

A Publication of Hospice of the Valley—  
Serving Santa Clara County Since 1979

# Touching Lives™

*Holding Hands. Holding Hearts.*

## Yes, A Time for Hope

In This  
Together

Sibling Rivalry  
...or Revelry?

Finding Grace  
and Peace

7 Ways to  
Celebrate  
A Life



Hospice  
of the Valley

# Making the Most of Time

by Ana Hays

**K**nown as a caring, passionate and beloved teacher, and infamous with students for his steely gaze, John Near's career at The Harker School in San Jose spanned 31 years as a middle and upper school teacher, coach and department chair.

"My Dad was very stern with students and was known for the Mr. Near Stare," said Casey Near, John's daughter. "But he was one of those people that you could break, and that's when his students felt that they had earned his trust and love."

"After John moved to The Harker School upper school in 1998, he taught Advanced Placement (AP) United States government and politics, and AP United States history," said John's wife, Pam Dickinson. "He was a brilliant, honorable and inspiring man and he always had the students' best interests in mind. At the age of 52, John was diagnosed with colorectal cancer in 2005 and in May of 2009 he was admitted to the hospital where he received extensive surgery on his leg to remove flesh-eating bacteria. The next day he was grading papers in the ICU. That's the kind of man John was.

With cancer you say, well the reoccurrence is high but it's still

possible to address it. But with the unexpected surgery on his leg, John now needed new cells to grow back the muscle and flesh and had to stop chemotherapy. He spent several months in the hospital recovering, during which time the cancer became more aggressive, metastasizing to his lungs, brain and bones," said Pam.

"My dad was finally discharged on July 3rd and we called it Independence from the Hospital Day," said Casey. "That's when we brought in Hospice of the Valley. During my dad's journey ▶

*Dedicated*

*Loving*

*John Near pictured with wife Pam Dickinson (left) and daughter Casey Near (right), and Kate, the family pug*



*Photo by Chris Daren*

# Husband Dad Teacher

John Near pictured with his students and alumni from The Harker School at the family open house, August 2009



Photo by Pam Dickinson

with cancer, we used CaringBridge.org to stay connected to all our friends, family and his students around the world. My dad wrote poignantly at times.”

On Monday, August 17, 2009 8:52 AM PDT John wrote: *Hi Everyone, I got out of the hospital Saturday and it was nice to get home again. I was pretty worn out yesterday but feel much better today. We are also starting hospice care tomorrow. We’ve met with them several times and they are wonderful. Experts in end-of-life care, they will be an enormous help for our entire family on every level.*

“Bringing in hospice care was a real gift,” said Pam. “We now had a team of specialists around us who understood the dying process and with them we were able to freely discuss John’s situation and to set goals.

Our conversations cut right to the chase. When cancer happens, you feel like there are things you don’t have control over. And so you have to ask, what do you have control over? You

have control over how you spend your time. So we threw a party—an open house for all those who loved John to visit with him.”

“Bringing in hospice care was a real gift,” said Pam. “We now had a team of specialists around us who understood the dying process and with them we were able to freely discuss John’s situation and to set goals.

“And we made a list of adventures for Dad on our fridge for the last few months,” said Casey. “It could be as simple as a trip to the grocery store, the farmer’s market or a double lunch at Harker. Each time Dad was able to do one of those things, we circled it, so he could see all he was able to do, and always have something to look forward to.”

“John was always about being a teacher. He lived by making the most out of time and demonstrated that up to the end of his life,” said Pam. “I am glad that we got involved with hospice. It helped us to calibrate ourselves to make the most of the dying process.

And it made John’s last few months meaningful and joyful, and honored the way he wanted to spend his time—laughing with friends, family and us.” ✨