

*“I think hospice is a wonderful service for those who want to let their life take its natural course.”*



Merle Koker

Photographed by Diane Stevenson

#### A lifelong teacher gives one last lesson

Merle has a fast-growing tumor that is terminal. Merle says, “I had 88 wonderful years and have no desire to live the rest of it with no quality; I think hospice is a wonderful service for those who want to let their life take its natural course.” In Merle’s opinion, people need to enjoy life. “People should not neglect their recreation. If you can find something to do and enjoy, do it before you can’t do it anymore because you’ll be there soon enough.”

Merle was widowed from two husbands, has a daughter in Oregon, and a son in California. She is a retired elementary school teacher and spends her days keeping up with world events, sharing her still strong opinions and thoughts, and playing piano. Merle taught in elementary classrooms for over 22 years and upon leaving the structured school setting, continued volunteering in the classroom, tutoring, and home schooling elementary age children. “My mother, grandmother, and great-aunt were all teachers and my mother told me that I needed to go to school and get an education even if I never used it.” Merle says that she didn’t want to teach at first but once in the classroom discovered her natural gift for inspiring children to learn and succeed. “The ability to teach is having a natural feeling for children; if you really are a teacher, every child becomes your child.” “You do all you can for each child but you need to have that personal relationship with each one.” Merle stayed in the profession so long because she wanted to help children and as a result has impacted the lives of many young children.