

Kathleen Spanjer – BS 1976 Food and Nutrition

Kathleen “Kathy” Anne Spanjer, 70, Fargo, passed into eternal life on December 13, 2024, while listening to Neil Young and holding her husband Duane’s hand. Her final word was “Joy.” If only she were here to write her own story. Kathy had a way with words that combined her acerbic wit with a loving smile, and that’s just one of the reasons she will be so missed.

Kathy was born August 15, 1954, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, to Norma (née Tjepkema) and Al Spanjer. She grew up moving around Minnesota and North Dakota with her parents and was a wonderful big sister and role model for her siblings Larry, Mike, Scott, and Shelly.

Kathy graduated from Jamestown High School in 1972 and from NDSU in 1976 with a Bachelor of Science in Food and Nutrition Research. From Organic Chemistry to Ancient Chinese History, she never encountered a subject she didn’t enjoy or at which she didn’t excel. Her wit, wisdom, and insight will be missed by all those who knew her well.

At an NDSU party, Kathy ran into a man she later told a friend was “the loudest and most obnoxious person I’ve ever met.” She and Duane married four years later, starting a union that lasted 46 years. Duane and Kathy were the perfect match. Their shared love of learning and exploration took them around the world; among their many travels, they visited China, Thailand, France, Malaysia, Italy, Japan...the list goes on.

In addition to her world travels, you could often find Kathy out tending to her beloved garden, embroidering at her sewing machine, or flying through a good book.

In 1991, Kathy and Duane’s lives changed for the better with the adoption of their son, Kevin. Kathy always said the day Kevin joined their family was the best day of her life. In everything they did, from exciting family vacations to normal nights at home, Kevin was Kathy’s pride and joy. She loved him unconditionally—a love that will live on through his role as a father to Alisa.

Kathy started her career in administration at Eide Helmke. After a few other organizations in between, she found her calling at The International Coalition, which later became the Red River Basin Commission. She proudly worked to protect the environment and safeguard our shared access to clean water for many years. She was deeply involved in her community, volunteering her time to the Soroptimist Society, and enjoying herself as an active member of the Valley Wine Society, a social and educational group to learn about wine.

Kathy will be missed by many, including her husband, Duane Lillehaug, and son, Kevin (fiancée Valentina Gulbis) Lillehaug; granddaughter Alisa Gulbis; brothers Larry (Denise) Spanjer, Mike (Marie) Spanjer, and Scott Spanjer; nieces Amanda (Rick) Scott, Christie Pederson, and Erika Spanjer; nephews Alex Petersen, Clay (Donell) Pederson, Isaac Spanjer, and Arnie Spanjer; and countless friends and loved ones. She is preceded in death by her parents, Al and Norma Spanjer; grandparents, Nellie and Gerben Tjepkema and Thelma and Dick Spanjer; sister Shelly; parents-in-law Ethel and Rollo Lillehaug; and sisters-in-law Joleen Petersen and Pam McGee.

The family would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to Amy Jo Sours, Kathy’s longtime aide and, more accurately, good friend.

A funeral service and memorial lunch will be held on Thursday, December 19, 2024, at 10:00 a.m. at Boulger Funeral Home in Fargo. Visitation will commence one hour prior at 9:00 a.m. In lieu of flowers, please honor Kathy's memory with a donation to the Muscular Dystrophy Association or Cat's Cradle. A Celebration of Life will be planned in February.