**Jo Rockwell, Volunteer Caregiver with Na Hoaloha, Maui County, Hawaii**

Interview 5.26.23

Jo Rockwell

*Volunteer caregiver with Na Hoaloha, Maui County, Hawaii*

Prior to becoming a volunteer caregiver, I participated in seasonal rotations delivering Meals on Wheels in Minneapolis, MN alongside a friend. We would alternate our responsibilities, ensuring that one of us was working while the other had time off. However, when I made the permanent move to Maui, I discovered a volunteer opportunity to transport seniors to their doctor's appointments. Responding to that advertisement, I joined Na Hoaloha as a volunteer caregiver, and for the past seven years, I have been dedicated to this role.

Maui encompasses multiple islands and I often have the opportunity to transport individuals from the ferry terminal to the doctor's office and back. However, most of the transportation assistance I provide is to people residing within 5-10 miles of my location in Maui. Primarily, I offer rides to the doctor for these individuals, which typically involves traveling approximately 25-30 miles to the other side of the island. I plan my errands based on the scheduled appointment time and then drive them back home afterward. In cases where the person I'm assisting is in a vulnerable condition, such as a patient with Alzheimer's, I ensure their safety by remaining by their side until they have completed their appointment and returned home. I take extra precautions to be nearby, ensuring they don't leave the building without me.

Engaging in volunteer caregiving has proven to be a fascinating journey for me, primarily focused on assisting seniors. Interestingly, many of the seniors I lend a hand to are actually younger than me, requiring assistance with transportation for their errands or medical appointments. I am incredibly grateful for the opportunity to be out there, on the road, providing them with the help they need.

**What inspired me to become a volunteer caregiver is that unlike volunteering to benefit a company or an organization like being an usher in a live theatre, volunteer caregiving is helping people directly.**

**My favorite part of volunteer caregiving I do is being in the car with the person who is usually eager to tell their life story to someone.** We have different cultures represented here in Hawaii and I have met such interesting people from different parts of the island, the mainland, and foreign countries.

The interactions with the people I help evoke various emotions besides gratitude as the primary feeling.

* “Feel gratitude!” That is my word.
* Sadness feeling the tragedy some folks have gone through.
* Loss of the several patients that I had transported.
* Fear of not knowing if my patient is OK if I am going to pick them up and they do not answer the door. I formed a connection with a woman I regularly transported as a volunteer caregiver. We bonded over our shared love for art, and she even invited me to her house to see her paintings. However, on a subsequent visit, she didn't answer the door or phone. I contacted the social service agency but they had no information. Unfortunately, we later discovered that she had passed away in her home. This incident left me feeling fearful and unsure about not knowing someone's well-being or how to respond in such situations.
* Funny stories from wonderful people make my day, and we'll just be laughing as we go along.

I have become a lifelong friend of a couple of the folks I have helped. I have one patient who I had picked up at the hospital the first time I met her she had brain cancer and had just had surgery. She has survived multiple cancer types and is now in remission for the first time in 20 years. She is a resilient person with a wonderful story and we both decided to be friends forever.

My educational background was in social work and I started out in a government agency in Minnesota as a caseworker at the time when they separated the financial from social work. Although I stayed with the financial as a beginner, my social work background helped me become an excellent manager. I was really good with people and people liked working for me and I wound up as the director of the agency focused on family public assistance. I loved my 380 staff members.

**Feel gratitude! That is my word.**

Suggestions for Social Media:

Jo Rockwell, *Volunteer caregiver with Na Hoaloha, Maui County, Hawaii*

1. “What inspired me to become a volunteer caregiver is that unlike volunteering to benefit a company or an organization like being an usher in a live theatre, volunteer caregiving is helping people directly.”
2. “Engaging in volunteer caregiving has proven to be a fascinating journey for me, primarily focused on assisting seniors. Interestingly, many of the seniors I lend a hand to are actually younger than me, requiring assistance with transportation for their errands or medical appointments. I am incredibly grateful for the opportunity to be out there, on the road, providing them with the help they need.”
3. “My favorite part of volunteer caregiving I do is being in the car transporting the person who is usually eager to tell their life story.”