



Norma Jean Denault

July 8, 1944 - July 1, 2014

Norma Jean Denault

Norma Jean Denault died peacefully on Tuesday, July 1 in Wenatchee, WA. Norma was born July 8, 1944 in Langdon, ND, to George and Florence Denault. She was the oldest of ten siblings, providing her the first of many managerial experiences she would hold in her professional life. She graduated from Pisek High School in 1962 and earned a degree in Secondary Education from Mayville State University, a Masters in Literature from the University of North Dakota, and a Specialist Degree with doctoral work in Education Administration from St Cloud University.

She married Terry LaFleur of Mayville, ND, in 1965. Their daughter Nicolle was born in 1968.

Norma began her career in education teaching in Linton, ND, Beaver Dam, WI, and at UND in Grand Forks, ND, and later served as a librarian and assistant principal at Coon Rapids Junior High in Coon Rapids, MN. She moved to Rapid City in 1984 to accept a position as assistant principal at Stevens High School. She was named assistant superintendent to the Rapid City School District in 1988, a position she held for six years. Norma left the Rapid City District in 1994 for a position as principal of Cambridge Middle School in Cambridge, MN. She remained there until her retirement in 1999.

Norma was a respected administrator; she was firm, but great fun, and passionate about her work with kids. With great compassion, she developed drop-out prevention programs, ran youth support groups, served as a probation officer and on the Board for Juvenile Detention, was a member of the SD Arts in Education Task Force, and was the first President of SD Women in Educational Leadership. She did not suffer fools lightly, but her compassion and fairness endeared her to her staff wherever she worked. Among her most loyal employees in the building were her secretaries--no small feat. Norma left her mark in every building she served and she contributed to the field of education throughout her lifetime.

She was a strong community leader, serving on the Board of Directors for Project 2000, United Way, Black Hills Community Theater, Black Hills Chamber Music Society, St James House Treatment Center, and was on the Advisory Board of Leadership in Educational Administration (LEAD). She was recognized by the Rapid City Journal as a "West River Notable" in 1991.

Norma's early retirement jobs in Minneapolis included a stint at the downtown Barnes and Noble--a job she loved--and volunteering and eventually working as part-time staff at Children's Home Society of Minnesota supporting international adoptions.

Norma divided the remainder of her retirement between Rapid City and Beijing, China, where she resided several months of the year with her daughter and family. There she enjoyed her favorite job of all as "live-in-grandma" to her two grandchildren, Téa and Chanté (Didi), viewed by her Beijing community as a superb 'traditional Chinese grandmother'. She greatly supported and encouraged her granddaughters' creative and artistic endeavors and was immensely proud of their accomplishments. She remained their biggest fan and favorite audience member until the day she

died. While in China, Norma tutored Chinese students in English. She served as Curriculum Director at the newly formed Beijing International Bilingual Academy where her granddaughters studied. She turned down a subsequent job offer as school principal but enjoyed volunteering in the library. She also became a student of Tai Chi, rising early in the morning to make her way to a neighborhood park in Beijing. There, surrounded by elderly Chinese and speaking minimal Mandarin, she bridged cultural and generational gaps with her quick smile and very popular salt-and-pepper hair. She took traditional Chinese painting classes at the local Elders Community University, and produced stunning work and made many friends. Norma was an ambassador wherever she traveled.

When in Rapid City, Norma was an active member of the Canyon Lake Senior Citizen Center. She also worked in various volunteer capacities at Rapid City Regional Hospital, working the front desk, the gift shop and with the sewing group.

Her close friends referred to Norma as the Hutterite Woman. She could do anything. She wielded power tools and managed million-dollar budgets with equal ease. Home plumbing and electrical problems were minor inconveniences, dealt with and dispatched. She was well-read; she had a great fashion sense and appreciated good art and good music. She was a gifted seamstress; her grandchildren and those of her friends were the recipients of beautiful and original blankets and quilts, lovingly executed.

In 2006 Norma was diagnosed with Alpha-1 Antitrypsin Deficiency, a congenital degenerative lung disease. She accepted the diagnosis with typical determination and continued to travel with her two trusted companions, Linda Boner and her portable oxygen machine, 'Bob'. Together they visited Alaska, Ireland/UK, Greece, Italy and various points in China, including Guilin. While

in Asia, Norma and Nicolle traveled to Malaysia, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau, and many beautiful destinations within China, including the Panda Center in Chengdu where she was given an opportunity to hold a young panda. Norma especially enjoyed her annual winter excursion to Mazatlan, Mexico, where many memories were made and will remain with the friends who shared time with her there. Growing up in a large family in rural North Dakota instilled in Norma a sense of practicality and pragmatism that served her throughout her entire life, and never more so than the last six months. As her health rapidly deteriorated, she rallied her strength for the sake of family and friends, using precious breath to make visitors feel comfortable and to thank those around her for their support. She was a fierce and loyal mother, grandmother, daughter, sister and friend. Her exuberant spirit and wicked sense of humor will be sorely missed.

She is survived by her daughter, Nicolle LaFleur and her husband, Ning Li and granddaughters Téa Renee and Chanté Rae (Didi), all recently moved to Wenatchee, WA; siblings Warren Denault, Park River, ND; Russel (Vicky) Denault, Fargo, ND; Gary Denault, Thatcher, AZ; Colleen Pesek, Moorhead MN; Renee Skeim, Ypsilanti, ND; Denise (Norman) Berg, Bennett, CO; Michelle (Robert) Nattress, Port Orange, FL; Kelly (Galen) Kringstad, Grafton, ND and many dear friends.

She was preceded in death by her parents, George and Florence Denault and an infant sister, Marjorie. A celebration of Norma's life will be held in Rapid City at a later date. Her Facebook page has been turned into a Memorial where friends and family can contribute comments of remembrance. Please express your thoughts and memories on the online guest book at jonesjonesbetts.com. Arrangements are by Jones & Jones-Betts Funeral Home.

Tribute Wall

BL

“ Norma was assistant principal at Stevens High when I was teaching at Stevens. What a bright light she was....so full of life, so talented, so intelligent, so full of humor....just to list a few.
My condolences to Nicole and family...
Barbara Linderman (Colin Wright's mother!!)

Barbara Linderman - July 16, 2014 at 05:14 PM

JC

“ I met Norma several years ago as I was working for the company that provided her Oxygen. I was always warmly welcomed into her home with a smile on her face when I came to service her oxygen equipment. We always looked forward to seeing her and hearing of her travels to China and Mexico! She was an amazing person! We will all miss her.

Jarrold Cabot--Performance Respiratory

Jarrold Cabot - July 09, 2014 at 11:23 AM

DF

“ Norma was a student of mine a long time ago in Pisek, North Dakota. We worked together in theatre, school paper and the library. She was such a help, always willing, helpful and optimistic. I loved her.
Donna Fleming

Donna Fleming - July 07, 2014 at 08:18 PM

SS

“ *Amazing Lady!*

We met many years ago when I "happened" upon her garage sale in the Midway area of St. Paul, MN.

I was able to convince this seamstress to custom make several pieces. And, had the luck to meet her eldest (and at the time only) grandchild.

Then came "China" and several years of "up-dates" before the updates stopped. I suspect she was just too busy living life instead of writing about it.

A most inspirational lady, I admired her for many reasons but especially for living in the moment and travelling light. Add to that, for being a "lady" in the truest sense, a rare quality.

All of that from just a garage sale and a couple of coffee dates!

My sincere condolences to Nicole and family.

Susan S.

St. Paul MN

Susan S. - July 06, 2014 at 10:07 AM

Janet
Denault
Middlestead

“ *3 files added to the album New Album Name*



Janet Denault Middlestead - July 03, 2014 at 07:47 AM

JM

“ we grew up on a farm the two of use we also had visit one there mom and dad & we go for walks along the tracks play hide from her brothers . Norma i am going to miss you and our talks we had.i am praying for your Family I no they are going through some graving also.miss you a lot Janet Denault Middlestead



Janet Middlestead - July 03, 2014 at 07:40 AM

JM

“ Norma Jean Denault is my cousin and we did play a lot when we were Kids we like going for walk's and put our head down by the train track'd and listen for the train to come. we just got in touch here two years ago and we were planing on seeing her this summer I am really going to miss this wanderfull Lady we were the same age. my pray's go out to her sister's & brother's & childern grand Kids.



Janet Denault Middlestead - July 02, 2014 at 03:41 PM