

Neil Simmons

February 28, 1950 ~ December 14, 2020

Neil Alan Simmons, born February 28, 1950 in White, South Dakota, passed away on December 14, 2020 in Salt Lake, Utah.

Neil developed a strong work ethic and sense of responsibility from a young age. His parents, Lois and Loren Simmons, owned a farm in White, South Dakota where Loren's father had also grown up.

He is survived by his mother, Lois, age 93, currently in Brookings, South Dakota, who said of his childhood, "Neil was always conscientious and, being the only son, there was always plenty of work for him on the farm." His father passed away in 1999.

Neil is also survived by his four sisters: Cheryl (Doug) Beste of Brookings, South Dakota; Linda Patrick of Aurora, South Dakota; Jan Simmons of Wayne, Nebraska; and Nancy (Vernon) Smith of Gettysburg, South Dakota; and their children.

As a child, Neil was a voracious reader and a lover of music (especially the Beatles); he attended a one-room schoolhouse in White, South Dakota until he was in 8th Grade.

He attended college at the South Dakota School of Mines and graduated with a degree in Mining Engineering in 1973.

He met his future wife, Rose Mary Vandenberg, in Rapid City, South Dakota where he was attending college, and she was attending secretarial school. They met at a Youth Group for young adults at the Methodist Church there. They both grew up Methodist, and they attended the Methodist Church throughout their lives.

They married in 1972, and welcomed their first child, Tavia, in 1976, while they were living in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania where Neil worked for the Bureau of Mines. They then moved to Price, Utah in 1978 where Neil launched his 32-year career as a Geologist with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). They would welcome three more children in Price: Brandon, Alanna, and Daimon.

Neil is also survived by his daughter Tavia Simmons, a statistician for the Census Bureau in Washington DC (residing in Crofton, MD); son Brandon (Kellie) Simmons, a prosecutor for Salt Lake County (residing in Sandy, UT); daughter Alanna (Josh) Simmons-Cameron, an English teacher at Grand County High School (residing in Moab, UT); and son Daimon (Jonida) Simmons, a pathologist at Brigham and Women's Hospital and Instructor at Harvard Medical School (residing in Boston, MA). He is also survived by seven grandchildren.

On his excursions "in the field" at the San Rafael Swell for the BLM, Neil had a range of surprising stories from his solo hikes, from stumbling across naked hikers, to himself falling into a ravine and needing a helicopter rescue. He knew the land well through the lens of science but also experience. Toward the end of his tenure at the BLM, Neil transitioned to become a GIS Coordinator (making and analyzing maps) for the BLM. Rose had the joy of working

with him at the BLM for over 25 years. A lifelong learner, Neil earned a Bachelor's of Psychology in his 40s "for fun."

He continued to read incessantly, whether paleontology journals or science fiction novels. He was a collector to the core, amassing books, movies, comics, and Japanese anime. Neil had a great sense of humor; for those who knew him well, his ready wit and playful mien was a balm to any day. He was a homebody who poured his attention into his garden and trees (his yard in Price had many different types of fruit trees that he planted and cared for), canning, cooking, reading, and watching TV and movies. Neil appreciated working alongside the farm cats when he was a boy on the farm. In Price, he was bamboozled into bringing cats in the home when Tavia was a child. His children thought of him as the cat whisperer as the felines competed for space on his lap or would fight for priority at dinner time.

Neil was someone who took his responsibilities very seriously, whether at work or home, and for his wife and children. He very rarely missed a day of work, and even when hit by a car while bicycling home, he only stayed home one day. He was the chef of the family, and his lasagna and pie were legendary. Whatever needed done, he would do it, and he was diligent at both home and work.

In 2010, Neil had a debilitating car accident in Provo Canyon. He narrowly escaped the clutches of death, undergoing many surgeries and rehabilitation that spanned several months. His quiet tenacity and his 48-year devotion to his beloved wife carried him through the severe medical problems that plagued him after the accident.

Since that accident, Neil and Rose resided at an assisted care facility in Draper, Utah, to be near their son Brandon and his family, and also because they needed the increased care due to Neil's health needs because of the accident.

As Neil's health continued to deteriorate over time, his wife Rose, to whom he was so connected and devoted, told him, "It's okay for you to go, Neil." Always a man to listen to his wife and, in those final years of extreme health challenges to almost live for her, he heard her words. When she woke up, he had gone to his eternal rest. "I miss him," Rose says, "but I know that he is in a better place."

Neil's legacy of responsibility, hard work, familial devotion, and humor lives on in those who love him.

A memorial service will be held via Zoom on Tuesday, December 22 at 3:00pm (Mountain time). If you would like to attend, please email neil.simmons.memorial@gmail.com to request the link.

In lieu of flowers, the family asks that donations be sent to Ronald McDonald House in honor of Neil.