 2002.

It starts in the peritoneal wall of the lower abdominal cavity. A sign of this cancer is that the stomach bloats up with fluids.

She went to Dana Farber Cancer Center in Boston for more diagnosis. And on Sept. 3, 2002, she had debulking surgery, which involved a complete hysterectomy and removal of as many tumors as doctors could find at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston.

On Oct. 4, 2002, she started chemotherapy. Then came another surgery.

In 2003 through February 2005, Morin was in remission. She was beating the cancer.

During this period, she did strenuous physical exercise to build up her body. She swam a mile a day, and ran almost 3 miles a day.

"I really poured the coal right to it," she said. She had left the police department when the cancer was diagnosed.

In February 2005, the tumors started coming back.

She said she spent most of 2006 in the hospital.

Recently she spent two months in the hospital, came home for four days, and then had to go back to the hospital.

When she was home, Wenzel was there with her.

"One day we hung pictures in the house, just things Cynthia hadn't been able to get to," Wenzel said.

"It was important to get my house back livable," Morin said. "Believe me, I'm a very independent person, so it's been tough asking for help."