

Jennifer Joan Rusk

June 17, 1956 ~ July 23, 2020

Mom. Wife. Friend. While cliché doesn't escape Jennifer, it also doesn't even come close to encompassing all she gave and got out of life. Wisconsinite, cheese lover and true Green Bay Packer fan help describe her roots after her birth in Madison, Wisconsin, to loving parents Erwin & Joan Zuehlke. Jennifer also lived surrounded by men; 3 brothers (Alan [Barb], Dave [Carrie], and Greg [Hope]), 3 brothers-in-law (Tom, Ross, and David [Jane]), 3 sons (Josh [Brianne], Zachary, and Noah [Brittney]), 4 nephews on her side of the family (Matt [Jenny], Pete [Katherine], Drew [Kelly], and Chad [Emma]), and 2 nephews on her husband's (Steve) side of the family (Bill [Mae] and Ben[Mel]).

Her childhood encompassed all the wonderful things you'd expect in a Wisconsin Midwesterner with 3 brothers: lots of sports, scouting, and road trips with her entire family to camping destinations around the country. She enjoyed football thanks to her brothers, and from what we hear, she wasn't too bad at it. Through this, she developed a love for the Green Bay Packers and attended countless games in Green Bay thanks to some close family friends living just down the street from Lambeau Field (yes, one of the greatest places on earth!).

With brothers also came scouting. Each of her brothers earned the rank of Eagle Scout, and she herself ultimately earned the Gold Award through Girl Scouts (This was well before the days of girls being allowed in the Boy Scouts). She later watched 2 of her nephews earn the rank of Eagle Scout, too, and ultimately involved her own children in the lifelong endeavor of scouting. She was an active Den mother, started a Tiger Cub group, and felt so strongly about scouting that she even dressed up her husband (who had some familiarity with scouting as a child) in a scout uniform and shoved him in front of an elementary school gymnasium full of cub scouts and parents as a Scoutmaster. One of her own sons ultimately went on to earn the rank of Eagle Scout.

Backing up to before she created her own family of boys (husband, sons, and even a boy dog), she graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Management from the University of Wisconsin, Parkside. She was on the forefront of the computer revolution including helping the industry learn what was newly possible with computers. She went back and took additional classes to learn the coding/database computer language COBOL. This furthered her work as a computer database systems expert at several different companies while she continued living at home with her parents in Beloit, WI. She knew that computers would change the world and be a part of daily life for all Americans, especially her children, so even before the birth of her 1st son, she introduced computers into the family home with an Apple II personal computer. She taught her husband, successful in his own business and finance endeavors, how to use a computer starting with the very basics of databases. As her children started school, she even approached the local elementary school and pioneered incorporating computers into the classroom as early

as the 3rd and 4th grades. The school would never go back.

Jennifer wasn't all work. Besides football, she was a great softball player with many homeruns to her name. She swam and taught swimming. She was on the high school tennis team and continued to play and even teach tennis in college, as the captain and MVP of the tennis team. She ultimately was looking to improve her tennis skills further when she came across Victory Tennis Club in Rockford, IL. This is where she met a handsome tennis pro and instructor at the club named Steve Rusk, who ultimately became her husband. Tennis remained one of her loves in life, and she continued to play through marriage and raising kids. She developed countless friendships through tennis, most of which became lifelong. She played tennis well into the years when Alzheimer's Dementia took over her mind. Tennis was such a part of her that during these final years, even though she might not have known whose serve it was or what the score was, her instincts told her what to do as the ball approached. She was extremely blessed to have an incredible group of tennis friends that even though she couldn't drive, verbalize her feelings, or tell you what she was going to do that day, she could still play tennis and feel joy.

Skiing was no different. She fell in love with skiing, thanks to Steve. Skiing became a part of their early relationship and continued throughout their marriage. Skiing was an oasis in the middle of long, cold, midwestern winters. They started taking skiing trips out west, including to Alta, Utah (near where they ultimately resided in Park City) over Thanksgiving holidays back in the days when this time of year saw big storms and deep snow accumulations. They skied around the US and even over in Europe, and became experts in packing up and driving small 2-wheel drive cars across the country and over countless snowy mountain passes. Steve even proposed to Jennifer at the very tip-top of a mountain after schlepping their skis to the highest point of Steamboat Mountain Resort in Colorado.

Jennifer loved to travel. This love started with long station wagon road trips with her family to national parks across the country even in the dead desert heat of summer without car air conditioning. One of Steve's favorite stories to tell about their early travels together was a business trip to Europe he planned to take before they were married. He asked her to accompany him, but she was hesitant. Not sure what to say, Jennifer went home and told her mom of the adventure that Steve had asked of her. Her mom replied, "If you're not going to go, I am!" Jennifer went on that trip, and she and Steve continued their love of traveling throughout her life. The highlight of her travels was a trip around the world in 2014 making stops in places like India, Australia, Jordan, South Africa, and many more. Even though dementia was taking an active hold on her memory by that point, she absolutely loved the trip and her favorite part was the African Safari where she marveled at the incredible wildlife surrounding them.

Jennifer believed in and was always a part of her local community. She was heavily involved in schools, the Park City Newcomer's Group which later morphed into a group called NOW (Not Ordinary Women), church and music, tennis, skiing, and so much more. She was a strong advocate for her kids at the school level, ensuring that her children always had whatever support they needed. She loved music and learned to play the flute and piano when young. She continued playing the piano for recitals and for the congregation during church services at Shepherd of the Mountains Lutheran Church in Park City, Utah.

She really enjoyed volunteer work and spent a great deal of time volunteering at skiing competitions each winter, specifically the FIS Freestyle World Cup events in Deer Valley, Utah. As her seniority amongst the other volunteers climbed over the years, one of her responsibilities was managing athlete traffic at the top of the freestyle mogul course. She loved to tell stories about this job, including when a suave Italian ski racer gave her a 'surprise!' kiss to distract her, and when she had to argue with Johnny Mosley about not being allowed into the course area without his ID badge. Yup, Jennifer was always a rule follower! The pinnacle of her volunteer work at skiing competitions was working at the 2002 Winter Olympic Games where she was in the middle of all the action as the world visited Utah.

Sometime in the early 2000's, Alzheimer's Dementia started stealing Jennifer from herself, her family, and her friends. It robbed from her and her husband the ability to grow together in new stages of life as their children grew and moved away from home. It robbed from her and her children, who were learning how to be adults, the opportunity to get to know the real adult person they called 'Mom.' It stole from her, her family, and friends so much laughter, physical activity, and optimism about life in general.

Jennifer was an intensely private person who didn't talk much about her deeper feelings, thoughts, or worries. It mattered to her how people saw her on the outside, and she rarely let others inside to see who she really was. Just as she didn't talk much about her true self, she similarly didn't talk about her disease, the struggles it brought, or the emotions she was experiencing. It was heartbreaking to watch the disease take over her mind through the years and not be able to understand her inner torture. Perhaps she was too strong, too independent, and too caring of her family and friends to let them in and see the burden she carried.

Despite creating a background of destruction and devastation for Jennifer and everyone surrounding her, Alzheimer's did spare an ounce of grace during the disease progression. The dementia quelled some of the expressive inhibitions that had always dampened her emotional responses. While this didn't free her to talk about what she was going through, it did allow her to be more emotionally available in a physical way, albeit subtle. Her close friends and family would see this in her wanting to gently hold hands, hug, and be physically close together more so than she ever expressed earlier in her life.

There were also a few fascinating and uplifting moments wrapped in with the hardship. Because she was so young, athletic, and physically strong, she remained able to do certain activities that most might not have thought possible given her declining level of cognitive function. Since she loved skiing, her family kept taking her skiing. She didn't remember when or how to get off the ski lift at the top of the mountain; yup, she went around the top bull wheel many times still sitting on the chair! Once she got off the lift, however, you could point her downhill and she would ski almost any run with impeccable form, precision, and beauty.

One of the incredible qualities that always defined Jennifer also stayed with her even during the later stages of her disease: her ability to read other's emotions. While unable to verbally communicate thoughts and emotions, she could still sense and reciprocate them. Whether it be sad, happy, or concerned, Jennifer could feel these emotions from another person and was herself able to respond by staying silent and listening, laughing and giggling, or laying her head on your shoulder. This was one blessing that stood tall and strong above her mental foundation that was actively crumbling due to Alzheimer's in Jennifer's last few years.

Early onset Alzheimer's Disease stole from Jennifer and her loved ones the interactions that allow sharing, that build understanding, and that foster deeper relationships, but it did NOT steal an ounce of support or love that was provided to her by her family, friends, and caregivers. The entire Rusk Family wants to thank each and every person who helped give Jennifer the most wonderful days and years possible, despite this devastating disease. Countless baristas got to know her name at local coffee shops and made her feel special. Managers and wait staff at local restaurants were so kind and patient time and time again, bending over backwards to talk with her or change the channel on the TV to a tennis match. Friends visited, called, colored with her for hours, and took her out for activities to bring her joy, despite the hardship of seeing their friend suffering in the hands of this disease. Caregivers both at home and at Legacy Village provided endless amounts of the most compassionate care time and time again, even in the most difficult and challenging situations. Jennifer was SO lucky to have this incredible array of love and support through her last days. Thank you SO much, to ALL of you.

Jennifer died in peace, on hospice care, after well over a decade of struggle with early onset Alzheimer's Dementia. She and her immediate family were lucky enough to be able to spend her last days and breaths together. Her family held her hands, laughed, and reminisced about favorite memories with her. They even watched and sang along to her during her favorite movie 'The Sound of Music.' She ultimately passed early on the morning of July 23rd, 2020.

In lieu of flowers, donations in Jennifer's name can be made to the following organizations that resonate with Jennifer's life and passions.

• Alzheimer's Association, Utah Chapter, 12894 Pony Express Road, Suite 300, Draper Utah, 84020

• Shepherd of the Mountains Lutheran Church, specifically the MUSIC FUND, 4051 N. Highway 224, Park City Utah, 84098

• Tennis and Tutoring, 951 Bernay Circle, Sandy Utah, 84094.

A 'Zoom' online memorial service will take place on Saturday, August 22nd, 2020 at 10:30 a.m. Mountain Standard Time. Any updates or changes will be posted here. Please contact Shepherd of the Mountains Lutheran Church,

435-649-2233 or Larkin Mortuary at 801-582-1582 for the pass code to the Zoom meeting. The Zoom meeting ID is 856 3930 6198. In preparation, please also consider planning to prepare a drink and small appetizer/meal/dessert to enjoy in your own home after the online service to reflect and give thanks for Jennifer’s life.