

Spotlight on Neal Sparks

This is a special bio for a very special person.

In June 2007 after two surgeries and several tests, Neal Sparks was diagnosed with terminal small cell lung cancer. At that time the doctors gave him six months to live, but now, over a year later, Neal has proved them wrong and is still fighting to extend his life as long as possible. Two months ago in June they found that the cancer had metastasized to his bones, his brain, and to all of the organs in his body. The doctors were able to stop some bleeding and shrink the tumors in his brain but now they are very concerned about a tumor they discovered on his C5 (cervical vertebra). If they are unable to reduce the size of the tumor he will stop breathing. He is currently undergoing his third round of chemotherapy and second round of radiation, this time spot radiation, but the prognosis is not good.



Joan and Neal Sparks – April 2008

Life after Azusa High School

Work

After graduating high school Neal worked a variety of jobs, including selling electrostatic paint equipment. By 1969 he was tired of working for others and decided to start his own business, Roadrunner Trailers, a boat trailer manufacturing company based in California. He also opened a Roadrunner plant in Dallas, Texas, which became so successful that in 1980 he closed the California plant and moved to Dallas with his wife, Joan. Health issues forced Neal to retire in his early 50s; he had open heart surgery and also was in a car accident that caused brain injury. Fortunately Neal had a good crew of employees that were able to run his business during his retirement. Three years ago Neal sold his boat trailer manufacturing business. Life was good.

Family

On June 24 of this year Neal and Joan celebrated their 47th wedding anniversary and were hoping to make it to their 50th. Neal and Joan are true soul mates and have shared a wonderful life together. Joan says of Neal, "He is a great father and a great provider – extremely successful, very motivated and very generous. I couldn't ask for more." Neal and Joan have three children and five grandchildren. One of their grandchildren was adopted from Romania and another, from Russia.



Skating coach daughter, Darlene, with her former student, Olympic Silver Medalist Sasha Cohen



Neal with grandson, Ryan

Play

Fishing

Neal's passion is fishing. Most people like to travel to foreign countries to sightsee and experience the culture, but not Neal. He goes to fish. In 1975 he bought a 36' Sports Fisher he named Roadrunner. He also became a member of the U.S. Power Squadron and the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary where he taught classes in water safety. He spent every week taking his boat back and forth to Catalina Island where he fished. Neal and Joan also traveled up and down the coast, mooring in different harbors along the way. They called it "camping at sea." It wasn't all fun, though. In the late 1970s after hurricane Norman hit the coast of Mexico, Neal and Joan were in their boat coming back from Catalina when they lost both engines and had to wait seven hours to be rescued by the coast guard. It was pretty frightening and they didn't think they would make it. The next week they were out on their boat fishing again. Neal's best fishing was in Hawaii, in fact every time he fished in Hawaii he came back with a record-size fish that he had mounted to display on his wall. Joan was getting tired of looking at all of the fish on their wall, until she landed a trophy-sized Marlin herself that made Neal's "look like minnows." They sold their fish collection to a restaurant when they left Texas in 2000.



Travel

Neal and Joan also love to travel and have visited many interesting places in the world. They have sailed across the Pacific Ocean to Hawaii, visited Joan's family in Russia, took a cruise to Mexico, and traveled to Europe three to four times a year, primarily to visit their daughter who lived in Paris for eight years. On a trip to Ibiza, in the middle of the Mediterranean, they saw Dodi Fayed and Princess Diana on Dodi's yacht. In 1986 Neal and Joan bought their first motor home and traveled coast-to-coast through most of the states and saw some beautiful country. Ageless adventurers, in their 40s they bought a ski boat and learned how to water ski.

Mexico

Every year Neal and Joan met Larry Bauman (class of 1961) and his wife, Cindy, for a month's vacation at interesting places around the world. One of their favorite places was Mexico because the fishing is great. Larry and Neal share a love of fishing, so nine years ago Larry and Neal bought oceanfront houses right next to each other in San Felipe, Mexico. After that Neal and Joan spent October 1 through June 1 in San Felipe and during the summer months they lived and traveled the U.S. in their motor home.



Neal & Joan – San Felipe



San Felipe House

Neal purchased an additional 65 acres of oceanfront property in San Felipe that he was in the process of developing when he was diagnosed with cancer. Neal has listed the property for sale. He and Joan have also listed their home in Arizona that they bought two years ago and are hoping to sell their luxury motor home that they are currently living in. They are parked at in an RV park at Puddingstone Lake so that they can be within driving distance to Cedar Sinai Hospital where Neal is undergoing his cancer treatments. They want to buy a home near Los Angeles, where Neal can be more comfortable.

Neal is no longer able to drive, he tires very easily, and Joan is exhausted from driving him back and forth to Cedar Sinai every day, so they don't get out much. However, they welcome visitors, emails and phone calls. You can email Neal at mrrr@airmail.net and call his cell phone at (214) 668-4934 or send a card to 1630 West Covina Blvd, Space 101, San Dimas, CA 91772. He would love to hear from you.

Neal's 66th birthday is August 18.