

Sixty-nine-year-old man graduates from PUC ...and finds God in the process

by Heather Reifsnyder

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If you thought you had a short time left to live, what would you do? Most would travel the world, write the great American novel, or retire as a beach bum. However, Bernard "Skip" Walters chose to do something that many people would not. Skip kept going to school.

Though Skip was a college student, he was far from average in this respect. At the young age of sixty-seven, he had enrolled in Pacific Union College's Degree Completion Program (now CAPE) in order to fulfill his life-long dream of getting a college education.

People across the campus of Pacific Union College fondly recall Skip's adamant claim, "I'm going to get my degree before I croak." At the time, it was a joke, a way of Skip making light of his age. But halfway through the program, Skip learned that he had cancer.

But where most would surrender, Skip chose to march on. Finishing college was a dream he would accomplish. His perseverance to this goal even determined which therapy he would use to battle his illness. Skip chose to treat the cancer with radiation, refusing to undergo chemotherapy because it would make him too sick to attend classes.

By no means did Skip need a college degree; he had been a successful business man throughout life. But he had a love of education that allowed him to see the intrinsic value of a college degree.

In June of 1999, at the age of 69, Skip Walters graduated from Pacific

Union College with a bachelor of science in management. He marched across the stage to a standing ovation, giving a deep bow to show he was wearing a pair of shorts under his robe. He wanted to dress as he thought the kids would on a warm day.

However, Skip received more than a business degree at Pacific Union College. He found a community of friends. When his classmates realized that Skip had cancer, they would stand in a circle around him and pray for him. In addition, Skip found God. During the PUC program Skip indicated that he was not afraid of dying. He kept saying that he was "at peace with my Maker."

When the diplomas were ready to be mailed out, the continuing education staff asked Skip to pick up his diploma at the school office. A gathering of people awaited his arrival to shake his hand.

On September 20, 2000, Skip died at his home in Yountville. He was 70 years old. When Skip's Maker returns to take him to Heaven, there just might be a special gathering of angels waiting to congratulate him, reminiscent of the assembly of well wishers in the continuing education offices.