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requests often modest

Forget Skydiving, it's the Little Things ...

By **Gary White**
The Ledger

The premise behind "The Bucket List" is not hypothetical for Bill Hoover.



The Winter Haven resident received a prognosis of one year to live in September after learning his prostate cancer had spread to his bones. Hoover, 83, isn't interested in exotic travel or thrill-seeking during his remaining time.

For him, living fully to the end means sitting in the sunny, makeshift painting studio of his apartment at Spring Haven retirement community. Hoover's apartment abounds with his acrylic paintings: Italian street scenes, a portrait of a fisherman, views of Bok Tower and Cypress Gardens, landscapes from the Spring Haven grounds and an arresting image of an old woman crossing a dirt road, surrounded by geese. One of Hoover's most recent works is a portrait of Sparky, a boxer dog owned by the Spring Haven manager, that he completed in a single morning.

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Winter Haven resident Bill Hoover is a terminal cancer patient who is planning on spending what time he has left with his paintbrush in hand.

"Before I get out of bed, I'm thinking about what I'm going to be doing - painting," Hoover said. "When I can't paint, all I can do is sit and lay. Since I'm painting, I'm up and I have more energy. I'm just very thankful for it."

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Hoover benefits from the support of Good Shepherd Hospice, which provides access to a doctor, a primary-care nurse, a volunteer helper and a chaplain. He was unable to paint for a time last fall because of pain and weakness, but he said doctors adjusted his medication, allowing him to resume his cherished avocation.

Debbie Smith, a clinical manager with Good Shepherd in Lakeland, said patients with terminal illnesses usually don't focus on grandiose gestures like the skydiving, car racing and world travel pursued by the two main characters in "The Bucket List."

"What I've found when we're talking to patients facing the end of life, the things that we think would be important don't appear to be the things they look at," Smith said. "Many times, making a trip seems to be on the top of the priority list for a lot of people, but not trips like you would think - to Hawaii or Europe - but trips back to either a place that made them happy or back to memories of childhood - to the mountains or to sit by the seashore, very simple things."

Smith said she asks hospice patients about their desires, and the answers often seem modest. She said people often want to make one last trip to a familiar restaurant. She recalled one woman whose greatest desire was to go to Plant City and devour an extra-large serving of strawberry shortcake.

"Her daughter came down from up north and ended up taking her," Smith said. "Just the pleasure she got out of driving over to that familiar place and having that strawberry shortcake was wonderful."

Patty Klein, a spokeswoman for Good Shepherd Hospice, told of a patient who had never been legally married to his longtime companion. At his request, the hospice arranged for a wedding in December, and the man died the next day.

Smith said terminal illnesses often prompt yearnings for family connections. Her team helped a patient track down a half-brother with whom he had lost touch, and more commonly she said they help patients work on family photo projects.

Hoover, who has two grown children and several grandchildren in the area, gathered with relatives on Christmas Eve to pore over his family photos in what Good Shepherd chaplain Richard Behers called "a celebration of memory."

Marie Rumph of Lakeland was diagnosed with breast cancer a few years ago and has had two close friends die of cancer. She said she responds to the premise of "The Bucket List."

"I have had a terminal illness, and I've given this some thought," said Rumph, who is in her 50s and

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is now in remission. "And what I want to do is what I do every day, and that is just be normal - have dinner with my family, talk to friends on the phone, feel the sunshine and see the moonlight. I don't need to skydive to enjoy this earth."

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