Jeanne Finch

AUGUST 16, 2020

Friend, lover, mother, daughter, sister, grandma, auntie and elder in her many communities, Jeanne Vernette Anderson Finch died peacefully at home on Sunday morning, August 16, 2020.

Glioblastoma multiforme took her from us, the brain cancer appearing in a test in June of 2018. Medical science extended her life about two years. And her quality of life remained good through the “extra time” she treasured as her truncated retirement and enjoyed with many family members and friends.

Jeannie chose to die at home, under the excellent medical care of her family physician Dr. Frances Vettergreen and oncologist Dr. Paula de Robles at the Tom Baker Cancer Centre and other skilled medical staff in oncology. Nurse Robin Lyons coached and supported Annie and David in her role as Palliative Home Care Coordinator at Alberta Health Services in Calgary and allowed Jeannie to die peacefully in her music room, surrounded by art and books and musical instruments, birds visiting her at a feeder near her hospital bed.

Born Jeanne Vernette Anderson (her father John Vernon *really* wanted a son after three daughters) to John Vernon and Beda Minnie Anderson at Buffalo, Minnesota on July 20 1955, she was the daughter of evangelical missionaries. Jeannie spent her childhood in Venezuela. As a legacy of those early years, she spoke Spanish. Her father “Bud” was a passionate Old Testament scholar and inculcated in her a

philosopher’s ability to probe the deepest questions about the human experience. Her love of adventure continued through her life. She eventually earned a degree in Sociology after moving to Canada in 1979, where she became a proud Canadian.

Living with cancer and living with dying are difficult. But the cadre of friends who became a family for Jeannie and David at the Living With Cancer Program at the Sage Centre in Calgary supported her in ways physical, mental, spiritual and musical, not to mention with humour and compassion and hugs. More hugs. And even more hugs. “They are like shooting stars,” she said on June 30, 2020, “some brighter than others, some with longer tails, all blazing and beautiful in the dark night of dying.”

Passions a many filled Jeannie’s life, among them a zeal for lifelong learning. Calgary Learns, her employer at the time of her brain cancer diagnosis, set up the Jeannie’s Fund (just type in Jeannie’s Fund for the link) to provide support for professional development for teachers of lifelong learners. Nothing would please Jeannie more than a donation to this fund, into which she invested tens of thousands of dollars.

Jeannie’s end of life – her “extra time” – was just like the first 63 years of her life; loving family and friends, enjoying skiing and paddling and biking, singing a wide range of music, curating Christmas and Easter feasts for more than a dozen at our home, doting on daughter Annie and grandson John and her husband of almost 42 years, David.

As a survivor of breast cancer in 2002, she was not bitter or resentful to find out about the terminal brain cancer that took her from us in the lovely summer of 2020. “Why not me?” she asked when she got breast cancer, and again in 2020. Disease and old age take us all. Normal. Instead she considered herself lucky to be able to rock her way through a craniotomy – “like getting kicked in the head by a horse” – and chemo and radiation. Two lovely holidays with her sisters Shari and

Joni in PEI and Victoria accentuated the gift of her extra years, as well as more time with David and Annie and John.

Faithful to the end to the integrity of experiencing the lived reality, she worked hard with decreasing cognitive abilities to pass on her responsibilities to others and to do her best to rest in her final days with the limited and failing energy that is often the experience of dying of brain cancer. Jeannie lived a full life. Do likewise.

Messages of Condolence

My condolences to David, Annie, and John. I knew Jeannie from the Living with Cancer Program. She was gifted poet and writer, and shared her work frequently. Jeannie has been such a positive influence in my life. Her courage,determination, and love were amazing. I will miss her.

— Pamela Goebel