



ST. STEPHEN THIS WEEK

St. Stephen Lutheran Church Newsletter



Val was part of the 1991 Women's World Cup USA team. Second row, fourth from left.

OUR VERY OWN HALL OF FAMER

St. Stephen people were steeling themselves for Val Sullivan's Celebration of Life. They weren't feeling much like celebrating. The passing of someone so vibrant had knocked them for a loop. But, in the end, Saturday's service was every inch a celebration of this remarkable woman. The sanctuary was packed. We heard from a niece who loved her. We heard from our own Susan Warren, who perfectly blended humor and heartache. And from Pastor Tom, we heard welcome words of hope. Here are excerpts from Val's obituary.

Valerie A. Sullivan ... passed away peacefully at home surrounded by loved ones.... She was born on August 17, 1963, in Saranac Lake, N.Y. Val was a loving, strong and caring individual who adored her family. She had a great passion for the beach, bird watching and cherished Christmas.

Valerie is survived by her wife, Valerie Kibler, her sister Jennifer Sullivan, her nieces Nicole McIntyre (Jimmy) and Sarah Owens (Eric), her nephew Drew Fabian, and her uncle Matthew Scinto. She was preceded in death by her parents, Harry and Lynne Sullivan.

Valerie received her education at Albemarle High School and went on to earn a bachelor's degree in physical education from Slippery Rock University. She furthered her education by obtaining a Master of Science in exercise physiology from Florida State University, followed by a teaching assignment in Germany. She went on to receive a Bachelor of Science in physical therapy from Florida A&M University.

Val began her career as a physical therapist and later became a certified wound care specialist by the American Academy of Wound Management. Her dedication and expertise in the field were recognized when she received the Distinguished Member award from the Association for the Advancement of Wound Care. Val worked at Capital Regional Medical Center for 25 years and concluded her career as a healthcare risk manager at Encompass Rehabilitation Hospital....



She found joy in various hobbies, starting with field hockey, softball and lacrosse, until she fell in love with rugby. Val played rugby at Slippery Rock and FSU and was honored to be a member of the 1991 U.S. Women's Rugby Team that won the World Cup in Wales. Her remarkable achievements led to her induction into the U.S. Women's Rugby Hall of Fame in 2017.

Contributions can be made to the US Women's Rugby Foundation (<https://www.uswrf.org>) or St. Jude (<https://www.stjude.org/donatetoday>).

EXCERPTS FROM PASTOR TOM'S EULOGY

Val understood the words of Jesus quoted in the Gospel from Mark that we read today because she'd (in a way) been preparing to go to "the other side" for a few years. She didn't necessarily want to go. Having strong faith doesn't make the traveling easy, but she knew as the doctors gave the reports that little by little her options were diminishing. Yet, ever the fighter, she kept up with her challenge.



And she had this overwhelming sense of peace about her. Like the storm the disciples went through, she never seemed to really panic, like the guys in the boat did! She recognized that it was God who had it all under control. It was like our Sully heard the voice of Christ say, "Peace! Be still." And so she was. You know, there is a great wisdom in people like Val who know their days are numbered from a diagnosis. They go about as if knowing a secret others of us don't know. It's a secret most will not understand unless we have similar circumstances, but it's as if they are already living in both worlds – and knowing, in truth, that the two worlds are not separate ones.... One foot in this world and the other in what comes next.

Those who spend even a little time around such people, like Val, will come to see we should all know our days are numbered. Even those who have current good health can go about life as if they have a secret that others may not know, because the truth is each and every one of us has a foot in both worlds. That is the way, that is the truth and that is the life which Jesus taught and modeled.



And it's what comes to our minds today. That even in our grief and hurt, and it hurts deeply to not have Sully to talk to and to touch, but that even in our grief and hurt, we have this joy that cannot be contained. Nor should it be!



Val knew what a gift a phone call can be, what a gift a visit is, what a gift it is to hold someone's hand, to motivate someone by singing a song, and joys of a passion for rugby. You have to see this picture of her screaming ... it's terrifying! :-)

She was a rock whom we needed to have in our corner because she was compassionate and fair, honest and supportive, and a fierce advocate. And we're going to miss her so much....

A NOTE FROM VAL KIBLER

Val Sullivan's family would like to thank everyone for all of your support, kind words, cards, fellowship hall setup, beautiful spread of food and cleanup. She loved you all so very much.

ST. STEPHEN REMEMBRANCES

“St. Stephen Lutheran became a brighter place when these two walked through those doors [on Dec. 26, 2004]. They immersed themselves in our social and ecumenical lives. They quickly became two of our favorites. Sully’s sense of humor and love of play was forever present. She was working at Capital Regional as wound-care specialist; I was there visiting case managers. Val had recently purchased a new Volvo (these gals love their Volvos), and I knew it was out in the parking lot somewhere. I had the receptionist call her down to the front desk telling her someone had reported they had rear-ended her car. She rushed down with this look of horror, and when she saw me standing off to the side, she gave me the biggest grin and then said a few choice words. We had a good laugh (thank goodness!!). Val, we are sad because we aren’t ready to say goodbye. Your mark on St. Stephen and all of us will forever be part of our history, and we are all better persons for you passing through our lives. Now you are in the ARMS OF JESUS. We promise to look after your beautiful wife. Godspeed.” *(Excerpts from Susan Warren’s eulogy)*

“Favorite photo:
Taking the Valz for a spin in Fern’s rumble seat in January 2020. [Fern is a gorgeous 1931 Model A.] I can hear her laugh; it was one of a kind, and she shared it freely.”
(Sue Williams)



“My heart is saddened at the passing of Val, but I rejoice knowing she is pain-free in the arms of her Savior.”
(Nathan Basford)

“Remembering the laughing while trying to carry the heavy manger figures from the fellowship hall to the sanctuary and Val making us laugh and then saying ‘Be careful’ so we wouldn’t drop them. Then doing the same thing while we were cleaning up, returning them to the storage shelves and guiding Bob on just how to place the individual pieces on the shelf so they would all fit!!!” *(Linda Eshleman)*

“Val was always so kind and helpful. Whenever we needed something, she delivered! Although, I remember her scolding me one time, when my mother was a patient at Encompass. I was not aware of the rule and took my mom in her wheelchair to a nearby nail salon, and Val came running over and said, ‘You can’t take her out – she is in a hospital!’ I was so embarrassed and apologetic, and she quickly gave her forgiveness. That was Val!” *(Greta Langley and Chris Gossman)*

“Sandy and Lauren’s struggles with cancer were long and difficult in the extreme. In both cases, Val was there to help us understand and negotiate their treatment, especially the rehabilitation hospital elements for Sandy. After they both died, Val was the epitome of a compassionate friend, helping me to negotiate this journey. Val truly lived her faith and used her gifts to make a real difference in the world. She will be greatly missed!” *(Jim Sampson)*

ONLINE REMEMBRANCES FROM THE COMMUNITY

Someone posted this message to Val Kibler: “How wonderful for you to have shared your life with someone so alive.”

“I worked with Val at CRMC in Tallahassee. She was always cheerful, and so friendly to everyone. I don’t think she ever met a stranger. She was loved by many, many people....”

“Val was an incredible friend and mentor. She was my ‘office neighbor’ at Encompass Health for several years and was always ready to chat (and laugh). Val was a patient advocate and a great supporter of nursing. She provided me guidance and advice more times than I can remember. The thing I will miss the most is her amazing sense of humor.”

“Sul was great with my daughter Mary. Our family loved her very much. I know she is in good hands now with all the others who have gone before her.”



“You knew you were in good hands if Val was with you.”

“Val was so helpful in me becoming a better professional.”

“A warrior spirit in an angel gauze ... fierce yet loving, intelligent, spirited, and thoughtful to the needs of all warrior spirits. The waves of love like the ocean will bathe her for eternity.”

Rest in peace, dear sister.

A SPECIAL MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION SUNDAY

This year’s Ministry of Reconciliation keynote address brought a welcome burst of optimism from the Florida Capitol. Our guest speaker was state Rep. Anna Eskamani, whom Pastor Tom introduced as “a gift of light in such a dark place.”

She’s a Democrat in a time when hard-right Florida Republicans are in charge. It’s daunting. So many legislators in the majority, she said, “want people to feel shame for being different.” As a young Iranian-American, she knows all about being “different.” But she grew up in the Orlando melting pot and said she sees people’s differences as potential strengths. She explained that her ministry to others began with Planned Parenthood – because, while she appreciated the access she got to comprehensive care, she couldn’t help but think of the people who didn’t have that same access.

Her aim as a legislator is to build bridges, to find areas of commonality with others who might not always agree with her stands. More than an ally, she wants to be an “accomplice.” That is, to be there even in the tough moments. To do what’s right, even when she doesn’t personally benefit. As for her political opponents, or her constituents who didn’t vote for her: “I can’t just write them off. They’re hurt people. Maybe they were bullied, or are insecure.... They’re worthy of my attention.”



(Photo, from left: Rep. Eskamani, Pastor Tom and Kimblin NeSmith, a Democratic candidate for Florida Senate District 3, which currently consists of Leon and all or part of 12 other counties.)

She said she leads with love, education and understanding. So much vitriol, she said, is based on misinformation. And so many of her fellow legislators see politics as a zero-sum game – as in “The only way I can succeed is if you fail.” Her view, by contrast, is that we all can succeed.

Although she sometimes feels disappointed, by no means does she feel powerless. “We have to be a little power-hungry,” she said, “if we want to bring about the world we envision.” She reminded us that, even these days, there are inclusive bills being proposed. Trouble is, they often don’t have a path forward, because the leadership decides which bills get heard. Too often, she said, those leaders don’t want to actually solve problems, such as property insurance. Why? Because that’s hard work! Plus, solving that kind of problem involves challenging your donors. As a result, she said, “so many nonsense bills get attention.”

Still, she said, she and other Democrats keep filing bills – if for no other reason than to show what’s possible in the future. Sometimes, those bills even pass. One example is her diaper bill – which eliminated the tax on the sale of diapers and adult incontinence products. It doesn’t bother her that the governor takes credit for that bill, she said, as long as working people get the help they need.

Rep. Eskamani earned a standing ovation from Sunday’s St. Stephen audience. Monday she was back at work, bucking the odds, with no ovations. As veteran Ministry of Reconciliation organizer Dave Suhrweir was preparing his thank-you email to her, he saw a breaking-news article headlined “Bill that could pull financial aid from student protesters advances in Florida.” Dave wrote in an email to Pastor Tom: “It demonstrates the work environment that Anna gets to experience and endure. Blessings to her!”

Pastor Tom’s email reply was a reminder that sometimes we do have legislative victories to celebrate. Pastor wrote: “I was able to be in the committee meeting [Monday] to speak in opposition to the ‘Pride Flag Ban Bill’ (SB1120). It was a joyful surprise when it died in committee!!! I am at the Capitol again today [Tuesday], but this time with other clergy from the ELCA around Florida! This is a huge step forward for our synod, as Bishop Suarez is here with us!”

HEARTFELT THANKS

By Bob Eshleman (Pictured here in 2021)

A huge heartfelt thanks to my St. Stephen family for walking with me through my recent open-heart-surgery adventure. From Pastor Tom’s pre-op visits, ministering communion to my family and his continued words of encouragement, I cannot imagine any way that the surgery would not be successful. I did say a prayer the night before my surgery that God would guide the hands of the entire surgical team. That prayer certainly was answered.



Following the surgery, the outpouring of love, continued care and cards with good wishes was totally amazing. This was expressed further by the numerous in-hospital visits from my St. Stephen family. Upon discharge, I was never forgotten as the visits continued. Even now, under the watchful eyes of my St. Stephen family, Linda has a chance to take short breaks for whatever reason. Last Sunday, it was definitely a treat for Linda and me to be back at worship with our St. Stephen family. The love and caring we received certainly warmed our hearts.

I realize there is still a long way to go. But with the support system I have, I will be doing my very best to return to my ushering spot in the narthex. Once again, thank you all so very much, and may God bless all of you!



TALENT SHOW: ONE WEEK FROM SUNDAY!

We haven’t heard from Taylor Swift’s people yet, but we have confirmed that a number of St. Stephen celebrities (including some of those pictured here, from last year) will be performing a week from Sunday in our annual Mardi Gras Talent Show. You want names? Here’s a sampling from showrunner Lex Lutheran:

- The Greeley Girls will do acrobatics.
- They’ll also perform a musical number with Judi Duffy, who will also do another number with a friend.

- Rita Ford and Colleen Holdcraft will dance, along with a mystery guest.
- Terri Schmitt will perform karate moves.
- Dave Suhrweir will amaze us with magic.
- The Hehns will sing.
- So will the Reces. (And Karl?)
- So will the choir.



So will YOU, if you're in the audience. You will be, right? Can't have a good show without a great audience. And, shucks, you're the greatest.

'WHEREFORE ART THOU ROMEO?'



Jen Reece brings you the latest drama news from Young Actors Theatre: "Please tell those individuals who bought subscriptions for Young Actors and/or others who may be interested that tickets for 'Romeo and Juliet' go on sale this week. (www.youngactorstheatre.com) None of the St. Stephen kiddos are in this show, as it is a high school production, but it will still be a fantastic show with wonderfully talented students."

BEFORE YOU GO...

- The St. Olaf Choir is performing at 7 p.m. Friday at Trinity United Methodist, 120 W. Park Ave. Tickets are \$35, or \$10 for students. Visit [St. Olaf Choir at Trinity United Methodist Church \(Tallahassee\) Tickets, Fri, Feb 2, 2024 at 7:00 PM | Eventbrite](#) .

- Sunday, the Outreach Committee is meeting in the fellowship hall immediately after the service.

- Here's an offer from embroidery wizard Margaret Bowers: "Bring your own shirt, jacket, bag or apron and get the St. Stephen logo embroidered for only \$5. Our fabulous Council President Denise came up with the idea of rainbow colors. Bring in your item and \$5, then drop off in fellowship hall – so you can promote our wonderful church. Questions? Call Margaret at 407-921-8671."



- Margaret also says: "Come join us on Tuesday, Feb. 13, at 11:30 for OWLS at Casa Grande Margaritas & Cocina, 1800 Thomasville Road, next to Jo-Ann fabric store. RSVP 407-921-8671."



- Here's a picture I wish I had: As we sing our final hymn, facing the back of the church, there stands Caroline Collins, one of our trusty tech-team members, holding up her bulletin as a shield against the invasive sunlight as she tries to monitor the tiny screen atop her video camera. Winter sun makes our worship together so much more interesting!

- If you have an anniversary, birthday, special memory or special St. Stephen person or program you'd like to honor, celebrate by sponsoring the altar flowers for our service. Sign up on the flower chart, out by the nametags, or ask Lori to sign you up. Include the \$40 with your regular offering. And then take the flowers home!



UPCOMING BIRTHDAYS

Joey Bonfanti - 02/02
Gabbi Oates - 02/02
Barb ODonnell - 02/05
Chris Reece - 02/15
Patrick Kennell - 02/18
Tami Allen - 02/21
Lisa Medley - 02/25
Jackie Mustian - 02/25
Judi Duffy - 02/27
Rob Schiffer - 02/28



IN THE WEEK AHEAD

Today:

Noon - Al-Anon meets in fellowship hall (FH)
7 p.m. - AA meets in FH

This Friday:

9:30 a.m. - TOPS meets in FH

This Saturday:

10 a.m. - Sew for Hope meets in the FH

This Sunday:

9:00 a.m. - Book study
9:30 a.m. - Choir practice
10 a.m. - Worship, Fifth Sunday after Epiphany
4 p.m. - Congolese Christian worship in FH

Monday, Feb. 5:

5 p.m. - TIMA meets in FH

Wednesday, Feb. 7:

5 p.m. - TIMA meets in FH
7 p.m. - Choir practice



If you have news or photos to share,
please send them to Lori at
sslc@ststephenlutherantally.com.

Don't forget our Facebook page:
<https://www.facebook.com/ststephentallahassee>.

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The Rev. Tom Holdcraft, Pastor

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