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**A VETERAN'S JOURNEY COMES FULL CIRCLE
THROUGH EXCELA HEALTH HOSPICE**

GREENSBURG, PA, May 20, 2014... Korean War veteran Joseph Shogan was proud to have served his country. March 3, 2013, he was laid to rest, completing a journey that began March 19, 1929. Joe Shogan didn't speak a lot about the war, but he always conveyed to his family that his country, and his fellow servicemen, were front and center in his heart and his mind.

His son, Gary Shogan, recalls... "He was always proud of his service and proud of his country and proud of the veterans – we always had a flag flying. He instilled a sense of patriotism in all his kids and now every one of us flies a flag."

Born in Turtle Creek, Joe Shogan managed a Foodland store until he opened his own little grocery store in Pleasant Unity. Years later he sold his grocery store and drove for Pepperidge Farms, delivering bread, until he retired. But he was ultimately a gardener at heart. His son remembers, "We only had a little yard, but we had a garden every year until we moved up here to the mountain (Stahlstown), with 20 acres. Dad had flower gardens and a big vegetable garden and we always had to pick stones out of the garden when we were kids. We didn't like the garden because we had to work in it, but he loved to garden and he continued to work in it until he just couldn't do it anymore. It was a gentleman's farm. We had chickens, horses, cows and ducks. He was raised on a farm, his grandfather had a farm, and I think that's why we moved up here, so he could have a little farm."

Enlisting in the U.S. Army in the 1950s, Joe Shogan served as a Sergeant in the Korean War. He worked in the ASA (Army Security Agency, predecessor to the NSA) deciphering codes during the war. Returning home, he helped found two VFW Posts – one in Donegal and one in Normalville and he became a lifetime member. During his later years, Joe Shogan made it his mission to continue to honor his fellow veterans by visiting them in nearby nursing facilities. He did not want them to go unnoticed or be forgotten. He continued to visit them until he himself became ill. In 2012, as his illness progressed, Joe Shogan was admitted to Excela Health Hospice.

Excela Health Hospice was honored to present Joe Shogan with a framed Certificate of Honor from the Congress of the United States in recognition of his military service, provided by Congressman Tim Murphy. His son remembers, "When he received the certificate, he displayed it on his desk in the family room so that people who were visiting could see it. He was so proud of it."

On Veterans Day, the Excela Health Hospice Simple Gifts Singers, who are hospice volunteers, visited Joe Shogan and many other veterans, to honor them by singing military songs. They also presented a red, white and blue afghan from the Excela Health Hospice Caring Hands Volunteers, crocheted specifically for the veterans in the program. Gary Shogan remembers being home the day they came to visit his father. "They called the day before, and said they were coming. Dad became very excited, telling me 'they are coming to sing patriotic songs for me!'

"When they came to sing – it meant a lot to him. You could see it in his eyes. For me, to be able to be there and see how it made his day and how his eyes lit up -it meant a lot to me and my family and it really helped me understand a lot more. He sang along with them. He was so happy. A few of the songs, you could see, brought tears to his eyes, especially the U.S. Army Anthem – 'The Caissons go Rolling Along.' He sang that with them. I think that really meant the most to him. He talked about that to everyone who came to visit and everybody he called or called him on the phone for weeks!"

As he remembered that special day, Gary Shogan became reflective..."Because of Dad's dedication to visiting the veterans, when the Simple Gifts Singers came to see him and sing him those songs, it came full circle. The singing was really special. That moment was one of the best memories I'll ever have. I'll never forget how his eyes lit up, how he talked about it, how he shared it with his friends. They certainly cheered him up. I am so glad I was there that day. I was actually singing along, too."

"On my Dad's birthday, Excelsa Health Hospice brought him a birthday cake decorated with red, white and blue icing – he really appreciated that, too. His birthday was just a few days before he died and the day of his birthday he was just so happy because they came and brought him a cake. The grandkids came in the evening – he just had the best day – he thanked me at the end of the day for 'making this day so special.' He stayed up all day and had his friends there and he was just so thankful at the end of the day – his final birthday was really happy for him.

"Any time any of the staff from Excelsa would come to visit he would talk about it. He loved the nurses and the aide – he talked about them all the time. He loved them. It was a good experience for all of us – mainly for him – but it made a difference for us as well. Now that I look back I am so glad that we were able to have him in our home. Without Excelsa Health Hospice I don't know how well we would have done. It was worth it. It was the best experience it could have been."

Excelsa Hospice: Looking for a few Good Men and Women

The 2012 U.S. Census Bureau reports there are in excess of 12.4 million veterans ages 65 or older in the United States. Excelsa Health Hospice has developed a unique program to honor and celebrate their contribution and commitment to our country. In the first four months of this year alone, Excelsa Health Hospice has cared for 45 veterans. Having served in World War II, Vietnam and Korea, they represent the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, the Merchant Marines and the National Guard.

Excelsa is looking to enlist men and women who share this military heritage to serve as volunteers specifically to veterans receiving care. Excelsa Health Hospice manager James Joyce explains, "So many veterans have sacrificed so much for all of us over the years; we at Excelsa Health Hospice feel it is our duty to recognize and repay our veterans in some small way. We are very pleased with the response we have received from our Veteran Program thus far and we hope to recruit more veteran volunteers so we can expand our veteran services even more in the future."

Gary Shogan looks forward to his retirement as a time to volunteer, much like his father, spending time with veterans, listening to their stories and honoring their past. "My Dad instilled in us how important the vets are. They were always at the top of his list and he always tried to help them. I hope to do the same."

To learn more about volunteer opportunities with Excelsa Health Hospice, contact Joan Roth, volunteer services coordinator, 724-689-1653.