

# Being Present *Volunteer Finds Meaning in Life's Last Moments*

In our busy lives, the concept of being present in the moment often seems unattainable. For Volunteer Pamela MacPherson, being present is essential to one of the experiences in her life that gives the greatest sense of purpose: sitting with a dying patient.

A nurse by training, Pamela's "curiosity" about death and dying led to years working with the VNA Hospice Program. Upon retiring in 2004, she trained to be a volunteer with our No One Dies Alone Program, which provides companionship and comfort to patients who are alone at their life's end. As her work has evolved through the years, she has come to feel that it is at life's end that we see its deepest meaning.

Mindfulness is a cornerstone of her work. Before she enters the room of a patient, she stops, centers herself, and makes a conscious effort to leave whatever is on her mind outside the room. Once inside, she pulls her chair close to the patient, speaks their name and offers her presence, quietly sitting with the dying individual. Most of the



patients are asleep or in a sleep-like state, so it is very peaceful.

It is there, during this experience, that Pamela says she finds the deepest rewards of this work. "My presence in another's experience of dying 'brings me to my still point,' she expresses in one of the many poems she has written about her work, 'a point that is often lost in the hum and buzz of everyday life.'"

*Vigil: The Poetry of Presence*, is a collection of Pamela's poems, published this year. Those words, which, she says, "pour" through her pen onto paper, reflect the rich rewards that lie in the sacred experience of bearing witness to dying.

"In being with the dying, being fully present to them during their last hours on this earth, I am witnessing something that brings deep meaning to my own life," she says. "It's a true privilege to share in these experiences."

If you are interested in learning more or reading Pamela's book, contact Pamela by email at [pmacphe@aol.com](mailto:pmacphe@aol.com).