



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel file

JoAnn King reads to students at Escuela Pacifica in 1991.

Teacher, radio host JoAnn King dies at 59

By DAN WHITE
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SANTA CRUZ — Popular radio host and teacher JoAnn King died Wednesday night with loved ones by her side. She was 59.

Since 1982, King was the host of the "Castle Cottage" program on KUSP-FM, the area's National Public Radio affiliate. The show features music, literature, language and stories. An estimated 2,000 listeners tuned in to the show.

She also taught children's literature courses at Cabrillo College and Monterey Peninsula College. In the 1970s she owned the Castle Cottage Corner children's book shop on Mission Street, named after the home of famed children's author Beatrix Potter in England.

King's battle with cancer drew an outpouring of support from local residents, including 300 cards from well-wishers. Hundreds of county residents folded 1,600 origami cranes in her honor.

In her last weeks, she was too weak to receive visitors, who gathered outside her hospital room to share stories and comfort each other.

"It was a wonderfully peaceful day," said her daughter, LuAnn Jenkins, who was with King in her last moments at Dominican Hospital.

King recently told her children not to worry. "She would continue to teach us," Jenkins said. "She said, 'I just want you to know it is not scary, that I'm not in pain.'"

King was diagnosed Aug. 5 with stomach cancer. In

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September, 450 people set out to fold 1,000 paper cranes, but ended up folding 1,600.

The cranes were a reference to the story "Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes." Sadako Sasaki was 2 years old when the atomic bomb exploded on Hiroshima in 1945. Ten years later, she became ill from leukemia. When a friend told her that folding 1,000 cranes would grant her a special wish, she set to work, but died before reaching her goal. Friends later completed the task for her.

During the crane-folding gathering for King, a former student of King's, Noah Almog, 10, said: "We're saving someone's life."

The cranes didn't save King's life, but she got her special wish, said her sister, Janet Lowell of Nevada City. "She really believed that she would begin a new life after she died," she said.

King's 1954 graduating class from Santa Cruz High School held a benefit for her Saturday to raise funds to offset her medical bills. In one evening, \$4,600 was raised, Lowell said.

Lowell said King had excellent insurance coverage, "but you can imagine the cost of being in the hospital for three months. She didn't have 100 percent coverage."

A memorial service will be at 2 p.m., Saturday, Nov. 11, at the Cabrillo College Theater. The celebration of literature, music, and poetry will be open to all. Children are encouraged to come with their families.

KUSP station manager Peter Troxell said KUSP will continue the "Castle Cottage" program with several hosts. On Saturday, from 9 to 11 a.m. — the same time King hosted the show — KUSP will air a special show in her honor.

King's relatives and friends said they felt relief that King is at peace after a long struggle with cancer, and great sorrow.

"Where it really hits you is over the long term, when you realize for the rest of your life, you have to draw on her spirit but you'll never be able to have another coffee together," said Wendy Martyna, who coordinated support for King and also teaches a workshop on death and dying.

King's son, Jonathan Jenkins, also was with her when she died. "She wouldn't take credit for this but she has molded me into a peaceful warrior," he said. "By that I mean that I have become a man with a feminine side that understands what human nature is about and what peace is."

Peace always was crucial to JoAnn King, who was born in Merced on March 21, 1936. Janet Lowell described her sister as a gentle and thoughtful child. Her family moved to Santa Cruz in 1945. She went to Live Oak Elementary School, Branciforte Junior High School and Santa Cruz High School. She graduated from San Jose State in 1958 with a bachelor's degree in education.

She married Lucius Jenkins in 1958. She taught elementary school but left it to raise her three children. In 1978, she opened Castle Cottage Corner. Around that time, she began to develop a career helping parents educate their children through literature.

The death of her two brothers in Vietnam changed King, reinforcing her work toward peace. Lt. Col. Welton R. King and Lt. Col. Ronald R. King were killed in action in 1967. Both served in the Air Force.

Lowell said King promoted peace through literature.

"She really believed there were lots of messages for children and adults alike," Lowell said. "She believed in living an authentic life for everybody and that we can do no more than become the people we are created to be."

King's "Castle Cottage" show started out under the name "Saturday's Child." Her celebrity guests included writer Robert Bly and internationally known storyteller Ashley Ramsden.

King is survived by her children, LuAnn Jenkins of San Jose, Jeffrey Jenkins of Hayward, and Jonathan Jenkins of Santa Cruz, and her sister, Janet Lowell of Nevada City. She also is survived by her mother, Rowena King of Santa Cruz. Her father, Cue R. King of Santa Cruz, died in 1981.

A fund has been established to help pay King's expenses. Donations may be sent to the King family at 125 Woods St., Santa Cruz, Calif. 95062, or to Bay Federal Credit Union, Account No. 12189 S-2, 228 Car diff Place, Santa Cruz, Calif. 95060.