

Debra Louise Riley

August 11, 1961 ~ June 27, 2023

Debra Louise Riley, our dearest Mother, Grandmother, Sister, and Friend, peacefully departed this world on June 27, 2023.

Deb was born to Geraldine Louise Elliott and Daniel Anthony Riley on August 11, 1961. She was raised by her dad in Long Beach, California, who served as a machinist in the US Airforce. While the family knew their relationship to be challenging on and off throughout her life, her love, appreciation, and duty to her father was unwavering. Deb was the youngest sibling in her home, with an older brother and sister whom she was estranged from for most of her adult life and a younger half-sister who lived with Deb's Mom. Many of Deb's summer days growing up were spent at Seal Beach, soaking up the sunshine with her younger sister and friends.

At the age of 19, Deb eloped with her then-love, Randall Craig Massey, in March of 1981. They had three children together, Randy, Jess, and Nick Massey. The early years of this marriage with her young children Deb always described as "the best years of my life." When this marriage ended in 1988, Deb became a single mom and the sole carer and provider for her three kids.

During this time, Deb worked incredibly hard to keep her family together and well cared for. She worked full-time in low-paying jobs and would pick up odd jobs (cleaning houses and newspaper routes) to make ends meet. She knew she needed an education to provide for her family in the way that she wanted. She went back to school and became a Surgical Technician in 1990. She realized quickly that this role wasn't a good fit for her as working alongside doctors performing surgery was too stressful. So, she set her sights on nursing school. We have all heard Mom talk about repeating the prerequisite courses to be eligible for nursing school (math, anatomy, and physiology, I believe). We remember her being up all hours of the night, a steaming cup of coffee in hand with her textbook open, sitting on the carpet, legs crossed, glasses on, studying. She showed great persistence in achieving her goals. She graduated in 2000 with an Associate of Applied Science in Nursing from Salt Lake Community College and became a Registered Nurse. While Deb studied to be a Nurse, she was the primary carer and provider for her three kids, worked full-time as a Certified Nurse Assistant, and cared for her father in her home in the last years of his life.

Clearly, given her situation, we didn't have much loose change around. Eating a meal at a restaurant felt like winning the lottery as a kid, and there are no recollections of family vacations. But Deb had a gift for making something out of nothing. We remember coming home often to find all the furniture rearranged in a new way, making the home feel fresh and zesty. She was always making things around her more organized, more beautiful, more comfortable, and cozier than before. The time and care she took to wrap a present beautifully had a way of

making gifts from her feel extra special.

By the time she graduated, the kids she thought she was doing it all for were teenagers who didn't realize the monumental achievement Deb had succeeded in. Way to go, Mom! We are forever proud of your accomplishments and hard work and feel lucky to have witnessed your glorious evolution.

Because Deb was more financially comfortable working as an RN, she could finally relax and enjoy life a little. She had worked extremely hard to get here. She married Mike Wall in 2002. With him, she discovered (or perhaps re-kindled) a love for nature, particularly birds and flowers. She enjoyed hiking, camping, and snowshoeing with her friends, family, and dog, Merle. It's been a joy to watch Deb pursue and excel at photography. Photography was how she expressed her wonder of the natural world, and she was quite good at it! When not working or serving her family in some way, she would be taking, editing or just enjoying photographs of her outdoor adventures or grandchildren. She enjoyed traveling to Australia annually to visit her daughter and the "Aussie Fam." She most enjoyed spending time with her grandchildren and children. A family dinner or celebration where all her children and grandchildren could attend was rare, but for Mom, it was the jewel in her crown. Her love lives on in all of us.

Debra is survived by her children Randall (Jennifer) Massey, Jessica (Michael) Massey, Nicholas Massey, her grandchildren Avery, Arya, Eliana, Matilda, and Felix, along with her siblings Daniel Riley and Kay-T Rhodes. She is preceded in death by her parents and older sister.

Deb's family would also like to extend our sincere appreciation to her oncology care team, Dr. Shivani Shinde and Jessica Carlisle, who cared for Deb in a way that always left her feeling loved.

In lieu of flowers, a donation to the Breast Cancer Research Foundation (brcf.org) would be greatly appreciated.

Please join us in remembering and honoring Deb's life at Larkin Sunset Gardens 1950 East Dimple Dell Road (10600 South), Sandy on 14 July at 2pm with a Graveside Service to follow.