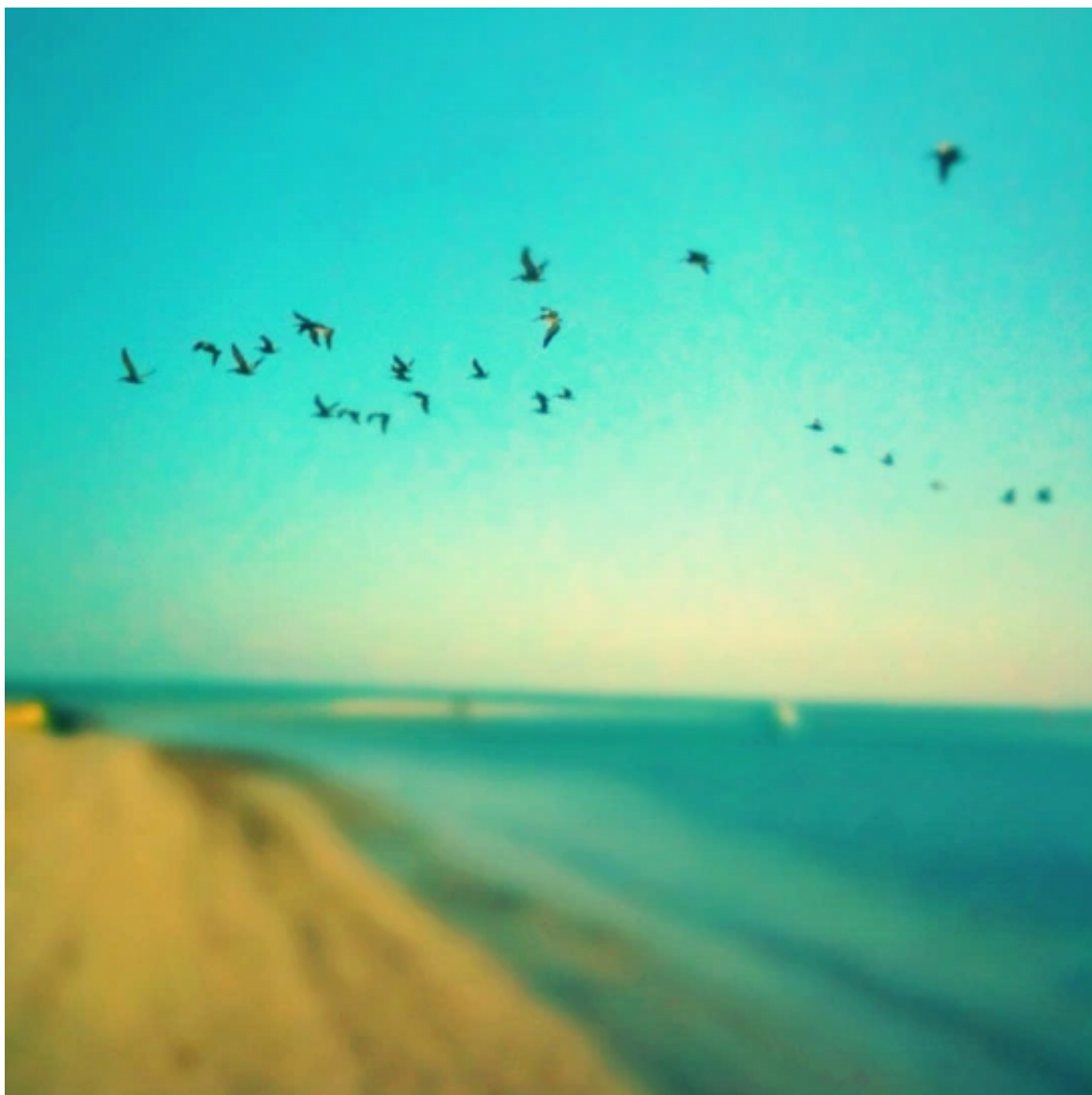


# Hospice Volunteer Training



“The Select Few” by Jaime Ferreyros

By: Lockie Hunter (<http://gulfstreamlitmag.com/current-issue/contributor-bios-10/>)

**Hospice Volunteer Training, Day One**

**Five scenarios**

**Tip 1:** *From the Volunteer Primer: “Let me begin by saying how much the patients really need you. Many patients cannot fill out their lunch card by themselves. Their cards are color coded to show their dietary restrictions. Just pick something for them. It’s all the same.”*

**SCENE:** The patient cannot speak.

“Let’s try the red today, shall we?” I say, smiling.

I check the box for strawberry Jell-O.

Tuesday: I dutifully check off lime Jell-O.

Wednesday: It is lemon.

Thursday : I am delayed, in his room one hour late.

I arrive to a completed lunch card.

Written

In a shaky hand

Bold and in red ink

The words:

*I fucking hate Jell-O*

**Tip 2:** *“If the patient has taken a fall in the hallway, just leave her there. Don’t risk your own back. Find an orderly. You don’t have the strength to lift a patient.”*

**SCENE :** The patient sprawls on the ground. Her gown immodestly showing ankle, thigh, hip. Her attending nurse runs to fetch an orderly. Someone stronger.

“Hey,” I say, lying beside her on the cool linoleum floor. “Whatcha doing?” I pull the gown below her knees.

She smiles and says, “Stargazing.”

“Show me Orion,” I say.

Her finger moves to a stain on the ceiling and makes an arc across the tiles.

**Tip 3:** *“If you encounter a patient with dementia, don’t encourage it. Although you might be tempted to light an imaginary cigarette or mix an imaginary drink, they need to be reminded of where they really are. Try to keep them in the real moment.”*

**SCENE:** The patient is flat on his back. His mouth half open, his eyes closed. He has not acknowledged my presence. I've been here for 20 minutes. On minute 21, he shouts:

“Bartender! Bring me a vodka martini. Dry! Dirty! Extra olives!”

He sits up straight.

I round my fingers into the shape of a circle, stack them and shake them while making noises like ice against steel. I pour the imaginary martini into an imaginary glass and offer it to the patient.

He takes it in his hand. Drinks a sip of air. “This doesn't taste like anything,” he says. “What vodka did you use?”

“Uh, Grey Goose,” I say.

“That explains it,” he says. “I prefer Belvedere.”

**Tip 4:** *“It is important to chat with the patient. This helps her feel connected.”*

**SCENE:** The patient has chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. Each breath a panic. I chat and chat and chat until I suddenly feel her hand on my knee.

“You know that talking,” she says between sips of oxygen, “is... overrated. Just breathe with me. Breathe.”

**Tip 5:** *“Some may say hospice work is depressing. I disagree! In fact, often times when I leave the hospital, I find that I have a harder time communicating with the living (so to speak), as I feel such a strong connection with the dying. I hope it is the same for you on your journey with us. It is, however, vital to care for your own self so that you don't internalize the patient's fear. Treat yourself to a coffee! Or a chocolate truffle! You deserve it!”*

**Final SCENE:**

I sit in bed. A chocolate truffle in one hand, cappuccino in the other. My new lover braids my hair over my naked back.

“I really have to go,” I say, “My hospice shift started at noon.”

It is 2 pm.

“You're not going anywhere,” he says, “It's a volunteer job. They don't really need you.” He lowers his head and kisses my forehead gently. “But I do. Stay with me. Choose the living.”