

Words by Pat Beech

When I first met Jim, it was in June 1982. He was a student in my Beginner ASL class at Fairfax High School. The glow and smile on his face were what captured my attention. My name sign for Jim was “J”. He really was a treasure to work with during the summer. I knew right off that there was something special about Jim.

People asked me why Jim took ASL class. At that time, he was coaching basketball. His team had played against Model Secondary School for the Deaf on Gallaudet campus. Jim always congratulated the other teams, so he wanted to be able to sign with the MSSD team players.

Near the end of the semester, he told me that he had to drop out because of taking care of his Dad, who needed more attention. During the last session, one student told me that he was meeting Jim for racquetball at Providence Recreation Center. He asked if I wanted to come. I thought yeah sure. After the three of us played racquetball, the friend excused himself. Jim and I spent the evening chatting, and he came over to the house where I was staying. He was so curious about TTY, Flash Signaler, etc.

Our first official date was at a high school football game. It was so cold so we used a blanket to stay warm.

During the course of our dating, Jim told me that he kept making excuses not to see me, because he didn't understand what was happening between us. He said that his family told him that he was in love. He thought no, he could not be, because he thought he had already met his soulmate at University of Jamestown. That soulmate, named Kathy Pederson, died before she could finish college.

Jim finally agreed that yes, he was in love with me. We hardly could keep our eyes off each other during the course of our dating.

He came home with me for Christmas. We first went to see my aunt and uncle in Mocksville, NC. My uncle told Jim that Dad was okay, but Mom could be a problem, and to let him know if he needed help. Next we went to see my parents. First thing my mom said was “Don't you do anything to hurt my daughter.” Jim was taken aback, and thought “Hello”. This began a wonderful relationship between Jim and my mom.

In early 1983, we decided we will get married. We went home again to NC. Jim and Dad went out on the back porch. Later Mom and I went out there, and I asked Jim what Dad's reply was. Jim said that Dad didn't reply. Dad explained that we were already making wedding plans. I told Dad that Jim wanted his blessing. Dad gave him that. We went out to the local lake, and that was where Jim proposed to me.

We were married at Annandale United Methodist Church on August 20, 1983. It was the hottest day that year. The reception was at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Falls Church. Here is a little background - Jim was a custodian at St. Paul's Episcopal Church. After we left from the reception, we went to my apartment to change clothes and wait a bit before coming back to St. Paul's Episcopal Church. We cleaned up.

The next day we went to National Airport for our honeymoon. Jim heard over the loudspeaker that we needed to go over to the ticket counter. Jim went over. The ticket person wanted to see our tickets. They tore them in half, and we were given first class seats. That was a very nice surprise!!

I have so many fond memories of Jim. We shared love for family, friends, Macintosh computers, traveling, photography, videotaping, movies, and so many more. We did not have children of our own, but we were blessed with nephews, nieces, and children of friends.

As many of you already know, we have made multiple trips to Walt Disney World and a trip to Disneyland. Jim was a big Disney Fan. We went to Disneyana Conventions where we met some of Jim's favorite celebrities, such as Fess Parker, the original Mouseketeers, Disney's Nine Old Men (Marc Davis, Ollie Johnston, Ward Kimball, Frank Thomas). During the years, we had made many friends, such as Jeanne Horn, Claud Smith III, Susannah & Todd Campbell.

In June 2005, we went on a land and cruise tour in Alaska with 6 friends. That was a fantastic experience. One of the highlights was visiting the Husky Homestead in Denali where we saw Jeff King, a four-time Iditarod winner. Jim was so fascinated with Iditarod that we came back in 2007 and 2008. We got bids for me to be IditaRider both times. Jim loved mingling with all of the mushers. We also went to Fairbanks both times to see the World Ice Art Championships.

During June-July 2011, we were on the road for 6 ½ weeks in our Prius. We went to University of Jamestown for Jim's 40th class reunion. We continued to Oregon and California. We stayed a week in Seattle for a conference for ASL teachers. Next we entered Canada, visiting mostly Alberta. We went back into US via North Dakota for Jim's college classmate's (Gary Purath) daughter Darci's wedding.

During August 2013, we were on the road for 3 ½ weeks in our Prius. We visited Colorado and Utah, before coming through Nebraska for Jennifer Greenfield's wedding.

We loved visiting National Parks. We visited 39, and sailed through two. We still had 18 more National Parks to visit. We were looking forward to visiting Texas in April 2017. We planned to visit Big Bend National Park, Joshua Tree, etc.

Jim was so thrilled to have a mini-class reunion when we went to Fargo in July 2015. His college classmate, Jack Suyderhoud, had a son who was a Blue Angel pilot.

Some of you knew that Jim had total replacement surgery on left knee on May 20, 2015. He recovered nicely and was looking forward to having the total replacement surgery on right knee on January 6, 2016. About two weeks of PT sessions, he had some health setbacks. During the 2nd hospitalization, we learned that he had fracture in the T8 area of his spine and multiple myeloma. During the 3rd hospitalization, he had staph infection which was hard to get rid of. In the meantime, multiple myeloma was taking over his body. His immune system was not strong enough to fight off everything. Jim died peacefully on April 11.

In addition to being my soulmate, Jim was my “gem.”

Jim – I thank you for 34 wonderful years!! I love you and look forward to joining you.