

## Bill and Ailie



Ailie and Pat Mehnert

Bill and I were married for 38 years. He was a gentle man — quiet, patient and kind, without a harsh word for anyone at anytime. Both Scandinavians from Minnesota, we moved to Boulder at the call of IBM and raised our five children in the home I live in today. The home where Bill died peacefully while in the compassionate care of the extraordinary people of HospiceCare.

He was 63 when we learned that the renal cancer he had battled years earlier had spread to his brain and spine. The news was devastating. He underwent more treatment and multiple surgeries but nothing really helped. Eventually, Bill realized that a cure was not to be and chose HospiceCare.

That was in the spring. And surprisingly, that's when things took a turn for the better.

I'll never forget the day we arrived home from the hospital to meet our hospice nurse, Pat Mehnert. No sooner had we come in the door than she turned our family room into a cheerful sanctuary for Bill. She positioned his bed so that he could enjoy the view of our garden and the chatter of the birds flocking to the feeder at the window. She arranged a space for his family and friends to relax and visit. She just went out of her way to create a calm environment where Bill's comfort and peace were the top priorities.

As far as I'm concerned, Pat was a miracle worker. She was just so kind, so competent. Over the six months that Bill was a HospiceCare patient, she became like family to me and my children, not only caring for the man we all loved, but for the rest of us as well. I honestly don't know what we would have done without Pat.

And the same could be said for the rest of the HospiceCare team. Like the lovely nursing assistant who shared such a special bond with Bill that when he died, she wrote a beautiful poem about him. The wonderful massage therapist who worked her gentle magic on Bill, then turned and offered her soothing touch to me. And the special volunteer who regularly gave me the brief respite I needed from my responsibilities as Bill's caregiver. I will be forever grateful to every one of these extraordinary people. Because of them, because of HospiceCare, Bill died the way he lived: on his terms, in his home, with his family all around him.

I remember the last few hours well. With her usual compassion, Pat had let us know that the end was near. We were sitting vigil when Bill's dear friend came to say his goodbye. Though he was very weak and his eyes were closed, Bill lifted his hand and waved a touching farewell in return. Or perhaps this gesture was actually a hello to someone else, someone the rest of us couldn't see. Ten minutes later, Bill took his last breath.

Thanks to HospiceCare, Bill's was a peaceful, dignified death. I take great solace in this. I believe that everyone who is dying should have such a comfortable, loving experience. I miss him dearly. But it comforts me to know he had the very best care and a very good death.