Deborah Lynn Gardiner

April 22, 1954 ~ January 24, 2020

Debbie knew, without a doubt, the happiest moment of her life. It was a summer afternoon about 30 years ago. Her long blonde hair blew in the wind as she walked through the meadows of Soapstone, among the soaring peaks of the Uinta Mountains. The wildflowers were in full bloom ‚Äî yellow, blue and purple. She held hands with her two boys, ages 3 and 5. "That was everything for me," she told one of her sons this past summer, "I was so happy."

Deborah Lynn Gardiner died unexpectedly January 24th, at her home in Salt Lake City. She was 65, and passed in her sleep, due to pneumonia-related complications. She was born April 22, 1954 to Dorothy Staley Jorgenson, the daughter of Vernal coal miners, and Grant Norman Jorgenson, the hard-working son of recent Norwegian immigrants.

Debbie, to those who knew her, lived a life filled with love for her family, many close friends and Mother Nature's wondrous beauty. From a young age, Debbie was known for her independent spirit and tomboyish behavior. She spent summers with her beloved Grandma Staley in Vernal. Debbie grew up in Cottonwood Heights and graduated from Brighton High School in 1972. She was a free spirit and often spent Saturday afternoons in Sugarhouse Park, protesting the Vietnam war or laying in the grass under the sun. In her late 20s, she fell in love with Ted Gardiner, a hippie with long brown hair. They spent many nights camping under the stars, exploring Southern Utah's red rock wilderness ‚Äî Beef Basin, Cedar Mesa, Coyote Gulch and Boulder Mountain. They bought and preserved a pristine stretch of land along Boulder Creek.

Debbie had two sons, Daniel Ted Gardiner and Dustin Sage Gardiner, and embraced motherhood as her life's calling. As toddlers, she taught her boys to love and respect nature.

Debbie and Ted took out a 2nd mortgage to buy a majority stake in Dan's Foods, the grocery chain started by Ted's grandfather. They rebuilt the company in a time of economic strife. Debbie oversaw charitable efforts, including annual food deliveries to the Navajo Nation and local shelters.

At home, she entertained a large group of friends and family. She served as a Cub Scout den leader, and children from the neighborhood were a constant presence in her backyard or around her kitchen island. Debbie thrived in the domestic arts, and cooked homemade meals often. Her home was beautifully decorated with antique furniture, Native American art and lush plants.

Debbie and Ted eventually divorced, but they remained close friends until his death in 2010. She also had a close relationship with Ashton Gardiner, Ted's daughter from his second marriage. Debbie loved Ashton like her own daughter.

Debbie's best friend was her late mother, Dorothy. They spent many Saturday mornings hunting for antiques at garage sales or sharing a long conversation over a cup of coffee. Debbie also embraced her large extended family;

she had a close relationship with her older brother, Denny Jorgenson, and spent many holidays with his loving family. Debbie was known for her frequent laughing spells and irreverent sense of humor. She also carried a deep sense of empathy and generosity.

Per Debbie's final wishes, there will be no services. Her ashes will be spread in the meadows of Soapstone ,Äî when the wildflowers bloom.

In lieu of flowers, Debbie's family requests donations be made in her name to the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance, https://suwa.org/.