



Connie Louise Kimsey

June 23, 1948 - March 1, 2011

Connie Kimsey passed away March 1, 2011, at Sunnyside, the family's home in the hamlet of Poudre Park along the Cache la Poudre River in the Lower Poudre Canyon. She was 62 years old. Her death resulted from a 3-year illness from lung cancer and associated ailments. The fact that Connie was stricken by lung cancer—typically a smoker's disease—was something she thought was the ultimate irony. She never smoked and always avoided places and businesses where smoking was allowed. Her mother was a chain-smoker who died of lung cancer when Connie was 15 years old. It's impossible to know whether second-hand smoke inhaled at an early age played a role in causing Connie's cancer later in life. Regardless, Connie wanted to leave behind this short but important message for you: "Don't smoke!"

Connie was a teacher by profession, spirit and enthusiasm. She began her teaching career in 1970 at an elementary school in an impoverished area of Dallas. There, she said, giant cockroaches roamed freely on the classroom floors and less enlightened teachers, as well as many parents, believed "whippin'" was the only discipline to use. Connie did not. In 1978 and 1979, she was a teacher with the public school district in Louisville, Kentucky, and in the 1980s and 1990s taught at Lopez, Harris Lab and Stove Prairie elementary schools in the Poudre School District in northern Colorado. Her last teaching position was with Treehouse Montessori, a private school in Fort Collins. Connie was a youth program specialist for Larimer County Employment and Training from 1979 to 1984; she designed curriculum and

taught career classes for youths, and coordinated the summer youth employment programs. For her work on behalf of youth, she was presented the Centennial Adult High School Recognition Award in Fort Collins. Beyond her vocation as a school teacher, Connie was an environmental educator, something she did on a volunteer basis. She created the Poudre Bat Habitat program in the mid-1990s and gave presentations to school children and adults about the many values of bats in our environment. The City of Fort Collins presented her with the 1995 Environmental Action Award to honor her accomplishments with the Poudre Bat Habitat. Connie volunteered with Rocky Mountain National Park's Elk Bugle Corps from 1995 until she became ill in 2008. She was an interpretive ranger who talked in the field with members of the public to educate them about the importance of elk and other wildlife. In 2003, Connie turned to a new enthusiasm. She became a wedding officiant—a person who helps a couple write their marriage vows and performs the wedding ceremony for them. During a 5-year period, she was the wedding officiant for many couples throughout northern Colorado. Connie loved doing this. She enjoyed seeing the love and commitment that two people can have for each other. Connie had a leading role in the creation and operation of Friends of the Poudre, a local grassroots organization dedicated to preserving the Poudre River. Friends of the Poudre was started in 1986 to stop the Poudre Project, a huge reservoir and hydroelectric project that would have had a devastating impact on the river in the lower Poudre Canyon. Connie helped coordinate scores of volunteers who sought to stop the project. She had a major role in the planning and execution of an 18-year campaign to raise \$1.2 million to open Gateway Natural Area in the Lower Poudre Canyon in 2004. Friends of the Poudre has received permission from the City of Fort Collins to plant a tree in the Gateway Natural Area to honor Connie. In the mid-1990s, Connie was active in a successful effort by a coalition of regional citizen groups to waylay a plan by a Texas developer to build a major ski resort in the Colorado State Forest at the top of Poudre Canyon. The project would have had significant adverse impacts on the Poudre River and canyon.

While Connie sought to preserve the river and canyon, she was not an adamant anti-growth advocate. She believed wisdom, good judgment and citizen action should be used to preserve important natural environments for future generations. Connie Lou Craig was born June 23, 1948, to Rex Luther Craig and Louise LeCompte Craig in Fort Worth, Texas. She grew up in a lakeside community along the shores of Lake Quivira, Kansas, in the Kansas City metropolitan area. In her youth she spent much of her free time sailing on Lake Quivira and hiking in nearby forests. She graduated in 1966 from Shawnee Mission North High School, Overland Park, Kansas

Connie attended Baker University, Baldwin, Kansas, from 1966 to 1970. She graduated with a bachelor of science degree in elementary education and a minor in art. She attended North Texas State University and Colorado State University at various times to continue her education and maintain her teaching credentials. She underwent training as a wildlife educator through the U.S. Forest Service and Colorado Division of Wildlife so she could better teach children about forestry, nature ethics, wildlife, and other aspects of the natural environment. Connie was self-educated in natural health and relaxation techniques, and completed extensive training to become certified as a transpersonal hypnotherapist. She used her hypnotherapy skills to help persons stricken with cancer and assist individuals who wanted to quit smoking. Connie visited Colorado in the late 1970s and just happened to drive into the Poudre Canyon. There, she discovered a place for her heart: a beautiful setting with nature all about and people who would become her friends and neighbors for more than three decades. On Feb. 6, 1982, she and Gary Kimsey were married on a big pink boulder in the middle of the Poudre River directly behind Sunnyside, the Kimsey family home since 1929. Connie and Gary lived there throughout the rest of her life and raised two children, Clay Oakenshield Kimsey, born Nov. 21, 1983, and Emily Kate Louise Kimsey, born July 6, 1986, both of whom were significant care-providers during Connie's illness. Connie is survived by Gary and their two children; her aunt,

Dorothy Eggert, Dallas; stepsister, Kathy Olson Nichols, Palacios, Texas; stepbrother, Lynn Olson, Lawrence, Kansas; and six cousins. Connie was preceded in death by her parents and stepmother, Jacquelin V. Craig, as well as her uncle, Fred Andrew Eggert, and her brother, Rex Lee Craig, a Marine captain killed in 1967 during the Vietnam War. Considering Connie's love of animals, it also needs to be noted that she is survived by her cute dog named Amber, five overly intelligent cats, a cooing white dove, and flocks of wild birds and bats that lazily lounge around outside of the house. A memorial service for Connie was held March 6 in the Lower Poudre Canyon Community Center. The memorial service was replete with Irish music by a fiddler to bring in Connie's spirit at the beginning of the ceremony and rhythmic drumming, performed by friends that Connie often drummed with, to move her spirit onward at the end of the service. As a way to honor and celebrate Connie, donations may be made to the American Cancer Society or Friends of the Poudre, P.O. Box 129, Laporte, Colo. 80535.

Tribute Wall

KR

“ I happened to meet Connie when she became my daughter's second and third grade teacher. Laura was fortunate to be part of Connie's classroom that encouraged the children to grow in a multitude of individual ways. Of course, we learned how to make bat houses as part of the curriculum! First my daughter's teacher, then my own precious friend, Connie wrote wonderful pages in my book of life; pages of a friendship that was a wellspring of sharing, encouragement, humor, love of life... I can remember walking with her, basking in her company, and being proud of this delightful companion whose colorful clothing flirted with the wind and whose jewelry winked back at the sun. I can remember those laughing blue eyes and, of course, that smile. Yes I miss her, and yes, I am glad for the day my little girl first walked through Connie's classroom door.

Karen Ray - March 19, 2011 at 12:00 AM

KM

“ To the Kimseys: My thoughts and prayers are with your family. I am sorry to hear about your loss.

Kaylyn Paez Martin - March 17, 2011 at 12:00 AM

FI

“ The obituary was lovely. Connie sounded like an amazing person. I so wish I could have met her. God Bless you all.

Fiona - March 16, 2011 at 12:00 AM

CP

“ We will miss Connie. She took good care of her family, friends and this world. Charlotte

Charlotte Patterson - March 14, 2011 at 12:00 AM

JG

“ I substituted for Connie many times during her time at Stove Prairie School. I was very sorry to read of her passing. Her obituary was beautifully written and very interesting. I learned a great deal more about her than I knew back when I was subbing for her. Regretfully,
Joan Glabach

Joan Glabach - March 14, 2011 at 12:00 AM

KB

“ To the Kimsey family - Please accept my condolences. Connie's impact on the world and our little part of it will never be forgotten. I am sorry for your loss. Kathy

Kathy Bauer - March 14, 2011 at 12:00 AM

TS

“ Dearest Gary and kids, I just read the Coloradoan and am heartbroken at your loss. Which is also the loss of everyone who ever had the pleasure of meeting Connie. I babysat you both Kate and Clay from the time you were in diapers. I loved your mother very very much and she was such a gift to everyone who was blessed to meet her and share in the many gifts that she had to offer. One of the biggest being her glowing smile. I will send you every prayer for strength and endurance to help you navigate your new path. Gary, love to you. E-mail me here in Sunny Salida. Trish

Trisha Shaw Stephens - March 14, 2011 at 12:00 AM

RM

“ Gary, Clay and Kate: I was shocked to read of Connie's last few years dealing with cancer, and her death several weeks ago. It seems like only yesterday I was up there visiting her, talking about the canyon, and old times. We were all so blessed to have had her in our lives. I remember frequently seeing her in town driving the Subaru with the license plate, Batlady! My daughter Allie was gifted with having had Connie as her teacher for some time at Stove Prairie School. I imagine there were untold critters waiting on the other side of the Rainbow Bridge to welcome their special friend home. Peace.

Randy Mergler - March 13, 2011 at 12:00 AM

MO

“ I was saddened when I read of Connie's passing. She was a good woman who loved learning, loved her children and family and will be missed by so many. May God bless you in the coming days, weeks and months as you adjust to life without her. Sincerely, Mickie Ortiz

Mickie Ortiz - March 06, 2011 at 12:00 AM

KE

“ Gary, Clay and Kate, I am so sorry to hear of Connie's death. I had just found out she was sick a couple of days before. I will always remember how hard she worked to make the world a better place. I will keep your family in my thoughts and prayers as you grieve this terrible loss. Kathleen Edmiston Stove Prairie School

Kathleen Edmiston - March 05, 2011 at 12:00 AM