



Donna Jean Denham

June 25, 1943 - November 5, 2023

In Loving Memory of Donna Denham, 80.

It is with deep sorrow that we announce Donna Denham passed away on November 5, 2023, after a long battle with dementia, leaving behind a legacy of love, kindness, and generosity of spirit.

Born to parents Gusta and Gladys Woodward in June of 1943, Donna spent her early years in Muskingum County, Ohio - a place that remained close to her heart throughout her life. After her parents' untimely passing, Donna was raised by her oldest brother and his wife, Wayne and Virginia Shelly. The family moved to Visalia, CA in the summer of 1956 where Donna attended Mt. Whitney High School and College of the Sequoias before graduating from Fresno State University with a degree in education.

Upon returning to Visalia, Donna became a teacher in the Visalia Unified School District (VUSD) first teaching physical education at Divisadero Junior High School before joining the staff of Mountain View Elementary School. It was at Mountain View that Donna met her husband, Clifford Denham whom she married in June of 1967. Donna's life was filled with family, friends, career and community.

She was a devoted wife to Cliff until his passing in 1996, and a loving and

nurturing mother to three Daughters: Lori Denham of Washington, DC, Suzy Plummer of Visalia, CA and Jennifer Denham of Visalia, CA. Donna was also a proud grandmother to six grandchildren, doting on each one with love and pride. Nothing brought Donna greater joy than being surrounded by her family and friends in the home that she and Cliff built together. Known for her warmth and compassion, Donna's backyard was in constant use for an impromptu barbeque, countless birthdays celebrations, graduation parties, swim lessons, wedding and baby showers and gourmet group dinners. Her front door was quite literally open to all, and her home was always filled with friends and neighbors and acquaintances stopping by for a visit or a bit of advice, kids coming to swim, and friends playing bridge. Donna's kindness, openness and generosity put others at ease, and she cherished her relationships throughout her life.

Donna spent her career as a teacher to hundreds of students ranging from kindergarten to middle school. She was a passionate educator who loved her students and their families. Throughout her career, Donna constantly worked to expand her knowledge and training to better serve her students. She became a renowned reading specialist and mentor to dozens of teachers at various stages of their careers, and even served as curriculum director for VUSD's Gifted and Talented Education program where she worked with teachers and students throughout the district. When not with friends or family, Donna could often be found at school, meeting with fellow teachers to share ideas, providing additional support to a student outside of school hours, or organizing her classroom and plans for the week ahead. Even after retirement, Donna remained active in local education and teacher training serving as an informal advisor and mentor to schools and serving as a founding board member and ongoing advisor to local charter school Sycamore Valley Academy.

An active member of her community, Donna devoted her time and boundless

energy to various organizations throughout the community. Always willing to volunteer and lead, Donna and husband Cliff spent more than a dozen years in a variety of roles with the Visalia Vikings and Visalia Seahawks swim teams where they spent their busy summers helping to organize swim team events while cheering on their daughters and teammates. Donna was also a leader in the area's American Association of University Women (AAUW) chapter where she served as the Vice President of programming, Home Tour Chair, and launched the Coffee and California Concerns discussion group. Donna's hobbies included traveling near and far, playing bridge, reading and visiting with friends. She had a natural talent for bringing people together and brightening the lives of everyone she encountered.

Donna is survived by her loving family, including daughter Lori Denham, son-in-law Todd Stein and grandchildren Olivia, Sophia and Henry Stein of Washington, DC, daughter Suzy Plummer, son-in-law Chuck Plummer and grandchildren Sarah and Thomas Plummer of Visalia, daughter Jennifer Denham, son-in-law Emilio Montti and grandson Sebastian Montti of Visalia, CA and brothers Ron and Dan Shelly and sister in law Dona Shelly.

In lieu of flowers, the family kindly requests that donations be made to the Donna Denham Memorial Fund at Visalia Education Foundation (Visaliaedfoundation.com or Visalia Education Foundation, 5000 W Cypress Ave. Visalia, CA 93277) or to AAUW Visalia-Sequoia Branch.

The family will be hosting a celebration of life for Donna in the spring.

Services have been entrusted to Salser & Dillard Funeral Chapel. Memorial Tributes and condolences may be offered by logging onto www.salseranddillard.com.

Tribute Wall

JG

“ Dear Lori, Suzy, and Jennifer
What a loss for the three of you and your families. Just reading the obituary gives me such a complete sense of who your mother was and how loved and appreciated she was for all the many things she managed to fit into her life. She was a dear friend, and she will be missed by many.
Jenny Jensen Glass

Jenny Glass - November 20, 2023 at 11:24 AM

LS

“ Donna had an infectious laugh and gentle spirit that made everyone feel at ease and welcome! I very much enjoyed working with her at Willow Glen School. My deepest sympathy to her family!

Laura Stafford - November 13, 2023 at 07:48 PM

JZ

“ Donna's obituary was so beautifully penned. It truly captured the essence of her and commemorated her life in a touching and meaningful way. May all the happy and cherished memories provide comfort and strength amidst the pain of loss. May she rest in everlasting peace. 🕊️❤️🕊️

Jill and Tendai Zinyemba - November 13, 2023 at 05:11 PM

TS

“ Suzy, Chuck, Sarah & Thomas - thinking of all of you. While I didn't know your mother/grandmother, I know how much she was loved and cared for by her family. Praying for your hearts and peace in your memories.

Tracy Salsa - November 13, 2023 at 04:51 PM