“It’s all about love,” says Mitzi Quint, veteran counselor / educator for Duke Hospice Bereavement Services and, more recently, assistant to the Duke Hospice Volunteer Services program. The work she does is everyday proof of this very simple statement.

Grief work is most often prompted by a love story, sometimes complicated, but wherever it starts Mitzi’s goal is to help the bereaved of our community, whether part of a Duke Hospice family or not, to find a way through the healing process. She counsels individuals and couples, facilitates grief support groups, and educates volunteers, staff, community groups, and other professionals. She loves talking about grief and cherishes the privilege of sitting with a client who opens his life, his story, and pain, seeking help for this difficult step in his journey.

Mitzi’s path to Duke Hospice Bereavement Services and Duke Hospice came by way of an undergraduate degree in folklore studies, travel, teaching, and following her dreams. After five years working at John Umstead Hospital in adolescent psychiatry, she followed one more dream: she stepped away from a fulltime, permanent career job to take a four-month temporary assignment as a hospice social worker, and then another temp assignment in bereavement. That temp job stuck and she had “the great good fortune” to train for the work under Linda E. Jordan, D. Min., former manager of Duke Hospice Bereavement Services, now retired. Now ten years later, Mitzi remains inspired: “I think I’m made for this work,” the phone calls and letters, the one-shot encounters or relationships that go on for months. “It allows me to integrate all of my life experiences,” and to work with “fabulous, friendly, big-hearted volunteers” who work with the bereavement program, mailing as many as 800 letters per month to families who have lost loved ones while on hospice service.

In addition to her bereavement work, Mitzi works closely with Duke Hospice volunteers who serve patients in care facilities (PARTners program) in Durham and Orange counties—working with families and volunteers to match family needs with volunteers’ gifts, supporting both groups during down times, and problem-solving issues that arise.
And in the last year we have seen another side of Mitzi Quint: she has become known for her many poems of gratitude. She is the official poet in her family, writing toasts and poems for special occasions, and this talent found a natural home in the work she does. “Ritual is central to what we do as bereavement counselors,” she says. Her poems and toasts are ways of making moments special in her family. And to hear the affection in her voice when she speaks of her colleagues and the volunteers, it is no surprise then that she has extended this special gift to them as well. “I believe strongly in showing appreciation,” she says, and writing poems to do so delights her. She comes from a musical family, and brings her education / experience in folklore and the storytelling and metaphor-building work of a grief counselor to poems that honor the rhymes and rhythms, images and themes of a time when poems were gifts created for special occasions and special people. She was kind enough to write one especially for this conversation.

Mitzi’s bereavement and hospice work is a community service; it is for our patients and families, for staff and volunteers, and for the many grieving people in the area who may feel overwhelmed. She is energized by and grateful for the work and for opportunities to learn, serve, and grow—energy and gratitude that you can’t miss when you speak with her or read her gifts of verse. It’s probably all about love.

Winter is waning, and springtime is near,  
A welcome and glorious time of the year.  
A time when the brown world turns into green,  
What's been underground begins to be seen.  
What's been in the darkness comes into the light,  
And blooms once again because of its long night.  
So each of us grows as life cycles around,  
So each of us finds that new blessings abound.  
Thus we all bloom and grow in life's garden so dear,  
And the loveliest flower is YOU, volunteer.  

Mitzi Quint January 2010