

'California Slim' dies at 66

SANTA CRUZ — Bob Rowe, the college history instructor who graduated to become "California Slim," the Pacific Garden Mall's best known street minstrel for more than a decade, died Tuesday in Santa Cruz. He was 66.

He was playing at the Poet and Patriot pub up until a month ago, although he had begun experiencing back pains in the fall. He was diagnosed as having bone cancer and after a brief hospitalization he died at his beachside Santa Cruz home.

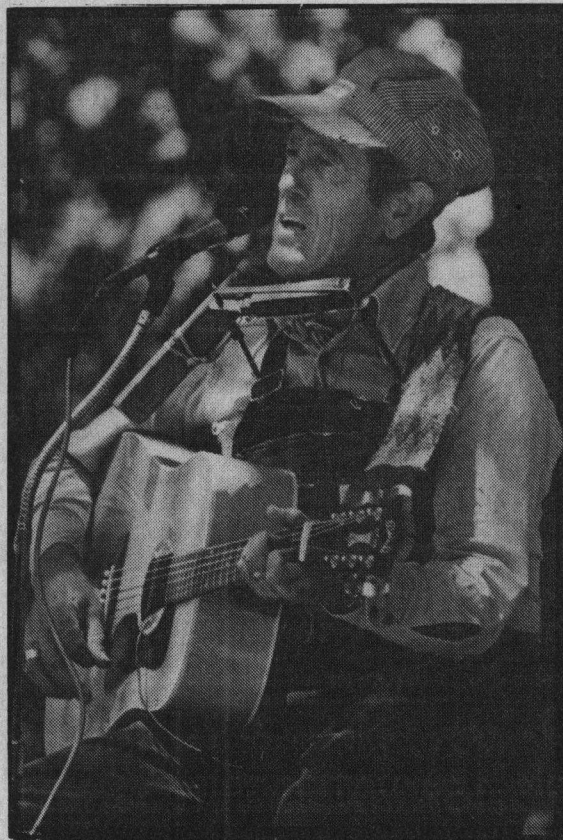
Dressed in well-worn Stetson and jean jacket, his harmonica around his neck, sometimes with a scuba-tank-powered train whistle at his feet to accompany his Jimmy Rodgers train songs, Rowe's golden voice accompanied the street dance and changes in the downtown business district throughout the '80s. In the weeks following the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake, he quickly relocated on what was left of the Mall, often playing front of empty storefronts to the occasional passerby.

During better times on the Mall, Rowe's audience ranged from young children of shoppers to street people, whose concerns he frequently voiced. But unlike other street musicians, he used the money thrown into his guitar case to finance three albums of songs ranging from folk and country and western to standards including "The Days of Wine and Roses" and "Some Enchanted Evening."

A native of Ridgefield, Wa., he worked in the Oregon logging industry while he was growing up and was a Merchant Marine cook during World War II. His career as an educator spanned 35 years, first as a high school teacher in Oregon and later as a teacher at West Valley College in Cupertino. There, his classes included American History and the History of Folk Music.

He was an avid sportsman, a scuba diver, Hobie Cat sailor, a member of the Imperial Courts Tennis Club and Seascape Tennis Club as well as the Sea and Tree Dance Club.

He is survived by his wife, Jean Rowe of Santa Cruz; sons, Robert M. Rowe of San Francisco and Patrick C. Rowe of Rohnert Park; daughter, Jennifer L. Uppendahl of Chandler, Ariz.; stepson, Galen Cram of San Diego; stepdaughters, Diana Reiff of Woodland and Cynthia Grady of Ben Lomond;



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel file

Street musician Bob Rowe, 'California Slim,' was the voice of Pacific Garden Mall.

sisters, Doris White of San Bruno, Ethel Reed of St. Helens, Ore., and Josephine House of Newport, Ore.; and nine grandchildren.

Private family services will be later this week. Norman's Family Chapel is in charge of arrangements. Contributions are preferred to the Hospice Caring Project of Santa Cruz County, P.O. Box 670, Aptos, Ca. 95003.