

Linda Kay Shields Tanner

August 24, 1944 ~ February 20, 2024

When Linda first got sick, her early suspicions led her to believe that her coffee habit might be to blame. To test her theory, she cut back from her usual 12 cups a day to a meager three. When asked if maybe she should eliminate coffee entirely due to the concern, she responded with her signature spunk: “What are you trying to do, kill me?”

(Her family would like you to know that we were definitely not.)

It turned out, instead, to be “that son of a b#%!& cancer” — one of the few times she would swear — that took our incomparable, audacious and beloved matriarch. She fought the disease with positivity that never faded, never complaining and always saying, “It is what it is, babe.” She sang “Zip-A-Dee-Doo-Dah” into her final hours.

Now that Linda is gone, it’s left a hole in our family that 10,000 coffee cups couldn’t fill. She leaves behind more loved ones that Western mathematics can account for, making friends with every person she encountered, including the salesperson at DSW — her favorite store to shop for shoes — and the folks sitting next to her at the slot machines in Wendover.

Those who will miss her the most called her mom and grandma, the titles she cherished.

You’ve probably noticed by now that this isn’t an ordinary obituary. That’s because our lovable Linda wasn’t an ordinary woman. She was hilarious and sweet, iridescent, dedicated and sassy, certainly rambunctious, always wearing striped T-shirts and sharing her treats with anyone who stopped by for a chat. She lived so much in the 79 years caught in that little dash between the day she was born and the day she died. It’s impossible to capture her life in any way that would truly do justice for the tiny, blue-eyed woman that led the way for us.

Linda loved growing up on a farm here in Utah, running wild in jeans that were too big for her little frame and held up by a hardworking pair of suspenders that her mother pinned on her each morning. Her late parents, Ronal and Marjorie Shields, were Linda’s best friends and lifelong companions. And she had missed them dearly since they departed. She is survived by her two sisters, Janice and Denise; Linda and Janice were particularly close, sharing secrets and poodle skirts as they grew up.

She is also survived by her adoring aunt Maxine, whom Linda would spend hours on the phone talking to, even up to her last days.

Linda graduated from Jordan High School in 1962 as a “beetdigger,” a mascot that felt particularly special to her because her dad farmed the sugar beets that gave the school that name.

She met the love of her life, Paul Richards Tanner, that year, too. They had gone on a double date, both with different people. But Linda remembers Paul looking at her at the end of the night and saying, “I’m going to marry you.”

It was around Halloween, and he'd dressed up as a nerd. Linda wasn't as enamored at first sight, saying instead: "I thought he was a geek," just like his costume suggested. But Linda soon realized she loved that dorky guy right back. They married on Jan. 16, 1963, with Linda wearing a dress that she loved, with the back covered in little white roses.

Together, the couple raised six kids, several goats, birds, rabbits and many dogs in one of the funniest marriages to reminisce about — from their differences in politics to disagreements about the best flavor of ice cream.

She had her first baby, Wade, later that year; he gave her some trouble, but it was nothing a bunch of love and the playful threat of a wooden spoon couldn't solve (until he outsized her and could carry her, jokingly, into the closet). Soon after, siblings Marcie, Jill, Kim, Jenny and Weston filled the house with laughter and fights over who was spending the most time in the bathroom.

Linda seemed to have the answers to everything, from what ailments the kids had to how to fix anything with a butter knife.

For the last 18 years, Linda had been without her husband after Paul passed in 2006. She spent that time reading probably 90% of the romance novels in publication — stacked in teetering paperback towers beside her nightstand. But Linda said the stories never matched what she had with Paul.

Her family continued to grow as her kids married. And Linda loved each of their spouses as if they were her own kids — adding Terri, Todd, Dave, Chris and Veronica into her photo albums like they'd been there all along.

As 14 grandkids — and now, one great-grandbaby (with another on the way) — came into the picture, Linda found she relished being a grandma above any other calling. Her home soon became filled with those decorative signs about the joys of being a grandmother, and they were all true. She let the kids run free in her big backyard, and made them her famous tuna patties when they came back in, tired from a long day of water balloon fights or sledding.

She always had chocolate Creamies on hand for them, like a never-ending Mary Poppins bag in her freezer. And she would bury plastic toy soldiers in the sandbox for the kids to uncover like buried treasure. In return, they treasured her.

She was a beautiful smiling constant in the crowd of their lives. Linda showed up at their elementary plays, donned the crazy hats for Grandparents' Day at school, cheered on the sidelines for football and hockey games and waved at graduations. She was present for birthdays, with her lovely voice shouting "AND MANY MORE ON CHANNEL FOUR" as the candles were blown out.

As it turns out, she may have been more nerdy than her husband. And we wouldn't have had our Linda any other way. To us, she was perfect. We hope you'll have a cup of coffee in her memory.

If you choose, in lieu of flowers, Linda would've loved for you to donate to the Humane Society of Utah or the Utah Food Bank. The family would also like to sincerely thank Hospice for Utah, especially nurse Sara, for the attention and care provided to Linda.

A public visitation will be held Wednesday, Feb. 28 from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. at Larkin Sunset Gardens (1950 E. 10600 South, Sandy). Funeral services will be held at the same location on Thursday, Feb. 29, starting at 11 a.m. The interment will follow, at Wasatch Lawn Memorial Park, 3401 S. Highland Dr., Millcreek.

To watch the zoom recording of the service, please click on the tab above that says "Watch Service" or follow this link:
https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/share/0hbUY5XktzKBj-JG7b0p2pDAETl42vA9A6ra5CYDRw5eMAspT99IMRDFkZevhBlt.Gs