



Karen Joan Tortorello

April 6, 1953 - April 27, 2015

KAREN JOAN (GUTTU) TORTORELLO April 4, 1953 ~ April 27, 2015 "A smile is a curve that sets everything straight." A shining light went out here on earth Monday April 27, 2015 but now shines bright in Heaven above. Karen was born in Vancouver, WA and grew up in Camas, WA graduating from Camas High in 1971. She also graduated from Clark College with an associate's degree in the ancient art of Secretarial Science. Early in her business career, Karen was the personal assistant to the Director of the Pacific Northwest River Basins Commission and then Office Manager for Business Support Systems. In 1983, she took on the position that she cherished the most, that of being Mommy to daughters, Kristin and Kelsey. When the girls got older, Karen started back working on a part-time basis before finally finding the job she'd been looking for as an administrative assistant with James. E. John Construction. She enjoyed the challenges of the job and loved the people she worked with. Karen's organizational skills served her well in the running of the Tortorello home. She kept up with all of the girl's sports, hobbies and social activities, ran the household, was the chauffeur of the family Boogie Bus, and made their home a warm and friendly place with an open door where kids could just come and hang out. The family made many special memories on their summer camping outings, year round sports tournaments and road trips taken together. Especially memorable was the 1999 trip to Europe with Kristin's soccer team and spending the Millennium on Maui. In September of 2000, the family was dealt a tragedy

when they lost Kelsey to an unfortunate pedestrian/ vehicle accident. What could have been a devastating event for some, Karen chose to make it a source of inspiration and try to make a difference in the lives of others. She became a champion of pedestrian safety and education by working with the Clark County Traffic Safety Task Force and giving pedestrian safety presentations at many local elementary schools. With the encouragement and so much help from others, Kelsey's House was built through Habit for Humanity. She also helped found the Kelsey Tortorello Memorial Homeless Fund, a non-profit organization whose main objective was to help others in need. Later Karen became the volunteer Adopt-a-room coordinator at the Share Homestead shelter, something she enjoyed participating in the rest of her life. Having lived through the nightmare herself, Karen would also reach out to other women dealing with the loss of a child and would offer them support, a shoulder to cry on, an ear to hear their stories and try to help them sort through the grief they were dealing with. A group of those ladies, unofficially known as Moms Who Get It, still meet periodically to offer support and reach out to others who have found themselves dealing with a similar tragedy. After her diagnosis in 2005, Karen became active with the Pink Lemonade Project and Pink Sistas groups that offer support and education to breast cancer survivors and their families. Walter Winchell once said, "A real friend walks in when the rest of the world walks out." and Karen could be counted on to be a real friend. She knew how to listen, was a kind, sincere and genuine person. Her friends and family meant the world to her and she found time for them. Whether it was a family gathering, get together with friends, one of the many support groups she participated in or her Zumba class (which was her happy place), you could always count on a smile and a positive outlook from Karen. Karen is survived by her husband of 35 years, Gary; daughter, Kristin; grandson, Kingston and his father, Darrell Smith; sister, Donna (John) Rankins; brother-in-law, Rick (Sue) Tortorello; mother and father-in-law, Dick and Flo Tortorello; and numerous cousins, nieces and nephews who were dear to Karen's heart. She was preceded in death by her

beloved daughter, Kelsey; parents, Vernon and Elva Guttu; and many aunts, uncles, and cousins who were sure greeted her with open arms with lefsa, cookies, and a cup of coffee. Karen's family wishes to thank Dr. Magdolna Solti and the staff at Compass Oncology, PeaceHealth Southwest Washington Medical Center Medical Center and Dr. Alan Gabriel for their care, compassion, and concern for Karen as she fought her battle these past years. A memorial service and gathering will be held at noon on Saturday, May 9, 2015, at Zion Lutheran Church in Camas, WA. There is also a Celebration of Life planned at 4:00 p.m. that same day at Shanahan's in Vancouver, WA. In lieu of flowers, the family asks that contributions be made to the Pink Lemonade Project, Pink Sistas, or Share Vancouver; all organizations that Karen held very close to her heart. Please sign her guest book at: www.columbian.com/obits.

Tribute Wall



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Evergreen Memorial Gardens - July 03, 2025 at 09:51 PM

NW

“ I just returned from Holland to this sad news. Karen was one of my Breast Friends whom I met at a Pink Lemonaid Retreat. We had planned on doing lunch when I got back. Such a beautiful soul. Always thinking of others, giving her time and resources. Much love to the family, Nanette

Nanette Walker - May 08, 2015 at 12:00 AM

JA

“ Rick and Sue, We are sorry to hear the sad news of the passing of your sister-in-law. Although we did not know her, our thoughts and prayers are with you both. Sherry & Joe

Joe & Sherry Allen - April 30, 2015 at 12:00 AM

BS

“ I will always treasure our retreat memories Breast Friend!

Brandy Suhama - April 30, 2015 at 12:00 AM

JD

“ I know she was a fighter and loved by her family.

Joan Dickinson - April 30, 2015 at 12:00 AM

BB

“ She was a great person!

Bill Brown - April 28, 2015 at 12:00 AM