

HeartKeepers

THE BEGINNING

Her Name Was Martha.

I met my first private client in December of 2020. At the time I was unaware of how she would impact my life. I was pretty new to this type of work and didn't really know what to expect. My mom had suggested that I become a caregiver several times over the years, I was finally taking her advice. Although I had no clue what I was getting myself into, I was excited and optimistic. Her name was Martha and I was her first caregiver. I felt that we were perfect for each other considering we would be going through this new experience together and were able to come up with our own way of doing things. Martha was a 92 year old, feisty, charismatic, sarcastic soul with a big sense of humor and an even bigger heart. I will never forget how many phone calls and gifts she received during her recovery time; the flowers, the meals and prayers. I knew that I had encountered a special person.

Martha was needing in-home services due to a fractured shoulder and hip after a fall. She needed assistance with her daily routine, which included physical therapy, so it took no time for her to heal and get back to her active lifestyle. Once she was fully recovered she went back to swimming, attending social events and having lunch with family and friends. Martha was very outgoing and independent. She did bills on her own, wrote checks and attended board meetings. Her mind was sharp. In her down time she loved playing sudoku, chatting on the phone, reading, and she had a genuine interest in my life, interests and goals. Over time Martha began to experience pain quite often which slowed her down and required more visits to the doctor. The pain medication made her a little fuzzy and contributed to confusion and dizziness. After 2 falls I suggested to the family that we add an additional day to her in home services. I was now providing care to Martha 6 days a week. This went on for a while.



In August of 2022 the family and I noticed she needed a little more attention. I remember telling Martha, "You may need a nurse to come and help you." Her response was, "Aishah you are a nurse, you're qualified to do everything." By this time we had become pretty close but she and I both knew we were going to need a little more help. Once everyone was onboard the family went ahead and hired a hospice nurse. I learned so much from Martha's hospice nurse. She took the time to prepare me and taught me how to notice declines. I knew what to look for and how to prepare for Martha's transition. Discussing these things with her made me nervous and emotional. I would think about the stories my mom shared with me, which didn't seem bad, but I just knew I wouldn't be able to handle it. I also knew that I had to be there for Martha.



In January 2023 Martha asked me if I could move in with her until she passed away. This made me feel very overwhelmed. She would always say, "It won't be long until then, I just need you here with me until that day comes." I wondered how she knew and why she was trying to speed the process up. I was constantly asking myself "What am I supposed to do?" I started working 24 hour shifts Monday - Thursday. Another caregiver, Sophia, would work the remaining days and we found different PRN caregivers for Fridays. Martha would give them such a hard time because she only wanted me there. When I started the 24 hour shifts things were a little rough for me, but I took on the challenges and figured everything out. I refused to let it get the best of me. Figuring out the side effects of multiple medications was definitely a test for me. I had to determine which ones made things worse, and which ones made things better. While Martha was dealing with constipation, agitation, confusion and anxiety I began to realize I was her only comfort. The days I did not work I would receive calls and text messages about the difficulties of the other caregivers and how things weren't going well. When I arrived for my shifts Martha's whole mood would change. I felt pretty comfortable with Martha and her family. They welcomed me from day one. My relationship with them made it easier to get through those tough situations. We were able to work through things together.

In June 2023 there was a drastic decline. Martha was only eating once or twice a day. She had given up snacking and was barely drinking her scotch. Over half of her day was spent napping. She no longer wanted visitors or to take phone calls, no more newspapers and coffee in the morning. Martha slowly became less alert and needed more and more assistance. Except for bible study on Tuesdays she stopped getting dressed in the morning. Soon after, she would doze off during those couple of hours. At this point hospice had placed her on oxygen which gave her a little comfort but Martha was just no longer herself.

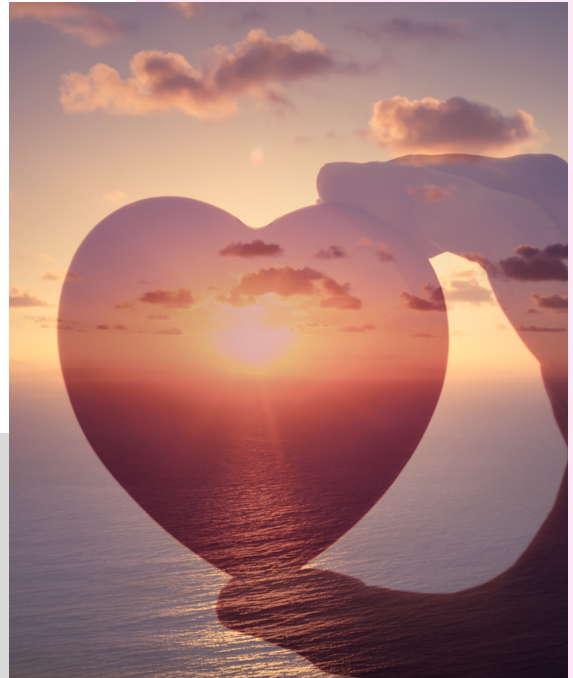
July 2nd I vividly remember Sophia calling me in a panic. Martha was telling her that she was done, that she just couldn't do it anymore. In addition to that her oxygen levels were dropping while receiving oxygen. This call was different. I had received a few over the past month when I wasn't working. I'm not sure if it was Sophia's tone or the flow of emotions but I realized that day was closer than I thought.

When I hung up the phone I broke down completely. I remember telling my mom and sister that I did not want to go back to work. I did not want to be the one that was working when that day came. Although Martha's nurse, Shera, attempted to prepare me, I truly did not know if I could handle this. There is absolutely nothing that can prepare you. On Monday, July 3 I went to work full of nerves with so many thoughts running through my mind. Martha was still in bed requesting to go to the restroom. I got her bedside potty out but she could not bend her legs. She was very stiff and confused. Sophia and I got her back into bed and I called the hospice nurse immediately to report what was happening. Shera planned a visit for that morning.

Shera told us that from this point on Martha would be on comfort medication and wearing diapers. Martha slept 97% of the day, only taking in a few sips of water. The next day was about the same, day 2 with no food and barely any water. I continued to update family and friends, in the back of my mind knowing she didn't have much longer.

In-laws came by along with two of her daughters so we sat around her and chatted. The phone consistently rang with those that were close to her wanting to express how much she meant to them. Sophia stayed the night with me which was weird because it wasn't the usual. This feeling that I had was completely different, something I've never experienced or felt before. Wednesday morning came and I put on some of her favorite music. As we awaited the arrival of one of Martha's other daughters Sophia and I got her dressed, brushed her hair, polished her nails and put on a fresh gown.

When getting her back into bed, I realized Martha had no pulse. A slow panic began to creep over me but I heard Shera's voice in my head. She went over this with me, and wrote things down. There was no need to panic, this is what we had been preparing for. This was still a part of Martha's life. I called hospice and then started to call Martha's family. This was one of the hardest things I have ever had to do in my life. In a weird way the past couple of days somehow prepared me and I knew they would want to hear it from me. Her daughter and son-in-law arrived first, then hospice pronounced her. The whole thing was just surreal. I was overwhelmed with emotions and really at a loss for words.



Martha was so much more to me than my client. She had become a piece of me. If you knew me, you knew Martha. She taught me so many things, she motivated me and helped me find my purpose. Since the day we met she reminded me of how intelligent I was and always saw me for who I was. She encouraged me to become an entrepreneur. Starting an agency is what she thought would be the best thing for me. Honestly, her encouragement was only confirmation. Once Martha passed I took it upon myself to make her proud and take her advice. Martha's memory will forever be kept in my heart. And from that memory HeartKeepers Senior Home Care was born.