



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

June 15, 2010

PRESS CONTACT:

Daniella Elghanayan/Chris Davis,  
(805) 687-3322

## **Hospice of Santa Barbara's Beloved Bear Program Offers Comfort and Healing for those in Grief**

**Santa Barbara, CA**—When Hospice of Santa Barbara Clinical Director Gabriela Dodson attended the National Hospice and Palliative Care conference late last year, something special caught her attention: a creative grief coping idea called the Beloved Bear Program. She learned how other Hospice organizations and their volunteers around the country were using different clothing articles of deceased loved ones to create teddy bears.

“As soon as I returned to Santa Barbara, I passed on the idea to my Hospice of Santa Barbara colleagues and they were very excited to implement the program, said Dodson. “We all thought the concept was so simple, but at the same time so meaningful and potentially healing for people in grief.”

The Beloved Bear program provides families an opportunity to turn a piece of clothing into a tangible keepsake infused with memories, texture, and even the familiar comforting scent of their loved one.

It also helps to solve another sensitive issue; many families do not know what to do with the deceased person's clothing – they want the smell of the clothes or the memory of the clothes. The bear provides a way for memories to continue, in a gentle and even interactive way. The teddy bear serves as a joyful memory of a loved one because it is something “new” and appropriate for both kids and adults. Creating the bear is also a ritual for the family; they now have something special and unique and, at the same time, familiar.

The first “Beloved Bear” was made for Julie Boller, a woman whose husband, Richard Boller, was in Hospice of Santa Barbara's Case Management Program. She currently attends individual bereavement counseling at Hospice of Santa Barbara. Her son and grandson also came to counseling for bereavement support. The last ten years of Julie and Richard's lives were filled with medical treatments for heart attacks, strokes, lung cancer, lung cancer remission and then cancer again.

“When Gabriela approached me with the idea, I was just thrilled,” said Boller. “I knew just the shirt to use.”

Julie chose a Hawaiian shirt of Richard's to create the bear, because he wore it the last time they were “happy and healthy” together during a nice getaway to Hawaii. They both loved Hawaii and had vacationed there several times. Richard and Julie were married for 42 years, with four children and three grandchildren.

“The bear means so much to me. My grandsons come over and they pick it up and hug it, and tell me ‘look, it's Grandpa's shirt’,” said Boller.

Hospice of Santa Barbara asks for two cotton shirts and a brief description of the deceased, and the organization takes over from there. There is no cost to the family.

Those interested in the Beloved Bear Program may contact Hospice of Santa Barbara at (805) 563-8820 or [www.hospiceofsantabarbara.org](http://www.hospiceofsantabarbara.org)

The mission of Hospice of Santa Barbara, Inc. is to provide care to anyone experiencing the impact of a life-threatening illness, or grieving the death of a loved one.

###