



Brattleboro Area Hospice *Newsletter*

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Neshama, the Hebrew Word for Soul

She spends most of her time asleep; I don't know what, if anything she may be thinking about. I gently stroke her hair and softly speak her name. Occasionally she will open her eyes but I know she isn't able to focus on my face and she doesn't know who I am. She doesn't have any teeth and she survives on a liquid supplement for all her meals. She does have a crushed medication every morning which sustains her health. She is unable to speak or make her needs known. She cries sometimes and I don't know if she is aware that I'm trying to soothe her. She is unable to distinguish day from night and is unaware of who, or where she is. She doesn't know the time or date and isn't interested in the daily news. I know I love her and her name is Olivia.

People at the end of their life with Alzheimer's disease are dependent on caregivers, whether family, friends or professionals for all of their needs. Their needs are many—washing, dressing, toileting, eating, the list goes on and on. They are unable to communicate in what might be considered meaningful ways. They don't look the way they once did when young and vibrant. They have lost their way, it seems, and they no longer know their loved ones. The very people that have cared for them for such a long time are now just strangers.

As their lives are coming to an end it may seem to some that time spent with these people would be anything but rewarding or enriching for either party. How wrong this would be and I know because I spend time with

such people every day I work. People with end stage Alzheimer's can still give and receive the riches that life has to offer. Residents with end stage dementia at Vernon Green are part of the Neshama program. Neshama is a Hebrew word meaning soul and this program addresses the essence or soul of our residents. They spend time daily with music, massage and aromatherapy. They hear their name, something they might remember from their distant past. They are surrounded with pleasant scents and receive gentle touch, every day. Staff who have participated in this multisensory program have come to realize how calming and uplifting this can be and leave with a sense of well-being.

Even the elderly can suffer from failure to thrive and programs such as Neshama can be time well spent for all. If this intrigues you, please contact Hospice for more information and open your world up to a new adventure. In ending I will share some additional information about Olivia. She continues to thrive and even smiles sometimes. Oh yes, I forgot to mention, she is not a person with end stage dementia but a precious little girl born a month early on July 25 of this year. She is my great granddaughter and some day she will know I love her; until then I will be content knowing that our time together is extraordinarily special!

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