

Virginia “Ginny” Olney

Our very dear friend **Ginny Olney** passed peacefully from this world Sept. 4, 2022, at 10:47 a.m., at her home.

She was surrounded by loving friends, and an outstanding team of home caregivers and Home Health employees. She was 79 years old. She had an aggressive form of brain cancer that took her, and everyone else, by surprise.

We four friends have collected personal memories to share about this remarkable woman.



Virginia “Ginny” Olney was born and raised in Seattle, and later went to college in Massachusetts. She graduated with a degree in elementary education and spent a few years as a classroom teacher in Provincetown on Cape Cod. She maintained close connections to her friends there, throughout her life.

She and her husband, Grant Miller, moved to Washington state together, and became commercial fishermen. They raised their sons, Bae and Nick, on their boat, and chose Vashon Island as their permanent home.

Later, the family fished in Southeast Alaska, and eventually moved to Sitka. It was important to Ginny to retain a home in the Seattle area to be close to her beloved mother, Lucy Olney, who preceded her in death. She visited her mother regularly, and made sure she was comfortable and at home, for as long as possible.

Ginny loved life, her friends, and had a fierce love for her family. She was committed to maintaining a very healthy lifestyle. She was proud of her sons who had become successful fishermen on their own seiners. She was thrilled when her grandchildren would join their parents for a trip or a fishing season.

Ginny also cared deeply for her daughter Kate, and Kate’s children Molly, Theo, and Finn. Kate happily reconnected with her birth mother (Ginny) later in life. Ginny’s Sitka grandchildren are Jordan, Kai, Tatum, Tevin, Marina, Rowan,

and Dezi. She adored her grandchildren and made sure she never missed any of their basketball games.

Ginny was petite, but very strong. She would go to the gym regularly to condition for downhill skiing, a sport she enjoyed almost to the end of her life. She was strong physically, mentally, and spiritually, and had much fortitude and willpower that helped her accomplish much in this life.

Ginny loved the ocean and fishing. After retiring from commercial fishing, she focused on renovating houses. Her last major project was rebuilding her own deck from the ground up, at the age of 75. With a table saw and the tools she needed at hand, she completed the project, including doing all the heavy lifting by herself.

Ginny had long, soft, straight, brown hair with silvery highlights. She looked so elegant in her simple, but very beautiful clothing and jewelry. You could always count on Ginny to be looking great, and “put together,” showing respect to others as she put her best self forward.

Ginny had a regal bearing. At classical music concerts, she sat with perfect posture, attentive to the music, and looking peaceful. Her hearing loss made listening to the music challenging, but her incredible love for the music, and the occasional good audio day, kept her attending the Sitka Music Festivals for a long time.

She had many wonderful qualities. She was generous, loving, devoted to her grandchildren, hard-working, civic minded, lively, and joyful.

Ginny was also a spiritual seeker and joined her friends in the Ocean of Love Meditation Circle. She fell in love with Sufi teachings and stories, and the community of like-minded inquirers. One could often find her at home reading or meditating. Several times she hosted a group of Sitka friends at her condo in Seattle, for meditation retreat weekends. She was exuberant when she had a chance to show her favorite “stomping grounds.”

In the arena of friendship, she was most generous. Her invitations to come over for snacks or a meal on her deck by the sea were always a treat. It was clear she had thought out every detail of the meal, its presentation, the ingredients, and of course the delicious flavor.

She loved to share her garden flowers, the ocean breeze, the birds, and to generally catch up on life’s comings and goings. She desired love, harmony, and beauty in this world, and worked on those qualities daily. She had a grounded meditation

practice, read copious volumes of spiritual teachings, and loved to share and discuss her emerging realizations.

Having a terminal brain tumor was initially devastating, and took Ginny down many difficult roads, with many challenging twists and turns. There were waves of disbelief, and then questioning – how? and why? – interspersed with layers of acceptance. She wanted to unravel the mystery of exactly how she could have been stricken with brain cancer, but that was an impossible task.

Fortunately, Ginny did come to a place of acceptance, and was a beautiful model for gracefully parting from this world. Some last moments with her were spent listening to three familiar chamber music pieces. It is not clear what she was able to hear of it, but for sure there were sacred moments shared together before she died.

About a week before she was unable to converse anymore, she shared one of her last verbalizations about the process of dying, saying, “I’m not going to fight it, I’m going to love it.”

Submitted by Auriella Hughes, Carmen Gibson Bartelds, Cat Lieser, and Martina Kurzer.

Source: *Daily Sitka Sentinel*, September 1, 2023.

Posted: January 2025.