

Peaceful Endings New Beginnings



Dr. Amanda Sommerfeldt
Medical Director
Hospice of Mercy

John and Pat Van Sichel believed in preparation.

So, early in their marriage they discussed how they would approach a life-threatening illness. Neither wanted heroic life-saving measures and both preferred a peaceful ending in the comfort of their own home.

John had a strong family history of cancer. He realized getting cancer was a strong possibility – one that became a reality when he was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer at age 61 in 2010.

For two years, the Van Sichels rode the rollercoaster of doctors' visits, treatments, good news and, eventually, not-so-good news. In May 2012, John's doctor told him it was time to get his affairs in order and to think about seeking hospice services.

"We thought hospice was care for when you were at the very end. But the doctor told us there are other things you get from hospice that help before end of life," says Pat, a 15-year breast cancer survivor. "We've always gone to Mercy. So, naturally, that's who we

called for help."

The Van Sichels began meeting regularly with Hospice of Mercy nurse Kay Limkemann in their Cedar Rapids home. One morning, John awoke disoriented and Pat quickly realized she couldn't handle her 6-foot, 210-pound husband on her own.

Pat called the Hospice of Mercy 24-hour line. An on-call hospice nurse came over and gently suggested that John could benefit from the special care at the Dennis and Donna Oldorf Hospice House of Mercy. No, that wasn't part of the Van Sichels' original plan. But Pat says now that it was the best possible solution.

Hospice of Mercy Medical Director, Dr. Amanda Sommerfeldt, cared for John during his stay. "Hospice of Mercy is dedicated to high-quality patient care, serving patients and families with

compassion and integrity," she says. "Dying patients deserve compassion, dignity, comfort and respect."

John and Pat's daughter, Carrie Campbell, says, "Dr. Sommerfeldt was exactly what we

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Pat Van Sichel enjoys traveling and spending time with her grandchildren, including 18-month-old Owen. She says she misses her husband every day, but takes peace that he was able to live his final days surrounded by those he loved in a comfortable, caring environment like the Dennis and Donna Oldorf Hospice House of Mercy.

needed. She gave us the information we needed to have to make good decisions – but she delivered it with so much compassion."

Pat also appreciated Dr. Sommerfeldt's expertise. "She talked to him like he was able to help make decisions and spoke in a soft, quiet voice. After she met with John, she led us into the hallway to carry on a conversation rather than just talking over him. She was extremely helpful – straightforward and honest. We may not have wanted to hear it, but we needed to hear the facts."

John died one week after he entered the Hospice House in September 2012.

Pat is grateful John went to the Hospice House. "It wasn't my wish to go there, but in the end it worked the best. Even after we left, they were there to help with any wish we had. They are all very special people," Pat says, adding, "We went back this year for Love Lights. All of a sudden this voice cried out from the crowd and it was our Hospice House nurse, Jennifer! She remembered us, even though so many people go through there and we weren't even there that long."

Love Light trees are the center of an annual December celebration at the Hospice House. Each Love Light signifies a gracious gift of support to Hospice of Mercy given in honor of a loved one.

Pat felt so positive about her experience with Hospice of Mercy that she purchased a brick with John's name on it for the walkway at Hospice House.

To learn more about Hospice of Mercy, visit www.mercycare.org/hospice.



If you would like to honor, remember or celebrate the lives of those you love by purchasing a brick for the Hospice House walkway or a Love Light, call the Mercy Foundation office at (319) 398-6206.

