

**Laura Callens:  
From Caterer  
to Caregiver**

**“I’m going to help my patients like my husband’s nurses helped us.”**

– Laura Callens



**Laura Callens** thought she was too old to go back to nursing school. She was sure she wasn’t smart enough – and she was positive she’d never be accepted.

She was wrong.

At the age of 50, after a career in the catering business and serving as an admissions director for a local high school, Callens embarked on her “second act” by applying – and being accepted – to the school’s accelerated program.

Like many who come into nursing later in life, Callens’ journey to the profession started while she was caring for a loved one with an illness – her husband, Eddy, who was diagnosed with advanced brain cancer in 2005.

“The nurses my husband had were really inspirational. They really connected with both Eddy and me,” said Callens, who is originally from California. “At the time, I didn’t realize that was what I needed, but now, looking

back on it, it was.”

After undergoing six surgeries and radiation, Eddy passed away at home in hospice care in 2011.

“Eddy passing away really changed my whole perspective on life,” said Callens. “I had always felt the urge and the need to find a career that was truly fulfilling, and the whole experience really nudged me in that direction. That’s when I began thinking about becoming a hospice nurse.”

But Callens was understandably hesitant about leaving her established career at Our Lady of Mercy School for Young Women, where she had worked her way up from textbook coordinator to admissions director.

The tipping point finally came in 2015, when she was visiting a friend in the hospital.

“I began talking to one of the nurses, who had herself gotten into nursing as a second career and completed the one-year accelerated program,”

said Callens. “That’s when I realized that I could do it. I enrolled shortly after that visit.”

When the time came to do her first clinical rotation, Callens was assigned to neurosurgery, the hospital floor where her husband was a patient and spent a large portion of the last years of his life.

She was prepared for the rotation to be emotionally difficult, but to her surprise, she fell in love with the field. Following graduation, she hopes to become a neurosurgical nurse.

“When I saw my husband’s brain scan, and there was a tumor, it was terrifying,” said Callens. “But, when I’m looking at a patient’s scan, I’m able to think about it from a whole other point of view. It’s interesting, instead of scary, and I’m able to think about how I’m going to help my patients like my husband’s nurses helped us.” –JO