



Sharon Margaret Jones (Ward)

May 14, 1944 - September 14, 2023

“How can anyone not love standing in front of the ocean? Its wind blows the cobwebs from your soul” – Sharon Jones

Sharon was born in La Grande, Oregon on May 14, 1944, to Benjamin Ward and Kathryn Ward (Davis). Her father worked on the railroad as an engineer, and her mother was a homemaker, filling their Sears Kit Home with mouthwatering aromas from recipes passed down to Sharon and her siblings. Sharon was the youngest of three surviving children. Her sister, Kathlene Ward, sadly passed at just 4 months of age. Sharon came as a shock and blessing to her parents as a change-of-life baby, growing up alongside her nieces and nephews as her two brothers had already outgrown the nest.

The Wards valued hard work and education and were very influential on their three surviving children: Sharon's brother, Ben, spent his life in education working as a teacher. Her brother, Phil, followed in their father's footsteps as a section crewmember for Union Pacific Railroad. Sharon also entered the education field after graduating from Eastern Oregon College with a Bachelors in Secretarial Science. She went on to have many jobs in academics from working in the veterinary and psychology departments at Washington State University, the library at her alma mater, curator at the Harney County Museum, and retired from the Harney County School District at Slater as a teacher's aide in special education.

It was while working at the library at Eastern Oregon College that she met her kindred spirit, Gene Jones, and married him on August 16, 1974, at Morgan Lake above La Grande. They hiked 10 miles into West Glacier and spent their honeymoon among the cedar and ponderosa pine. Married to the man she would spend the next 49 years with Sharon settled in their Burns, Oregon home and took on a new adventure - navigating motherhood to Gene's two children from his previous marriage, Shirlee, and Daniel.

She spent the rest of her life enjoying everything the High Desert had to offer, raising her family with love, empathy, humility, a touch of sarcasm, and a whole lot of strength. She loved camping, fly fishing, gardening, and being out in nature. She was always quick to spot a deer hiding on the side of the road and identify plants or a bird as it flew by. Not

known to have any indigenous blood, Sharon connected on a spiritual level to nature and to local Indian tribes such as the Nez Perce and decorated their modest home with a blend of floral accents, Gene's hunting trophies, family photos, and Indian sculptures and photos.

Sharon and Gene often traveled - visiting Canada; and Mexico; navigating the southern hospitality states of Alabama, Mississippi, and Georgia; and even visiting New Orleans. And while Sharon had a fun-loving, don't-care-what-people-think personality, I doubt she took home any beads back to Oregon. Oregon was always their home and choice destination, and you would be hard-pressed to find one paved or dirt road in this state that Gene and Sharon haven't traveled down. Their hundreds of camping and car trips were fueled by Elvis, the Beach Boys, and gas station snacks; piled into a truck trying to avoid being drooled on by one of the kids.

While at home, Sharon enjoyed gardening, reading, writing, and cooking. Blessed with a genius knowledge of grammar, Sharon was well-read in fiction and poetry and often penned her own poems. She is even published in "A Sense of Place" An Eastern Oregon Anthology. If not at home, Sharon could be found in a bookstore, often accumulating so many books she would bring bags of books for her friends and family to sift through, and she spent many mornings discussing the month's popular read at one of her book clubs.

She was a very giving person, always knitting or sewing washcloths and blankets to give as gifts. She passed down recipes and was always willing to teach others, as long as they helped with the dishes. Sharon was an amazing cook. Her snickerdoodles were perfect little discs of cinnamon sugar, her grandchildren always requested homemade biscuits and gravy in the morning, she could cook deer and elk to rival any 5-star steak house, and her legendary Parker House Rolls will always be a treasure passed down through the generations. More than once those rolls have caused ruckus and family feuds during holiday dinners if anyone dared to leave their plate unattended.

Sharon and Gene enjoyed decades together in their Burns home. In August 2022, they sold that home and moved to Newberg, Oregon. Sharon's passing did not come as a surprise to her or her family. One of the strongest women in the world, she survived cancer and lived many years with an arm that was more decoration than a useable appendage. Sharon could feel her time coming and now, in hindsight, was preparing her immediate family for it as well. She allowed herself to be uprooted and moved to the Willamette Valley, just to be closer to her daughter and help put her mind at ease. Each night she would call out to Gene and repeat "I love you. You know I love you right?" She wrote down little notes and remembrances of her history, memories, and thoughts. She spent her final days enjoying what she loved the most: being right by Gene's side, book in hand, and enjoying the beauty of nature.

On September 14, 2023, Sharon passed from this world, wrapped in love and her Nez Perce tribal blanket. She is survived by her husband, Gene Jones; daughter and son; 7 grandchildren and 14 great-grandchildren. A Celebration of Life will be held on October 14, 2023, at Harney County Chamber of Commerce starting at 11:00 am. Please come by and share your favorite Sharon story. If you wish to donate in Sharon's memory, please donate to Shriners.

“And now these three remain: Faith, Hope, and Love. But the greatest of these is love.”

1 Corinthians 13:13

Previous Events

Celebration of Life

OCT **14**. 11:00 AM (PT)

Chamber of Commerce
484 N Broadway Avenue
Burns, OR 97720

Tribute Wall

“ Even though we grew up in the same town and moved to the same town after leaving college, I didn’t know Sharon Ward Jones until introduced to her by my sister, who had been her roommate at WSU. This introduction occurred on motorbikes as she and my sister Anita had toured the country as their version of *Easy Riders*, their heads full of dreams and the outdoors, topped by helmets. Because I was a new teacher, I knew no one in the small town, so I reached out to the one person I’d met and with whom I had something in common. Besides, she laughed a lot and I liked that. And so, our life-long friendship began.

I admired Sharon so much that when I began my journalistic career as a feature writer, she was one of my first subjects. She lived an authentic life, and by that I mean she pretended to be no one else. She not only heated her house with the wood she and Gene had gone to the woods to get in the summer, but she cooked and baked her wonderful meals and desserts in a wood-burning range. My favorite thing she baked was her grandmother’s raisin cookies, and she made sure I had the “receipt.” She did laundry with a wringer washer and a clothesline, as our mothers had done. She sewed clothing and quilts. She taught me the meaning of gleaning, one of the many things she did to economize. I remember her showing me a lovely item she’d sewn made of fabric she’d found at the town dump. It slayed her that people threw away perfectly good items instead of finding homes for them. She had answered the question of how to live the best life for both Gene and herself and the environment.

We laughed about so many things when we got together--children, husbands, ourselves. We talked books and writing. We traveled to the Oregon Shakespearean Festival, a cultural treat when you live in Burns. She and Gene were a great help when I was going through my divorce, making sure I was okay and bringing wood for my stove.

When I moved from Burns, I was always delighted when I got mail to see the 888 West Madison address in the upper corner of the letter or box. I knew what was within would be wonderful. Sometimes it was a book she knew I’d like, a dish rag or hat she’d knit or a hot pad or table runner she’d sewn. Sometimes it was a collection of her thoughts and observations from her rural life which were in turns wry, lovely, and inspirational. I was so proud of her when a piece of her writing was published!

I loved visiting their home because of the way Sharon decorated, with natural items I’d not thought of using—teasels, nuts, stones, feathers, dried weeds and flowers—things she’d found in nature that she loved. Because of that, I started paying attention to the outside world around me and finding joy in it. She came to stay one week when I started my new family, saying she would paint the kitchen in trade for her keep, because she wanted to visit the ocean here every day, breathe it in, and re-center. I would have been happy just to have her here, without the painting, but she wanted balance. The last time she and Gene came to visit was several years ago when they were touring the coast. She

wanted to see our gardens and I wanted to treat them to seafood. Balance.

Life always keeps us wanting more when it comes to friendships and the ones we love. Both Neal and I were so sad to hear of Sharon's passing. We will cherish the memories we have and know that if we all truly are a part of the great cosmic Love that binds everything together, we will meet again.

Karen Keltz

Karen Keltz - September 27, 2023 at 01:41 PM