
Obituaries

Susan Utzinger Christofferson

Susan Utzinger Christofferson, 59, died peacefully at home Wednesday evening, Feb. 25, 2009, while surrounded by family and friends.



Susan was born Oct. 19, 1949, in Peoria, Ill., to Bob and Lois Utzinger. Her childhood was filled with adventure, as the family spent time in New Mexico, Vietnam and Salt Lake City.

Susan married Wayne Christofferson in 1970 and had two children, Megan and Conor. After more than 10 years of marriage, the couple separated but remained lifelong friends.

Susan's love of children was instilled in her through her mother's work as a child advocate. This legacy is now being passed on to her daughter, Megan, who runs a Montessori school in Seattle.

Susan's career started at Smith Memorial Day Care, where she worked when her children were young. It was during this time she saw a great local need for quality child care and parental resources. She envisioned developing an organization to advocate for parents and their children, which became The Nurturing Center. As executive director and founder of the center, Susan worked tirelessly on behalf of families at a local and statewide level.

More than 30 years later, her passion for strengthening families is visible in the lives of the countless people she touched.

She created a number of heralded programs, such as ParentShare, Gemini, The Nurtury and Safe Havens, all of which elevated the level of resources available to local families. ParentShare offers parenting assistance, divorce education and a resource library. The Gemini program works to empower young women through local mentorship. The Nurtury was a comprehensive teen parenting and childcare program. She founded Safe Havens, which provides a safe and sup-

portive environment for parents and children to reunite.

She was also a consultant for Montana State University's Early Childhood Project and Montana's Department of Family Services.

Susan was often recognized for her commitment to the community and served as a board member on numerous state and local organizations.

Susan believed that "when people are treated with dignity, they pay it forward — to their children and to their family. It's the beginning of a culture where we teach tolerance and respect."

Above all else, Susan was a giver. She gave her time, her love, her understanding and her endless well of empathy to anyone in need. She will be remembered as a loving mother, sweet sister, devoted friend and tireless advocate.

Days before her death, she asked not to be canonized, but for those she has touched, this is an impossible request.

She is survived by her children, daughter, Megan Menis, and her husband, Dino, and grandson, Pete, of Seattle; son, Conor Christofferson, of Sandpoint, Idaho; brother, Charles Utzinger, and his wife, Paz, of the Philippines; and brother, Jim Utzinger, and his wife, Michele, of Spokane, and their three children, Zachary, Hailey and Laurel; sister, Ann Goldthwait, and husband, Glenn, of Sheridan, and nieces, Heidi and Kelly; surrogate daughter, Hanah Gharst, and her son, Izaak, and her brother, Brandon Vance; and former husband, Wayne Christofferson, and wife, Barbara.

Susan was preceded in death by her parents, Bob and Lois.

Per her request, a celebration of her life will be held in the spring.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests donations be made in her name to The Nurturing Center's Safe Havens program, 146 Third Ave. W., Kalispell, MT 59901; (406) 756-1414.

Susan had said, "Obstacles are what you see when you take your eyes off the goal." Here's to a woman who never took her eyes off the goal.