



“Here was someone I saw as the strongest force in my life. I considered his strength and witnessed what Hospice could do at his weakest moment.”

- Jay Smith

November 24, 2023

Dear Friends of Big Bend Hospice

My Dad, Doug Smith, was a fourth-generation Tallahassee native. I remember my whole life as a kid, he only missed one day of work. After college, I joined the family business, Ajax Building Company, which my grandfather, Block Smith, started in 1958. Chances are if you live in Tallahassee, you've been inside one of our buildings.

My Dad and I spent lot of hours on the road together, going to job sites. He was a hard charger in those early days. But what I remember most was when something difficult was going on, a challenge, I could see how he took care of people. It was eye opening.

Dad was known as the patriarch of our now 240-employee company, many of whom are second and third generation with Ajax. He retired in 2004, but remained the face of the business as CEO Emeritus, and lived to see the day we became part of the STO Building Group, which is the largest privately held construction company in the U.S.

It was actually my Mom Karen's health that convinced Dad to retire early. Mom has had three different types of cancer. And she's beat it every time. Dad wanted to be able to travel with her and his life became focused on caring for Mom, making sure she was protected.

They started a tradition where they would take a grandchild anywhere they wanted to go in the world as a gift to celebrate their 12th birthday.

For their youngest grandchild, our daughter, Claire, they decided to do it a year earlier—for her 11th birthday, in 2019. She chose a Disney River Cruise in Germany and Austria.

It's one of those things that you realize later happened for a reason. Dad started having stomach pains the following year and started losing weight. He was diagnosed with non-operable pancreatic cancer.

Despite the pain, he kept his wit and even showed up at the girls' soccer games all bundled up in the bitter cold.

We initially sought treatment options for Dad, but by Thanksgiving had to flip the switch from “beat cancer,” to keep him out of pain. Somehow we all knew at Christmas, it would be his last.





You're never ready. But when the time comes, Big Bend Hospice is there to help you get ready.

Big Bend Hospice set Dad up in a sunroom, off the back of their house. It's a place where he used to watch TV. It's beautiful with natural sunlight. They took care of everything—oxygen, a hospital bed, it's almost like setting up a hospital room in your house. It takes tremendous effort, but they coordinated it quickly.

Dad had a lot of fluid retention. There was a Hospice nurse technician who met with him weekly. He kept Dad distracted; they joked about how many liters he could get out of Dad.

They worked with Mom as caregiver on what he was going to be taking and answered her questions, like when he would stop eating. Things she just needed to prepare for. Having Hospice there, knowing Mom was going to be cared for, also helped me.

**Dad died in that sunroom, January 29, 2021,
with all of us able to say our goodbyes.**

You're never ready. But when the time comes, Big Bend Hospice is there to help you get ready. I thought I knew what it was about—Hospice helped with other family members. And I even served on the Board of Directors. But this experience was more personal. Here was someone I saw as the strongest force in my life. I considered his strength and witnessed what Hospice could do at his weakest moment.

**My hope is that everyone in our community and the eight counties
Big Bend Hospice serves can experience that same peace.**

Jay Smith

P.S. As my Dad's story shows, Big Bend Hospice is there, even for the strongest of people. It's there to help them, and you, get ready. Please consider a gift of \$250—or any amount—to make sure Big Bend Hospice can continue to help all of us when that time comes...

