



Paul Bernard Cunningham

January 10, 1943 - May 18, 2018

PAUL BERNARD CUNNINGHAM January 10, 1943 ~ May 18, 2018 Paul Bernard Cunningham passed away on May 18, 2018 with his wife by his side. He had lived with the progressive form of Multiple Sclerosis since 1989 which had left him paralyzed for many years. The symptoms of colon/ abdominal cancer were masked by his M.S. and he died just one week after the diagnosis. Paul was born in San Francisco to Forrest Eugene and Lois Berdeen (Caster) Cunningham. During the first few years, it was just Paul and his mother, as his father was serving in the Pacific during WW II. Paul grew up mostly in the Sacramento area of California where he graduated from La Sierra High School in Carmichael in 1961. His father was employed at McClellan Air Force Base and recommended that Paul enlist in the military, which he did. Paul served in the Army from 1961 to 1964, first on the DMZ in Korea, then as a member of the 1st Cavalry Honor Guard at the Persidio in San Francisco. Once discharged from the Army, Paul pursued a college degree in Sacramento then transferred to Humboldt State where he got his degree in Fisheries Biology and met Patricia Jewett. After a couple of years working as a temporary for the Alaska Dept. of Fish and Game, he was hired as a fisheries biologist in 1971. Paul was engaged to Patricia and a permanent job meant they could marry, which they did in Eureka, CA on Oct. 23, 1971. That's when their adventure together began. The day after their wedding they started driving north to Alaska in a little yellow VW bug on the Alcan Highway. Paul had enough confidence that he could calm the fears of

his new bride not knowing what was ahead. Life in Alaska started at a field station in King Salmon, then Fairbanks where they brought their first daughter Erin home from the hospital when it was 50 degrees below zero. In Nome, Paul was the Area Fisheries Management biologist for all of north western Alaska. From March to October he had to spend most of his time working away from home, often in Unalakleet or Kotzebue. In 1976, with Patricia's encouragement, they headed back to Eureka and nearby Humboldt State where Paul earned his Master's degree in Systems Analysis while working in used car sales. Their second daughter, Dara was born in Eureka where Patricia's parents, Fred and Mary Jewett, were happy to help with the new baby and big sister. Paul took a job as a fisheries biologist for the Quinault Indian Tribe which meant living in Aberdeen. But another opportunity with ADF&G took the family to Juneau where Paul was the Assistant Director of the new Subsistence Division, then a Systems Analyst for the Department of Community and Regional Affairs. He compiled data from around the state having to do with impacts of the oil industry on communities. One of his last projects took him to Valdez after the Norton Sound Oil Spill. In Juneau, Paul and Patricia searched for a church. Paul was brought up in the Catholic Church, Patricia in the Congregational / United Church of Christ, but Patricia's mother had been a Lutheran. So when they visited Resurrection Lutheran in Juneau, it was a good fit. It was a blessing to affirm the faith they shared in a Christian community which became an important part of their life together. During the last two or three of the family's 13 years in Juneau, Paul started noticing that simple tasks were becoming more and more difficult. Being a helpful can-do kind of guy, he mowed the lawns, chopped wood and turned the vegetable garden in the spring. He led his family on hikes in the Juneau area overlooking the Mendenhall Glacier, up Mount Roberts or down the beach on Douglas Island. But in the summer of 1989, when just walking became a problem, he pursued a diagnosis at the University of Washington Medical Center. The MRI showed that it was Multiple Sclerosis. By 1992, Paul had taken a disability retirement from the State of Alaska and moved the

family to Vancouver, WA where they became active members at St. Andrew Lutheran. Paul had started using a cane in Juneau, but soon he needed a walker, then a wheelchair, an electric scooter, finally a power wheel chair. When a wheel chair van was purchased, Paul felt it was a blessing to have the ability to get around so easily. He was also blessed by folks who reached out to him, his family and friends especially at church. Paul rarely complained about his disability, but from time to time he wished that he could walk again, dance with his wife or give his daughters a hug. He never ceased telling his wife and family that they were loved or took for granted the care he received from Patricia and caregivers. Paul is survived by Patricia his wife of 47 years; daughters, Erin Cunningham and Dara Tucker; and brother, Keith. A memorial service is planned for 7 p.m., Sat., June 9th at St. Andrew Lutheran Church in Vancouver with a dessert reception to follow.

Tribute Wall



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