



Susan Arlene Carpenter

June 26, 1955 - January 4, 2026

Susan Arlene Carpenter, age 70, passed away peacefully at home the morning of January 4, 2026. Her husband, both of her sons, her daughter-in-law, and her granddaughter were all there to say goodbye.

Susan was born on June 26, 1955, in Southington, Conn., the daughter of the late Paul and Eleanor Johnson. She is survived by her husband of 48 years Kenneth, sons David and Bryce, daughter-in-law Samantha (“Sam”), and her utterly delightful grandchild Sylvia, who brought much joy to the last year and a half of her life. She is also survived by her brother Eric Johnson, her nephews Kyle and Austin, and her sister-in-law Maria, Uncle Glenn, Cousin Kevin, and numerous other cousins.

Susan was raised in Cheshire, Conn. In high school she formed an Intrepid Trio with Sue Fontaine and the late Lorraine Brodeur, all of whom remained strong, lifelong friends. She graduated from Wesleyan University in Middletown, Conn., where she met Ken. They had grown up within ten miles of each other but didn’t meet until their Wesleyan years. At college, she made it easy for Ken to find her in the campus cafeteria and elsewhere by dressing in the brightest, most intense colors available. After marrying in 1977, they headed out to Columbus, Ohio and The Ohio State University (OSU).

Susan earned a master’s degree in business administration while Ken

pursued a Ph.D. in astrophysics. She also worked as a manager of the men's department at a local department store and after completing her studies worked at the National Longitudinal Survey at OSU.

While Ken loved the cross section of America that was Columbus, Susan was not sure about the fields of cows among the skyscrapers, permitted by the unusual zoning resulting from the land-grant status of many areas within the city.

Six years later they moved to Boulder, Colo., where Ken completed his postdoctoral work at the Joint Institute for Laboratory Astrophysics (JILA) and Susan worked for a startup IT company. Both enjoyed the foothills of the Rockies and the high country around the Continental Divide. Ken had to work hard to keep up with Susan's enthusiasm for cross-country and downhill skiing and lots of high-altitude hiking!

They started a family in Boulder with first son David born shortly before they moved to Maryland where Ken began work for NASA at the Goddard Space Flight Center in the fall of 1985. Susan chose to become a stay-at-home Mom and they settled in Columbia, Md. Their second son, Bryce, was born a few years later.

Susan home-schooled David up to high school and Bryce all the way through high school. She then worked as a financial advisor at Thrivent Financial to help support Bryce through college and David through helicopter pilot training. She retired to care for her father in the last three years of his life in Ken and Susan's Columbia home.

It was during this time that Susan met Garmai Tarnue Massally, a compassionate nursing assistant who helped care for Susan's father, a sometimes-difficult challenge. Susan was so grateful for that help that she

volunteered to start a charity with Garmai.

This charity, called Friends of Leumas, raised funds to help a group of five poverty-stricken villages centered on Kpallan Town, Liberia. The charity ran for several years and succeeded in promoting the construction of a new schoolhouse, library, community center, village hand water pumps and toilets. Friends of Leumas also helped establish a productive farm, purchasing tools and building a cassava mill. This charity, thanks to Susan's and Garmai's work, also financed canoes, fishing nets, and sewing machines. Villagers were trained to produce clothing for sale, which provided another stream of income in addition to the farm's earnings. This effort was spectacularly successful, and the villages around Kpallan Town are self-supporting and growing strong.

This was the most notable of the many actions that showed Susan's amazing heart, generosity, strong desire to help others, and the endless energy she could bring to any project to which she committed. She was also very engaged with her church (Abiding Savior), for which she served as its volunteer president, and the multi-church Coalition for Compassion, both for many years.

Susan and Garmai became the best of friends. When Garmai learned of Susan's decline and her entry into home hospice care, she showed the size of her own heart and volunteered to care for Susan overnight to allow Ken and David some respite from Susan's care. She made it possible for Susan to remain at home through the last hard weeks of her illness. It was a beautiful exchange of support that made life better a half a world apart for a village in Liberia and for the Carpenter family in Maryland.

Susan went through a lot in the last two decades of her life; breast cancer, heart valve replacement (needed because of the radiation that was part of her

breast cancer cure), her first bout with bile duct cancer, and then its recurrence two years later. She showed an incredible amount of bravery in battling through all of this and living 20 years more than might have been.

Susan loved to travel, and supported Ken's passion for Disney – even accidentally getting them their one-time-only Annual Pass for Walt Disney World, as she never could pass up a good bargain. Her advance purchase of a wedding dress, that she loved and found a most excellent deal on three years before anyone else knew she was getting married, was another example of her thriftiness and self-confidence! She also enjoyed the shore, the mountains and being outside. She and Ken (later with Bryce and David) visited many national parks and enjoyed camping in some of the best. Many of those journeys were with their lifelong friends, Sue Okula and the late Doug Bigelow, and their son David and daughter Elaine.

Throughout life, Susan had an uncanny ability to connect with people and has made admiring and warm friends across a broad spectrum of people (more than we could possibly note here), the major reason her life was so incredibly productive and enjoyable for her and all those around her. To all that she loved and knew, she says one final hello and expresses hope for a bright and wonderful future.

Tribute Wall

MT

“ I was so sad to hear of Susan's passing. Susan and I met in her role at the Coalition for Compassion in Columbia. She was tireless in her advocacy for those in need and a strong supporter for us at the Interfaith Hospitality Center. Her kindness and sense of humor always made me smile when we spoke. Her passing will be a loss for many but I know will be felt most by you , her family, that she loved so dearly. Please accept my condolences for this paibful loss of such a special lady. Marge Trenkle

Marge Trenkle - January 10 at 07:46 PM

LE

“ I am sorry to hear about Susan's passing. I will remember the times we spent together growing up on the Salmon River, learning to swim fish row boating canoeing on the river. I enjoyed the board games, dominoes while visiting at her family cottage in the summers. My mom Jean enjoyed spending time with Mrs. Johnson at her cottage playing cards or dominoes during summers. Susan and her mom and dad always made you feel welcome at their home and cottage. Sincerely. Jean Nichisti and Lorraine Ewalt.

Lorraine Ewalt - January 09 at 05:06 PM