



Mike Ross/staff photo


JOHN STEVENS, above, was an avid fisherman who suffered from inoperable brain cancer. One of his dreams was to be out on the sea one last time, a dream that he achieved with the help of hospice volunteer Aaron Silberdick last fall. Below, Stevens shares fishing stories with Silberdick, left, aboard the charter boat "Seafari."



The death of John Stevens

How hospice helped one man cope with the end of his life

A four-part series



The last fishing trip

Hospice volunteers a vital cog

Part 2

Editor's note about this series: For many with a terminal illness, dying means more than just a loss of life. It can mean a loss of dignity in the days, weeks, and months before death as the body succumbs. It also can mean financial and spiritual ordeals confronting patient and family.

In this special series, *The Death of John Stevens*, *Foster's Sunday Citizen* presents the story of a Dover man diagnosed with a terminal illness who, with the help of Seacoast Hospice, lived life as fully as possible before he died on Feb. 13.

By allowing us to tell his story, John Stevens hoped others would understand that no one has to struggle with their final days alone.

By **SEAN MURPHY**
Staff Writer

John arrives at the dock on time, armed with a cup of coffee and a box full of Munchkins. The nor'easter that brought torrential rain, heavy winds, and high seas to the area the day before has blown itself out, and there isn't a cloud in the sky.

But it's fall, and despite the warm sun the air blowing across the water is chilly enough to wear a hat. John is wearing a baseball cap emblazoned with

- Week One:** When Stevens learned he was terminally ill, he turned to hospice for help.
- Week Two:** Volunteers meet the day-to-day needs of patients.
- Week Three:** A social worker offers support and advice on practical matters like expenses.
- Week Four:** Nurses focus on the physical needs, while a counselor helps patients cope with death.

"Ireland," a symbol of his ever-present love for the country.

As the 44-foot fishing charter is untied, he knows the likelihood that he will catch something today is slim. Of course, any recreational fisherman, including John, would protest that's not the point, and today it's even

★ **Hospice**

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By **KATHY**
Associated F

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A naturalized was born Mohammed is most-wanted li had a hand i Qaida's most n The U.S. gc offered a rewa million for infc to his capture.

Mohammed i al-Qaida figure Pakistan. He Saturday in Ra near the Paki Islamabad,

★ 9/11 ar



Silberdick, left, is jiggling for mackerel off the stern of charter boat "Seafari" in Portsmouth Harbor.

Mike Ross/
staff photos



"You just sit there and think and look at the water and watch the boats go by and relax."

— JOHN STEVENS,
Hospice care recipient

Hospice: Volunteers provide a vital service

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not the point, and today it's even less of an issue.

"You just sit there and think and look at the water and watch the boats go by and relax," he says, his voice trailing along like a line in the water.

If it weren't for hospice services, John would most likely not be looking at the water today.

It's been more than a year since John has been able to go fishing.

His favorite spot is about 5 miles from his house, but since his legs weakened, walking that

far has been out of the question, let alone walking back.

And fishing off a boat in the harbor? Forget it.

But thanks to Norman Silberdick of Hampton, it's a reality.

He works as an investment banker, but also volunteers to assist hospice patients for Seacoast Hospice.

Currently, he has been assigned to see to all of John's day-to-day, non-medical needs.

That could include mowing lawns, cleaning out sheds, doing household chores, or even just sitting and talking for a while.

"You learn a lot about yourself in the process, whether you're really cut out for (giving hospice care). Not everyone is."

— NORMAN SILBERDICK,
Hospice care provider

In the past few weeks, Silberdick, 60, has helped John and has just spent a lot of time with John, who lives with his

wife who works five days a week.

In many ways, Silberdick seems to be a good match for John. They are close to the same age, and Silberdick's manner is

upbeat, yet tempered and reserved, much like John himself.

Both he and John agree that the two have plenty to talk about, and a lot of things in common.

Silberdick started working as a hospice volunteer in the early 1990s.

He does not get paid for helping John out.

"I wanted to find something to do for community service on a one-on-one basis," he said.

On a suggestion from his doctor, Silberdick looked into hospice work, and signed up for a 16-week course the program put on.

He and 10 to 12 other people engaged in role-playing exercises, sensitivity training, listening skills, and other activities designed to test the volunteers' mettle.

Susan Cole, Director of Seacoast Hospice, said the organization employs as many as 210 unpaid volunteers, about 40 of whom do work similar to Silberdick's.

The average assignment for these volunteers is three to four months.

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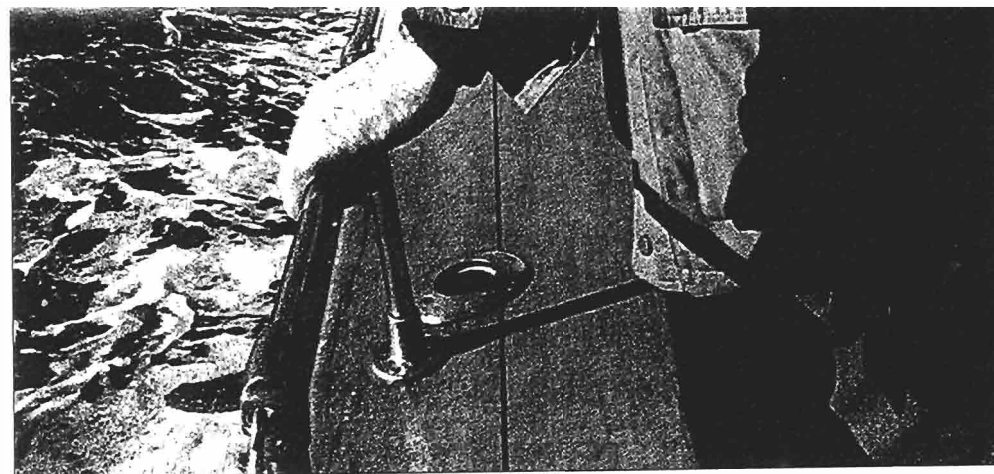
**TRUTH: MOST WOMEN
KNOW THAT HEART
DISEASE IS THE
KILLER OF WOMEN**

WOMEN'S HEART INITIATIVE LECTURES

Week three: A social worker offers support and advice on practical matters like expenses.

Week four: Nurses focus on the physical needs, while a counselor helps patients cope with death.

Portsmouth harbor. Right, Stevens looks out on the harbor.



Mike Ross/
staff photos

It makes me sad, that I may never see this again. It was a good day out, though. I really enjoyed it."

— JOHN STEVENS,
Hospice care recipient

Hospice: Volunteers make last days better

Hospice options in the area

There are approximately 3,200 hospice service groups available nationwide, through area hospitals and health care centers, as well as nonprofit and for-profit groups and organizations. Below is a list of some of the hospice care providers in the Seacoast and Lakes Region, along with a list of Web sites.

Seacoast Hospice

642 Central Ave., Dover — 750-0332
10 Hampton Road, Exeter — 778-7391
1039 Islington Street, Suite 202, Portsmouth — (800)416-9207

Your VNA

178 Farmington Road, Rochester — 332-1133

Hospice of York

5 Hospital Drive, York, Maine — (207) 363-7000

Community Health and Hospice Inc.

780 North Main St., Laconia — 524-8444, (800) 244-8549

VNA-Hospice of Southern Carroll County & Vicinity, Inc.

South Main Street, Wolfeboro — 603-569-2729, 603-569-1590

Wentworth Homecare & Hospice

113 New Rochester Road, Suite #4, Dover — 603 742-7921

Portsmouth Home Health and Hospice Services

95 Albany Street, Unit 11, Portsmouth — 603 436-0815

On the Web:

Seacoast Hospice:
www.seacoasthospice.org

Your VNA:

www.yournva.org

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During that time, they are expected to forge a bond with the patient, a bond that is ended in death.

"When you agree to do this, that's part of what you have to expect," he said.

Silberdick said going into the relationship knowing what will ultimately happen helps, too.

"There's such a strong emotional relationship (in a family), that the effect is totally different on you than it is with a friend," he said.

Not that it's easy. Silberdick said he reacts like anyone else who loses a loved one when one of his patients dies.

"You feel a sense of loss for the person you've had the relationship with," he said.

Silberdick said he never talks with anyone about personal conversations he has with John, but he often talks about his volunteer work with his family.

"They understand what I do, and they support it," he said.

Silberdick said he usually takes a couple of months off from service between assign-

"This is life and death. The other (job, in banking) has a life and death aspect to it, but it's a financial life and death."

— NORMAN SILBERDICK,
Hospice care provider

ments, to collect himself.

For him, that often includes quite a few hours playing tennis, his personal way of coping.

"You learn a lot about yourself in the process, whether you're really cut out for this. Not everyone is," he said.

But Silberdick is. He visits John about once a week, for anywhere from one to two hours at a time and does whatever errands and chores John can't do now.

Sometimes all they do is talk, and when they do, they talk about what two friends might talk about: family, hobbies, tales from days gone by.

And, of course, fishing. Today, Silberdick is using a personal connection to a char-

ter fishing company to take John out.

As the boat chugs through the water, John points to spots where he has been. There's the Goat Island Bridge, connecting New Castle to the mainland. John caught a 49-inch striper there once.

And, unlike some anglers, you believe John's fish stories. Not only does he tell them in his trademark casual way that makes them unquestionable, but he says quite frankly that he doesn't need to lie about catching "the big one."

"I don't have anybody to impress, so I don't really give a damn," he said.

No, John fishes for himself, and seems very much at peace,

staring out at the morning sun and taking in the scenery.

"It makes me sad, that I may never see this again," he said. "It was a good day out, though. I really enjoyed it."

For Silberdick, helping people like John gives him a sense of giving back to the community, and it has taught him a lot about life and himself.

His experiences, he said, have shown him "I deal very well under extra pressure, and I keep my wits about me."

Silberdick said he has stress and pressure in his regular job, but it's on a different plane.

"This is life and death," he said of hospice work. "The other (job, in banking) has a life and death aspect to it, but it's a financial life and death."

Silberdick also said it has taught him to listen more, and have more patience, especially in his own personal life, with his family.

"I appreciate life a lot, every day that I live," he said.

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