



HOFFMANN HOSPICE 

REFLECTIONS

A Non-Profit Hospice

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**Celebrating
a life
well lived**

**Avoiding
the call to
hospice**

A Disneyland dream

Reflections

is a publication of
Hoffmann Hospice

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On our cover
Claude Greenhaw
enjoys a celebration
of his life.

FROM OUR FOUNDERS

It was my pleasure recently to meet with other hospice directors at a California Hospice and Palliative Care Organization workshop, where my colleagues and I compared notes on the end-of-life questions seniors and their families are asking.

We talked about seniors' uncertainties and fears in the wake of recent healthcare reform. We talked about their questions and how critical it is they know all their end-of-life options. Based on those questions and our discussions, we concluded it's more important than ever for each of us to take charge of our own health care.

When it comes to healthcare, many of us fear what we don't know – what to do in times of crisis or where to find the help we need. The solution, of course, is education. When patients and their families are forearmed with clear, complete and accurate information, fears are eased and wise choices are made.

Unfortunately, patients aren't always given all of their end-of-life options. When this happens, we at Hoffmann strongly urge families to advocate for their loved ones and interview several hospices before making a final choice. This generally can be done quickly, either in person or over the phone.

Don't be shy about asking the important questions. Ask about response time after hours and on weekends. Ask about the number of visits you or your loved one can expect to receive. And don't forget to ask about the availability of supplemental services. Potential clients, their families and friends are welcome to call or visit us at our Bakersfield or Palmdale offices. We're also happy to meet with families wherever they're comfortable – at home, at a favorite Starbucks – to share information at no cost and with no obligation.

Whichever hospice provider you choose, make sure it's the one you feel is right for you

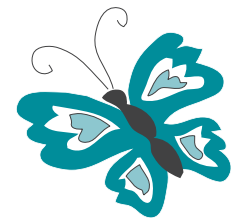


and your family.

The healthcare industry has experienced major cuts in recent years and may do so again in the years to come. Such cuts are felt in all corners of the industry and hospice is no exception. But Tom and I and our Board of Directors want to assure our Kern County and Antelope Valley communities we remain committed to the promise our patients will not feel the impacts of such cuts, now or in the future.

When families have control over their end-of-life decisions, there is less fear. We want our patients and their families to have that control, to captain their own ships. As always, we consider it a privilege when we're called upon to help navigate.

Tom and Beth



For the record

A number of poems penned by Maril Lee Brubaker were published in *Reflections of the Kern*, a publication of the *Kern River Valley Poets and Writers Club*. The club was misidentified in the winter issue of *Reflections*.

A new home for Palmdale staff

Hoffmann Hospice in Palmdale will soon be moving to a new home. Hoffmann staff can hardly wait.

“We’re serving more people in the Antelope Valley than ever before,” Branch Director Bart Joiner says. “With growth comes space issues and we’ve definitely outgrown our current location.”

Hoffmann staffers expect to move from their current 4,000-square-foot offices on Palmdale Blvd. to their new 7,000-square-foot home at 655 Avenue Q by early June. Joiner says the spacious new quarters will give Hoffmann greater room for support group meetings and family conferences.

“We’ve wanted to expand our services and now we have the ability to do that,” he

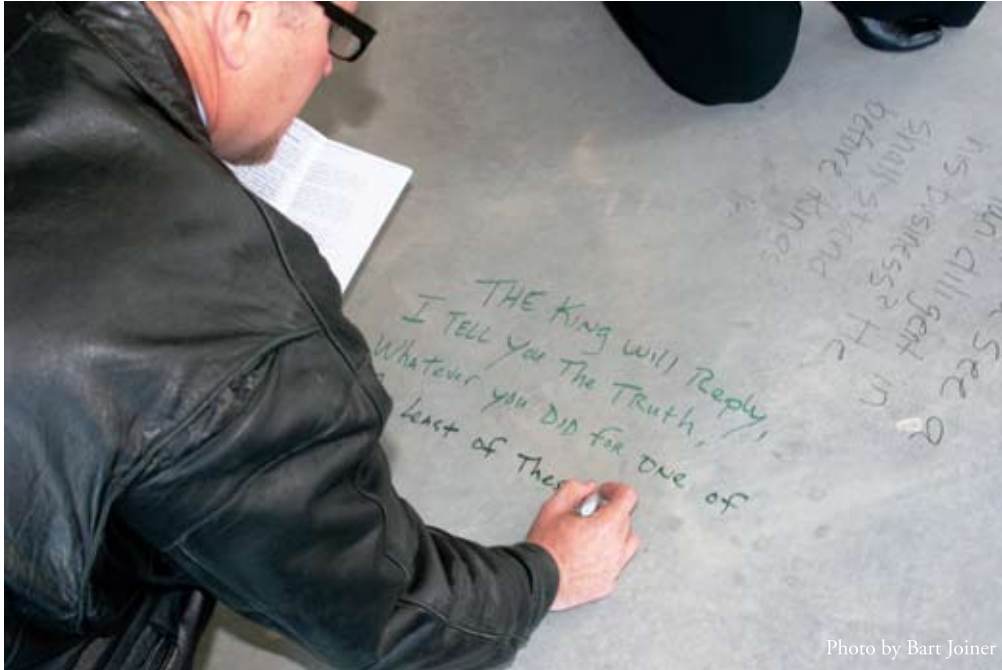


Photo by Bart Joiner

Tom Hoffmann writes a favorite Bible verse on the floor of Hoffmann’s new Palmdale office.

says. “Because we’ve grown our office, we can do more for the people who’ve helped us grow.”

The new location was chosen, in part, for its close proximity to the new Palmdale Regional Medical Center, scheduled to open later this year. Such a location, Joiner says, will be convenient for those in need of hospice care or end-of-life information.

Hoffmann founders and staff dedicated their new building on Feb. 17. Armed with heavy duty felt-tip pens, Hoffmann staffers “blessed” the building, writing warm thoughts, inspirational quotes and good wishes on the still unfinished walls and floors. Those sentiments will soon be covered with carpet and paint, but the prayers and wishes for a long

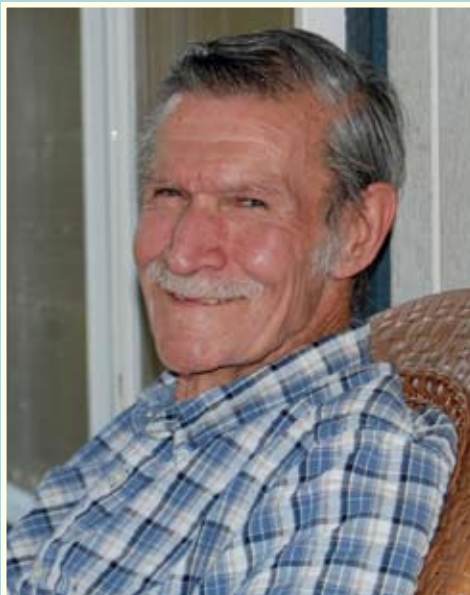
and happy stay at the new location will remain, Hoffmann Administrator Tom Hoffmann says.

“This new building says we’re investing in this area, we believe in this area, we want to care for the people in this area,” he says. “With God’s help we’ll be successful here for many more years.”

KindWords

We want to express our deepest gratitude for your wonderful care of our father during his last few weeks with us. We had no idea of the extensive resources that Hoffmann Hospice had to offer, the first being the people who work there.

Their dedication and sincerity was noticed by our entire family; most importantly by our dad, Rick Hinsley. He so appreciated the comfort and dignity that was shown to him by every member of the staff - from the first person to enter our home to the last, each was professional in every way possible.



Rick Hinsley

We were made to feel comfortable operating all the equipment and administering the drugs that were delivered to our home. The kindness and gentle voices of our team had a very calming effect on our family during a very difficult period of our lives. Hoffmann Hospice, you should be proud of who you are.

Please know that we will always have fond memories of our last days with our father, with our friends from Hoffmann playing a major role in his ability to leave with pride and dignity. Thank you so much.

The Hinsleys –
Brian, Kim and Megan

Avoiding the call to hospice

By Paula Span

What if I told you about an organization you could call when your elderly parent because so seriously ill that it appeared unlikely she'd recover?

What if I told you that this organization would send well trained nurses to see your parent, aides to lend a hand with daily care and a social worker to help the family grapple with emotional difficulties? That these folks would deliver equipment you might need – a hospital bed, say, or wheelchair – and all your parent's drugs? What if they'd also send a chaplain if you wanted one? And provide a nurse to call 24/7 when you had questions or problems? And volunteers who would stay with your parent while you took a few hours break, even if just for a long, quiet walk?

And what if I told you all this would cost you nothing; that Medicare would pay for it all? You'd pick up the phone, right? It's what caregivers so often yearn for and so seldom can locate: expertise, compassion, help that they can afford.

Now, what if I told you this organization was a hospice?

You might still call – the proportion of American deaths involving hospice care is climbing steadily. In 1998, when my mother was a hospice patient, the figure was only 18 percent; now it's nearly 40 percent, according to estimates by the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization.

But even if you did call, odds are you'd have waited so long that the hospice team would have very little time to do what it's good at doing –



providing care and comfort to the dying and their families. My mother, diagnosed with uterine cancer, was in hospice care for three months, thankfully. Overall, though, the median length of stay in hospice is just 20 days, and almost a third of patients enroll a week or less before they die.

Yet in surveys after patients' deaths, more than 98 percent of family members say they would recommend hospice to others.

Why do people wait so long to call? Why let what's invariably a wrenching time be even harder than it has to be?

Sometimes, simple misconceptions are to blame. People may think of hospice as a place rather than a service that aims to let people die in their homes. (Some hospices also operate residences.) Or they think hospice is for cancer patients, though in fact the majority of those in hospice have other terminal illnesses.

Doctors may neglect to mention hospice care, or even discourage it. (Maybe you've heard the grim joke: Why are coffins nailed shut? To keep doctors from administering more chemotherapy.)

A study by a Harvard Medical School team found that about half of patients with metastasized lung cancer, the leading cancer killer, didn't discuss hospice care with their doctors within four to seven months of diagnosis. Yet the average post-diagnosis survival for metastatic lung cancer is just four to eight months.

Sometimes, though, it's families who don't want to hear the word hospice. They think it's giving in, relinquishing hope.

So even if your physician will sign the form saying that in her best judgment, death is likely to occur within six months if the disease follows its normal course – and that's all that's needed to enroll in hospice – often it's the children who can't bear to acknowledge that a father probably won't rebound this time, that a mother is dying.

So families wait. And the parent dies anyway – maybe in pain that could have been eased, maybe with fears that could have been assuaged or lessened had hospice workers been able to offer more than brief crisis management.

How much hospice care is optimal? Hospice professionals say three months. But the median stay is less than three weeks.

It's a pity isn't it? Eleven years later, I still remember my mother's aide Terry, who sewed a small doughnut-like pillow to prevent pressures sores from developing on Mom's ear as she spent more time in bed. I wouldn't ever have thought of that, but I wasn't a specialist in end-of-life care. I was just glad we'd reached out to people who were.

This article first ran on May 26, 2009 in The New York Times blog, The New Old Age.

Touch therapist Volunteer of the Year

David Dowdy has enjoyed a number of careers, including stints in jobs like geology and steel fabrication. But his heart, he always knew, lay elsewhere.

Driven by a need to help others, Dowdy discovered the healing art of massage and began taking classes in 2006. Two years later, as a certified massage therapist specializing in Touch for the Terminally Ill, he began volunteering with Hoffmann Hospice, where he shares his skills with hospice patients.

His dedication to his patients and to his craft earned Dowdy Hoffmann's Volunteer of the Year award at the agency's annual Volunteer Recognition Banquet, April 22 at the Doubletree Hotel. Volunteer Coordinator Kim Pounder said Dowdy exemplifies the caring and commitment she looks for in a Hoffmann volunteer.



Hoffmann volunteer David Dowdy treats former patient Lorraine Dauwalder to a comforting massage in this 2008 photo.

"Dave sets aside one day a week for our patients; more if he's needed," Pounder says. "His passion for our patients and for what he does just pours out of him – I noticed that the first time I met him."

Pounder oversees the 60 volunteers who work directly with patients or at Hoffmann's Bakersfield office. Dowdy was one of several volunteers honored at this year's banquet. Margarita McNeil was also recognized for the 679 service hours she worked in 2009, while Althea Newhouse logged 311. Volunteer Carole Guillory was honored for 10 years of service.

Hoffmann's Palmdale volunteers were honored with a banquet of their own on April 20, at the Vista Golf Club, where Lisa Moulton, district representative for Sen. George Runner, presented each of the agency's 23 volunteers with certificates of appreciation.

Living the Dream

The night before Samuel Gonzalez set out on a two-day trip to Disneyland, he was so excited he couldn't sleep.

That's hardly unusual, considering Disneyland is a dream destination for kids the world over. The thing is, Gonzalez is no kid, though he does have four of his own he's crazy about.

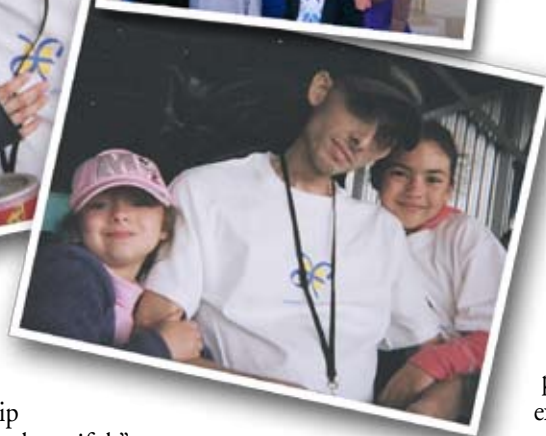
The 34-year-old Gonzalez, until recently a math teacher at Almond Tree Middle School in Delano, is a Hoffmann Hospice patient. Hoffmann nurses fell hard for the young father in February when he enrolled onto hospice service. When Gonzalez mentioned to his nurse he was planning to take his family on a day trip to Disneyland "in a few months," she knew a few months was not an option.

Enter the Dream Foundation, a wish-granting organization for adults with life-threatening illnesses. Within a day or two of Gonzalez's enrollment, Hoffmann staff submitted an emergency dream request to the Santa Barbara-based non-profit. The race to get the Gonzalez family to Disneyland was on.

As the foundation's dream coordinators worked feverishly to grant Gonzalez's wish, Hoffmann staff wondered if his rapidly declining health would allow him make the trip. Gonzalez, however, was determined to share with his children a trip they would never forget.

Two weeks later, with the blessing of his doctor and Hoffmann nurses, he did.

The morning of February 25, a shiny white limousine, courtesy of Hoffmann, pulled up to Gonzalez's Delano home. His children - Isaiah, 10; Karisia, 8; Samuel, 7 and Adalia, 6 - tumbled giggling into the limo as their proud dad walked slowly but steadily to the car. Gonzalez's beaming wife Adalia and best friend and caregiver Diego Diaz completed the family party. From that moment on, says a grateful



Adalia, the trip was "crazy beautiful."

"It was just - joy," she says "The experience of being there as a family, to be so free just to enjoy the being together. It was overwhelming."

Dream Foundation arranged for a two-night stay at the Ramada Maingate, across the street from Disneyland. There, the family found two days worth of park-hopper passes, vouchers for nearby restaurants and a \$500 stipend to cover meals and other expenses. They were also surprised by members of their extended family,

who, at their own expense, joined them at the park.

But that wasn't all. When Gonzalez family arrived at Disneyland, their first stop was City Hall, where a special Dream pass and Dream Foundation t-shirts were waiting. The pass worked like a magic ticket, ushering the family to the head of every line. With the gentle assistance of Disneyland staff, Gonzalez was able to share some of the park's most popular rides with his wife and children.

"They were so kind and patient," Adalia says Disney staff. "Because Samuel couldn't walk, they helped lift him from his wheelchair onto the rides."

Dream Foundation made 1,777 dreams come true in 2009, including 151 emergency dreams. The foundation works closely with hospice agencies throughout the United States and counts on nurses, social workers and family care givers for dream referrals. Communications Manager Erinn Lynch says the foundation will grant its 10,000th dream this year.

"Each one of those dreams matters to us," Lynch says. "The beauty of it is none of them are typical, but in essence they're all the same - people looking for a joy-filled reprieve from their illnesses."

A joy-filled reprieve is precisely what the Gonzalez family experienced, though Adalia says it took every ounce of her husband's strength to make it happen.

"He didn't care if he was comfortable or not, it was important to him to watch his kids enjoy this," she says. "That's how Sam is. That's his character."

Editor's note: Samuel Gonzalez passed away peacefully at home on March 29 surrounded by his family. For more information about Dream Foundation, visit www.dreamfoundation.org.



Hoffmann Bereavement Coordinator Katie Nelson shares a laugh Claude Greenhaw at a celebration honoring his life and volunteer service.

When Claude Greenhaw signed on as a volunteer with Hoffmann Hospice, he thought the weekly routine might help fill the empty hours left by the death of his wife. Before long, though, the spirit of volunteerism grabbed hold. He was hooked on service.

Six years later, Greenhaw, 78, still volunteers at Hoffmann, where he spends three mornings a week binding the *Patient and Family Handbooks* essential to Hoffmann's bereavement program. He's a regular and cheerful presence around Hoffmann's Bakersfield office, so friends and colleagues were shocked when, on February 18, he enrolled onto Hoffmann's service as a patient.

"I was so saddened by the news of Claude's cancer, but I was glad he was with us and chose to come on our service at the right time," Volunteer Coordinator Kim Pounder says. "I knew he was in good hands."

As news of Greenhaw's terminal diagnosis spread through the agency, Pounder and hospice founder Beth Hoffmann decided they would not wait to share their regard for the man who had given so much for so long. It was time, they decided, for a celebration to honor his life and service.

"Often, we don't talk about how great an impact people have on our lives until they're gone," Pounder says. "God gave us this incredible gift of time and he wants us to use that."



Congressman Kevin McCarthy honors Greenhaw's military and volunteer service with an American flag.

And so they did, welcoming about 60 of Greenhaw's family members, friends and colleagues to Hodel's in Bakersfield on March 27 for a luncheon celebration. Laughter and tears were the order of the day as guests shared fond memories and anecdotes.

"When I think of Claude, the first thing I think of is his legs," Beth Hoffmann told the crowd in reference to Greenhaw's tendency to wear shorts around the office. "Then I think of his smile and how that lights up a room and how work doesn't feel right when Claude's not there."

Celebrating honorable



by Marylee Shrider
Photos by Henry Barrios



Greenhaw and sweetheart Margarita McNeil. The couple's long-time friendship blossomed as Hoffmann volunteers.

One by one, guests took the microphone to praise Greenhaw's love of family, his work ethic and his fondness for fishing, old Westerns and a good joke. Greenhaw was also honored for his years of military service – from 1951 to 1960 he served in the U.S. Navy in a number of stations, including Japan, Guam, Saipan and Port Hueneme, California.

Congressman Kevin McCarthy honored Greenhaw's military and volunteer service with "thanks from a grateful nation" and an American flag that had flown over the nation's capitol. McCarthy was unable to attend the luncheon, but met earlier in the day with the veteran and his family at Greenhaw's home.

Greenhaw, a quiet man of few words, was deeply touched by the flag presentation, by the gift of a prayer quilt and by his day of celebration.

"Yeah, it was alright," a visibly moved Greenhaw said. "Sometime you just don't know until something like this how



Beth Hoffmann and Claude Greenhaw.

many people love you and care about you."

It was Family Support Coordinator Roger Doyle who may have best captured what Greenhaw and his service has meant to Hoffmann and to grieving families who have found comfort in the thousands of Hoffmann's handbooks bound by Greenhaw. Doyle's words, included below, were a poignant and fitting end to a moving day.

"There are hundreds, probably thousands of these books on coffee tables and in shelves – they're everywhere. And guess whose fingerprints are all over these books? Claude's fingerprints. And because we are the hands of God, Claude's fingerprints look an awful lot like God's fingerprints. That's what the

body of Christ looks like – every day people like Claude. So, today, Claude, we say thanks. Thanks for showing up. Thanks for making those books. Thank you for inspiring us to give more of ourselves."

MetLife: "Giving back what we've been given"

Host a tournament and they will come.

That was the conclusion agents of MetLife Reverse Mortgage came to when they started offering their services in Bakersfield 18 months ago. Hosting a golf tournament, they reasoned, would help get the word out about an important financial tool while supporting one of Bakersfield's deserving nonprofits.

That nonprofit, as it turned out, was Hoffmann Hospice.

The first MetLife Reverse Mortgage golf tournament, held March 24 at the Links at RiverLakes Ranch, raised \$3,250 in support of Hoffmann and the end-of-life services it offers terminally ill patients and their families. Melanie Parks, area manager of northern California for MetLife Reserve Mortgage, says with forty-four golfers participating, the first-time effort was such a success that organizers will



Golfers perfect their putts prior to the MetLife Tournament.

consider making the tournament an annual event.

"We thought it was a fun idea because a lot of our clients play golf," Parks says. "Then we decided we wanted to donate the proceeds to a deserving community partner."

Hoffmann was chosen as the tournament's beneficiary at the advice of clients who think highly of the non-profit's end-of-life services, Parks says. That gelled with Parks and fellow agents Karen Faulkner and Sandy Odom, each of whom have had loved ones on Hoffmann's service.

Organizing the tournament, which started in January, was a lot of work, but well worth the time and effort, Parks says.

"Hoffmann is a very deserving agency," she says. "We were very excited to give back to them some of what they've given to us."

Hoffmann revving up for 7th annual Charity Poker Run

It's been seven years since motorcycle-loving mom Linnie Moore Valenzuela passed away, but for her family, friends and fellow motorcycle enthusiasts the memories live on.

Linnie's memory is celebrated every year at the annual Charity Poker Run started by her parents, Gordon and Nancy Moore. The Moores founded the run to memorialize their daughter and to benefit Hoffmann Hospice, who cared for Linnie before her death from cancer at age 26.

This year's run is 9 a.m. on May 15 and will once again be hosted by the Antelope Valley Harley Davidson at 1759 West Avenue in Lancaster. Entry fees are \$25 for the first hand and \$10 for each additional hand.

All proceeds from the run support the many end-of-life services offered by Hoffmann, which took on the task of organizing the run two years ago so the Moores could participate in the event. Hoffmann Community Liaison Brandi Wheeler says the number of riders doubled at last year's run, a



Linnie Moore Valenzuela

jump she expects to see again this year.

"We've been letting people know about the run and reaching out to biking organizations," Wheeler says. "It's a big goal, but we want 300 riders out there this year."

Last year, the run featured 152 riders and raised more than \$6,000 for hospice care. The event continues to grow in popularity, attracting riders from throughout the Antelope Valley and beyond.

The reason for such interest? The woman and the cause, Wheeler says.

"Linnie was very young when she passed away and left behind a young daughter," she says. "Motorcycles were her passion and people want to rally behind her family. And hospice really is a beautiful cause."

The event is open to motorcycles, cars and "anything that moves," Wheeler says. Post run activities include food, music and raffle prizes. For more information, call Brandi Wheeler at 662-272-2355.

GRIEF SUPPORT GROUP MEETINGS

Bakersfield

When: Tuesdays at 6 p.m. and Thursdays at 10 a.m.
Where: Hoffmann Hospice
8501 Brimhall Road, Bldg. 100, Bakersfield

Children's Grief Support

When: Thursdays, 5:30 to 6:30 p.m.
Where: Hoffmann Hospice
8501 Brimhall Road, Bldg. 100, Bakersfield

Palmdale

Day Grief Support

When: Wednesdays, 10 to 11 a.m.
Where: Horizon Community Church
1850 East Avenue R, Palmdale

Evening Grief Support

When: Wednesdays, 5:30 to 7 p.m.
Where: Hoffmann Hospice
1543 East Palmdale Blvd., Suite N, Palmdale

Kern River Valley

When: 10 to 11 a.m., the first and third Friday of each month.
Where: 6048 B Lake Isabella Blvd. (in the True Value Hardware Plaza.)

Hoffmann's grief support meetings are free and open to the public. You need not have had a loved one on our service to attend.
For more information call: Bakersfield/Kern River Valley (661) 410-1010 • Palmdale (661) 272-2355

As Kern County's only locally founded non-profit hospice, Hoffmann Hospice cares for all who need our services, regardless of their ability to pay. We are able to fulfill this mission based on the availability of funds donated by generous individuals, businesses and foundations in our community. Hoffmann Hospice wishes to thank the following donors who gave from December 2009 through March of this year.

Names in bold are those in whose memory donations were made.

**Dorothy
"June" Aaron:**

Frankie Berchtold, Jim Burke
Ford, Harvey Hall, Jet Building,
Patricia Loyd, Theresa Trigueiro Revo-
cable Trust, Dee & Linda Wong, EA & Betty
Yaksitch. **Daniel Maitia:** James Aguilar, Michel
Ansolabehere LP, Henriette Ansolabehere, Michael
& Kathleen Ansolabehere, Janine Araneta, Shirley Ariztia, Darrell & Susan Atkin-
son, Antonio & Maria Bessonart, Mrs. John Bidart Sr. & Family, Lucien & Jeanne
Billet, Carl & Marian Bowser, Jerry & Betty Chicca, Harry & Mary Chicklenis, Clerou Tire
Co., Myrna Collins, Colombo Construction Co., Yvonne Cuburu, Jean & Marie
Curutchague, Michael Cutbirth, Ray & Joan Dezember, Lorenzo & Marie Echevere, Electric Motor
Works, Inc., Errol John Clare Trust, Gracian Errea, Joe & Sharron Esnoz, Dominic & Barbara Eyhera-
bide, Jim & Cyndi Eyherabide, Greg & Marilyn Fowler, Jean & Catherine Gastelluberry, Liana Gutier-
rez, Kathy Hahn, Michael Hale, Warren & Catherine Haupt, Bertha Hill Bruschi, Francisco & Maria
Iturriria, Miguel & Yvonne Iturriria, Germaine & Chris Jacobs, Doug Kaiser, Phil & Pam Klassen,
Michael Kundert, Diane S. Lake Family, Marianne Laxague, Josefa Maitia, RE & Angie
Martin, Roma McCaffrey, Jean & Noeline Mocho, Barbara Monan, Vincent & Meggan Phillips,
Michel & Jeanne Plaa, Mercedes Recatune, Richard & Dawn Rhodes, Ernst & Loellyn
Schroeder, Donna Sill, Steve Smoot, David & Karen Stanley,
Richard & Andrea Stricklen, Donald
& Yvonne Tillman, Don &
Donna Toretta, Torigiani
Farms, Betty Tritten,
Fred Valentich,
Mike & Carmen
West.



BATTLE OF THE BULGE SURVIVOR

"just lucky"



densely forested Ardennes Mountains. There, on Dec. 16, the German army launched its ferocious blitzkrieg against unprepared American forces.

"The Germans wanted to push us back to Antwerp, Belgium, where they could get to our supplies of fuel, food and ammo," Lenke says. "They damned near did."

The battle lasted six weeks. In the end, a crucial German shortage of fuel and the gallantry of American troops thwarted the German attack. It was the costliest action ever fought by the U.S. Army, which suffered about 80,000 casualties. How did Lenke survive?

"Just lucky," he says, dabbing his eyes.

The following year - three years, three months and 10 days after answering his country's call - Lenke was honorably discharged and headed for home, taking with him campaign ribbons representing three major battles. He was America bound when he heard the news that Patton, the "smart general who got me home," had died in a car accident.

"I remembered the last time I saw him in Germany and how much he loved the ordinary soldier," he says. "He took a lot of guff for slapping that G.I. back then, but if you are a soldier you know why he did it."

Lenke returned to wife Wilma, found a career with the Richfield Oil Company and had two daughters, Kathy Lenke and Linda Paregian. A grandfather of four and great-grandfather to four more, Lenke now lives in Bakersfield with Kathy who, with help from Wilma, is her dad's caregiver.

At 88, Lenke is the only surviving charter member of the Frazier Park VFW Post 9791. He enjoys reminiscing about the days when streetcars ran down Chester Avenue and hamburgers were just a nickel, but as the ranks of WWII veterans dwindle, he's keenly aware of the importance of accounts from his days on the battlefield. And he's touched by those who express gratitude for his service.

"A lot of the time, I get a handshake and a thank you," he says. "I like that."

It's been 65 years since Ralph Lenke fought in the most desperate battle of WWII, but he recalls every moment with crystal clarity.

He remembers the freezing cold, still hears the gun fire, still feels the near misses. Still sees the broken and lifeless bodies of his comrades in arms.

The powerful memories bring tears to Lenke's eyes though he is proud of the days when, with thousands of other American soldiers, he fought the Battle of the Bulge. These days, as a patient on service with Hoffmann Hospice, Lenke tends to dwell on more pleasant recollections. Even so, he remains ready to share his war-time experiences lest younger generations forget the sacrifices made in the Ardennes Mountains of France, Belgium and

Luxembourg in December of 1944.

"Our billets were snow and mud," Lenke says. "It was always about 10 to 15 degrees above zero and we didn't have the proper clothing. We lost a lot of men to the fighting, but lost some to the freezing temperatures."

Lenke was running a bowling alley in Lebec when, at age 23, he was drafted into the U.S. Army Signal Corps, the Army's communications division. He served at a number of stateside posts before shipping out to England in 1941.

"I was there in London during the Blitz," Lenke says of the months-long German bombing of Britain. "I watched the buzz bombs fall."

Lenke's battalion, the 94th Signal Battalion, pushed its way across France to join Gen. George Patton's famed 3rd Army in the rugged and

Living life on his own terms

Living off the grid was a way of life for Milton Davis, a man who wouldn't think of letting a little thing like terminal illness keep him from living his dream.

For the last 25 years, almost until his death on November 26, 2009, Davis lived in the shadow of Piute Mountain above Walker Basin. The rugged 80 acres he called home suited the affable Davis, who loved to work the land, often maintaining the area's dirt roads with his trusty bulldozer.

Davis bought his mountain property in 1981, after retiring from his job as an industrial arts teacher at Taft College. Married for 56 years, the couple lived there until Sally's death five years ago. The fiercely independent Davis continued to live in their mountain home after his leukemia diagnosis in March of 2009. He even put the kibosh on hospice care – at first.

“When the nurse first called, I told her I didn't need hospice,” Davis said in October. “When they explained it would just become part of my routine, well, I thought I could put up with that.”

So he did, charming Hoffmann's Kern River Valley staff. Nearby friends and neighbors checked regularly on Davis as he continued to work his property, daily driving his Kubota utility vehicle from project to project. That Davis wanted to end his days in the mountains came as no surprise to his children – son Wayne Davis of Bakersfield and daughter Vickie Davis of Taft. Vickie



Milt Davis and his dog Ebony.

Davis says they both accepted their dad's independent streak a long time ago.

“He always wanted to live in the mountains – he fought tooth and nail for it,” she says. “There were a couple neighbors that gave him some grief, a few fires and floods – my dad was a fighter.”

He was also a friend, known to most in the area as “Dad,” Davis says. He was born with a spirit of adventure, coming on his own to California from New Mexico when only 16. He graduated from Lemoore High

School, then earned a master's degree at Fresno State. He served in the U.S. Navy during WWII and, later in life, discovered a passion for prospecting. That passion led to a few prospecting trips to Alaska and back to Taft College, where he taught his hobby and founded the Taft Prospector's Club.

It was a long, full and happy life, lived exactly the way he wanted.

“He had those years of being just what he wanted to be,” she says. “You have to be happy about that.”



Davis feeds his koi fish.

Photos by Dan Ocampo

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A marriage made in the mail



enlisting the help of a Navy chaplain to propose to Doris.

“It was the only way to get around the censors - they really cut up the letters,” Ritchie says. “If you got the chaplain’s approval, you could get them through without all that.”

Ritchie asked Doris to move to California and marry him.

She said yes to the move and the marriage and Ritchie sent her the money for a train ticket.

He made it home to California in time for Thanksgiving and in late February of 1946 Doris boarded a train for the three-and-a-half day trip out west. He promised to wear his uniform, she told him to look for the girl in a red wool coat.

When Doris arrived at Union Depot in Los Angeles, Ritchie and his mom were there to greet her. She stepped off the train and into his arms for their first kiss.

“I thought she looked beautiful,” Ritchie says.

Twenty-four days later the couple married in the chapel of the church his parents had married in two decades before. The wedding party of nine went to a restaurant afterwards to celebrate. Sixty-seven years later, the marriage – which produced 4 children, 20 grandchildren and 15 great grandchildren – is still going strong.

Doris now cares for Ritchie in the Palmdale home they’ve shared for 30 years. Ritchie, diagnosed last year with renal

failure, took hemodialysis treatments for a while, but says he stopped when the dialysis began to make him feel worse instead of better. When he made the decision to go on hospice, he knew it was the right thing to do.

“As soon as I signed up with hospice, I felt such a relief,” he says. “It was like a burden was lifted from my whole body.”

Doris bravely supports her husband’s decision.

Dean Ritchie was a young sailor stationed in Australia in 1943, when a fellow swabby complained that his girl back in Michigan wasn’t writing enough.

Always looking out for his pals, Ritchie offered to write the girl to remind her she had a fighting man awaiting a sweet word or two from across the sea. The friend agreed and Ritchie wrote the letter.

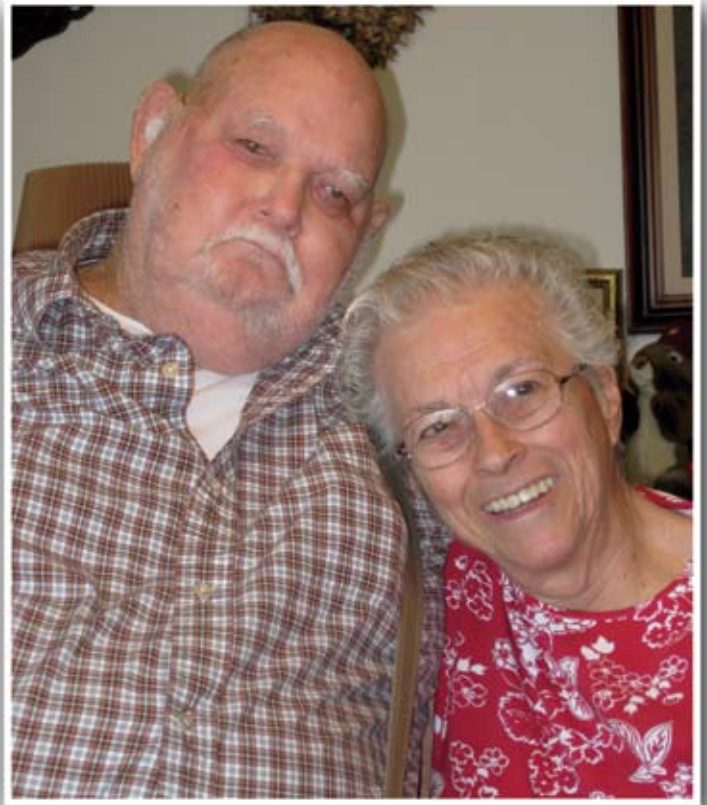
Six months later, a three-page response arrived for the friend. A six-page response arrived for Ritchie.

Ritchie, now a Hoffmann Hospice patient, still laughs when retelling the story of how he met the girl destined to be his. Only 19 when he wrote that first letter, Ritchie says it was his prose that won him a wife. Doris Ritchie – 15-year-old Doris Koch at the time – says she was intrigued, but not immediately smitten by his missives.

“There was a war on,” she says matter-of-factly. “I thought it was my patriotic duty to write.”

Still, it wasn’t long before Ritchie became the exclusive recipient of Doris’ letters and affections. They each had only a small wallet-size photo of the other, but that was enough. When Ritchie began ending his letters with “oceans of love and a kiss on every wave,” Doris fell for her seafaring friend.

The two continued to write for 18 months, through assignments that took Ritchie from Australia to the Admiralty Islands to Subic Bay in the Philippines. In the fall of 1945, Ritchie took the plunge,



Dean & Doris Ritchie

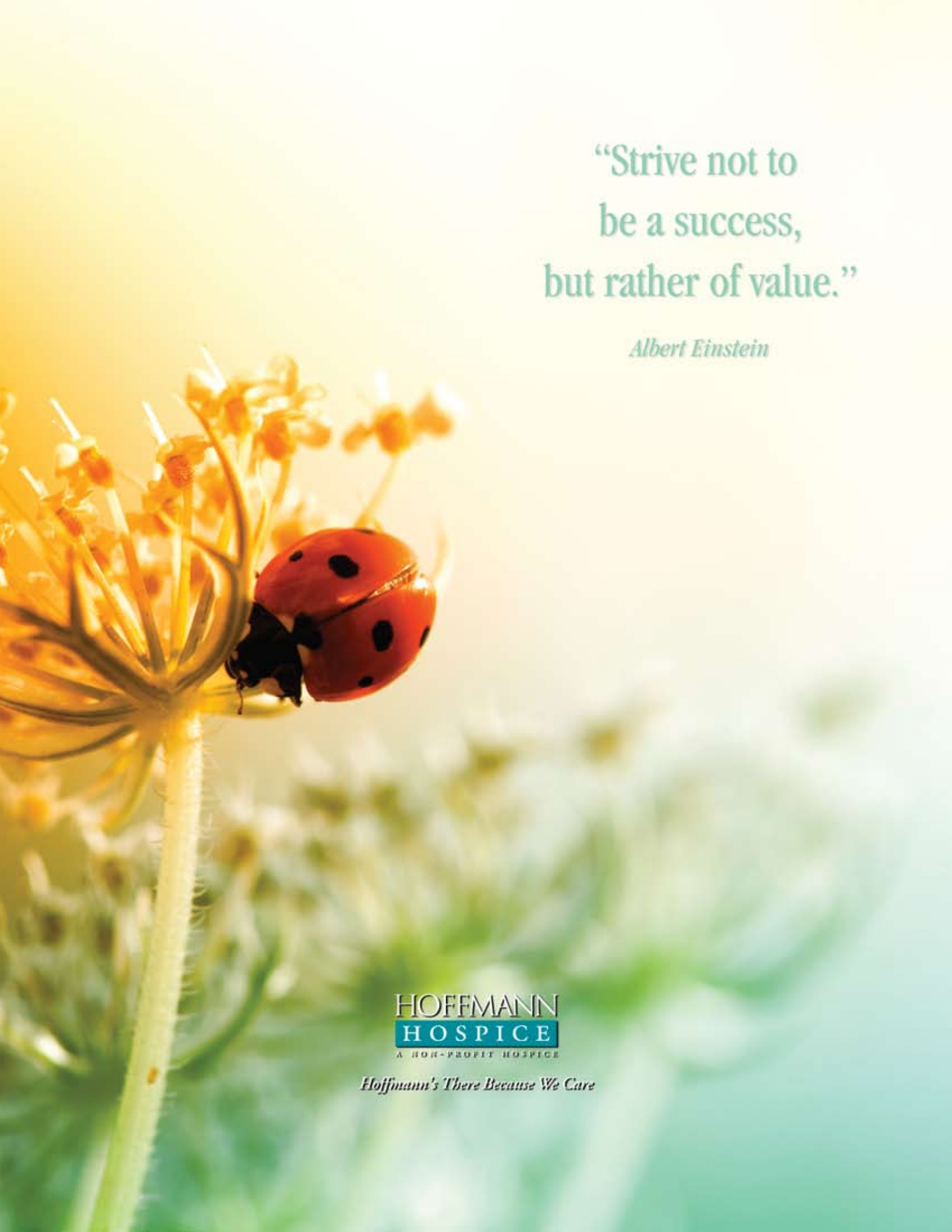
The letters written by a young sailor with a hopeful heart are tucked safely away, still treasured by his bride. His eyesight failing, Ritchie’s writing days are over, but he still marvels at the romance that started with a letter and lasted a lifetime.

“We got together through the power of the written word,” he says. “We turned out to be soulmates.”

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A close-up photograph of a ladybug on a flower stem. The ladybug is red with black spots and is positioned on the left side of the frame, facing right. The flower stem is light green and has several small, yellowish-orange flowers at the top. The background is a soft, out-of-focus mix of light green and yellow, suggesting a bright, sunny day.

“Strive not to
be a success,
but rather of value.”

Albert Einstein

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