

Local Writer Dies

by Mary Bryant

Marybeth Varcados died on Jan. 23 at age 68 of leukemia that was first diagnosed in 1999.

Varcados worked most of her career in journalism. First, right out of high school, she wrote and edited for the Watsonville *Register-Pajaronian* and then in 1983 for the *Santa Cruz Sentinel*.

In between, she earned her journalism degree, married her college sweetheart and raised her family. She also touched the lives of many young journalists, teaching the trade and making lifelong friends.

Former reporter for the *Pajaronian* and *The Post*, and now Capitola Museum curator, Carolyn Swift was Varcados' friend for four decades.

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Capitola Resident, Mystery Writer, Newspaper Editor and Activist Dies

After a Decade of Surviving Cancer, Marybeth Varcados Succumbs on Jan. 23

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Swift recalled her first meeting with Varcados.

"I had gotten a job at the *Register-Pajaronian* as the assistant to the society page editor," Swift said. "I was a brand new hire and I didn't even know how to type."

That was 1969 and by then, Varcados had already managed the society page for the *Pajaronian*, started college in Reno, Nevada and finished her degree at the University of California at Berkeley, married and had her two daughters, then ages four and two.

"Marybeth put me at ease," Swift said, in part because Varcados was almost as tall as the six-foot-tall Swift. "We became friends pretty quickly."

Friendship included hot-

dogs at Woolworth's lunch counter and Varcados standing as Swift's matron of honor.

A Career in Journalism

Varcados' family moved from Wisconsin to Watsonville in the late '40s when Marybeth was young, and Marybeth attended Watsonville area schools. Marybeth graduated from high school in 1959, where she edited her high school year book.

While she worked at the *Pajaronian* before going to college and part time after college, it wasn't until the mid-'70s that Marybeth was back pursuing journalism full time. Husband Peter was a history teacher at Cabrillo College.

Marybeth was promoted to style editor, and in 1983 she moved to the *Sentinel* to a similar position. She was again pro-



In this 2007 photo, Marybeth Varcados stands at left with fellow Jewel Box Mystery authors Judith Feinman, Pat Pease, Gayle Ortiz and Tomi Newman. "The Jewel Box, A Capitola Mystery," began as a lark when members of the Women of Mystery book club decided they could turn out a better product than some they were reading. The book was written with different authors contributing different chapters, even before the ending was agreed upon. The book proved to be a surprise local hit, and was followed last fall by a second adventure with familiar characters and locations, "A Killer Festival, A Capitola Mystery." The nom de plum of the group, Mysty W. Moonfree, is an anagram of Women of Mystery.

moted, this time to managing editor, before retiring in 1991.

In the late '80s, Varcados had served on Capitola's Art Commission. In the '90s, she took a seat on the city's planning commission.

Peter and Marybeth were

also active at church, including the past decade at St. Joseph's Church.

Swift said she took her cancer diagnosis as she did with most things in life: face on.

"She didn't want anybody to worry about her in the

short term," Swift said. "[However] she knew it was going to cut her life short."

In the ensuing decade, Marybeth helped write two books, was active in community projects and counseled those who were terminally ill.

"She had no fear in facing people who were dying," Swift said. "I think her sense of acceptance all along was very strong. ... She just wasn't afraid."

Swift said that Marybeth was not someone to "talk dogma."

"She knew if there was a heaven she'd be there," Swift said.

Varcados is survived by her husband of 46 years Peter and her daughters, Diana Varcados of Sacramento and Sophia Varcados of Illinois, along with two brothers and two sisters. ■