



December 24, 1945 - June 7, 2020



sister

— Born on Christmas Eve, 1945, Jill was a gift to the community of Inver Grove Heights until her death due to pancreatic cancer on Sunday, June 7, 2020. She served the community for 40 years as a school board member, Rotarian, founding and executive committee member of the Inver Grove Heights B.E.S.T. Foundation, and president of the trustee committee of Old Salem Shrine (the Little White Church). She played a role in many positive developments in the Inver Grove Heights community, including the Inver Glen Library and the Inver Grove Heights Post Office. She

was the recipient of numerous awards, including the 2019 Service to Others Humanitarian Award from the South St. Paul/Inver Grove Heights Rotary Club.

Born to Cyrus and Edith Zehnder, Jill grew up on the family farm on Salem Church Road in Sunfish Lake. She attended Somerset Elementary School and graduated from Sibley High School in 1963.

She married Denny Lewis on December 14, 1962, when she was 17. Their son Mark was born May of 1967 and daughter Amy in

July 1969. For two short periods, they lived in Des Moines, Iowa, and later Winterset, Iowa, where they operated a cattle ranch among the bridges of Madison County. They returned to Inver Grove Heights after each stint in Iowa. The couple divorced after 21 years of marriage.

Jill began playing the organ for church at the age of 12 and went on to serve as music director at three area United Methodist Churches: Salem UMC (now Crossroads) in Inver Grove Heights, First UMC in South St. Paul and Mt. Bethel

UMC in Inver Grove Heights.

Jill was committed to ensuring area students received the best education possible. She served on the Independent School District 199 Board from 1980 to 1995, holding the position of chair for 7 years. From 1995 to 2020, she was the appointed representative to the school board of Intermediate School District 917, serving as chair from 1999 until the time of her death. She helped found the Inver Grove Heights B.E.S.T. (Better Educated Students of Today) Foundation,

friend





mother grandmother

the educational scholarship foundation for graduates of Simley High School. She was the lifeblood of BEST since its inception until 2019, holding the office of president and treasurer for many years. Under her leadership from 1987-2018, the Foundation awarded more than \$3 million in scholarships to Simley graduates.

She was a long-time member of the Inver Grove Heights/South St. Paul Rotary Club, serving as treasurer for 15 years. Through Rotary, she served as host “family” for Emma Bannister, whom Jill

loved and maintained contact with until she died.

Jill carried on her family's legacy of caring for the Old Salem Shrine, or the Little White Church, on Upper 55th Street. She was president of the trustee committee for nearly 40 years, ensuring this historical landmark which her great grandfather helped found was preserved for future generations.

Professionally, Jill became a Realtor in 1976, as it provided her flexibility to be at her kids' activities.

transitioned to the mortgage side of the business in which she remained until her death. Her career brought many longtime, close friends - from Bremer Bank, Dakota County Abstract, and others.

Jill loved to travel and was sure to check off bucket list trips after being diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in July 2018. She took an Alaskan cruise, toured New England for the fall colors, and visited her brother Dave in Nevada and friends in Arizona the winter prior to her death.

Jill prided herself on remembering people's names and knowing everyone in town. She loved piecing together a new acquaintance with someone she already knew. She was over the moon when she met Amy's future husband, John Nugent, who she quickly discovered was the nephew of her grade school best friend who had moved away.

Jill disliked being alone — nothing made her more happy than social gatherings. She could be seen at one of the restaurants in Inver Grove Heights at least once,

leader



Playing the antique pump organ at Old Salem Shrine, Founders Day, June 2019

In 2019, Jill was inducted into the Simley High School Hall of Fame for her dedication to Simley graduates and the IGH B.E.S.T. Foundation.



community

sometimes two or three times, a day. She was well known at Cahill Diner and Old World Pizza! In the early 2000s, she befriended others who gathered for breakfast at Khoury's Restaurant and kept a firm date each week for "Friday Breakfast." After Khoury's closed, the group moved around to various restaurants.

She reconnected with many high school classmates in her 40s and 50s and helped coordinate several class reunions and travels for the "high school bunch." She looked forward to concerts, car cruises

and hours playing chickenfoot.

She often planned family holidays and nights of waffles and Trivial Pursuit. There was such joy on her face and in her voice when her house was full. Almost without fail, she would choke up saying grace before the meal because she was so happy. She was a traditionalist when it came to what was served for holiday meals but on other special occasions, her meal of choice was crab legs and popovers.

She is preceded in death by her parents, Cyrus and Edith Zehnder.

Survived by siblings Bartley (Joanne) Zehnder, David Zehnder and Laurie (Don) Dinger; children, Mark (Lisa) Lewis, Amy (John) Nugent and her adopted “British Daughter,” Emma Bannister; 6 grandkids; 3 great grandkids; and many dear classmates from Sibley High School Class of 1963.

Memorial Gifts

Please consider extending Jill’s legacy of service to the community with a memorial gift to one of the following:

Old Salem Shrine (Little White Church): OldSalemShrine.org

Inver Grove Heights BEST
Fdn: IGHBESTFoundation.com

advocate

Dear Jill,

I find it very difficult to express in words how grateful I am for your leadership, your mentorship, and your friendship. You have been by my side for the two best years of my career. You have made me a better leader, a better person, and a better man. I love you very much and respect you dearly. I will miss your presence in my life, but I will forever remember the lessons I learned from you!

Love,
Mark (Zuzek)



Jill and superintendents with whom she worked: (L-R) Dave Webb (SSP), John Christiansen (retired ISD 917), Mark Zuzek (ISD 917) and Dave Bernhardson (IGH).



*We remember her in the rising of the sun, and in its going down,
We remember her in the blowing of the wind and in the chill of winter,
We remember her in the opening of buds and in the warmth of summer,
We remember her in the rustling of leaves and the beauty of autumn,
We remember her in the beginning of the year and when it ends,
We remember her when we are weary and in need of strength,
We remember her when we are lost and sick at heart,
We remember her when we have joys to share,
We remember her so long as we live, she shall live,
for she is now part of us,
We remember her.*