

Tribute to JoAnne Bowie

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By: Jennifer Necessary, Executive Director – The ALS Association–Arkansas Chapter, Inc.

Sweetest JoAnne....

The first moment I stepped into your home for our initial visit....there's nothing else to say except for I loved you instantly. Our eyes met, we embraced in a hug and that smile of yours was absolutely the most beautiful expression I've ever witnessed, even though you were scared, reluctant, and in denial of your diagnosis.....your contagious smile still illuminated your beautiful face.

As I told you many times in our heart to heart visits, you touched everyone's lives that you ever came in contact with in such a positive way and there is a true testament of that today as we celebrate your life. You were the life of the "party" always.....even when your voice was stricken from you...you still were in control and everyone in the group was extremely thankful for your fighting desire. We will always laugh about the moments that you begged us to put Rum in your feeding tube. We never told you "NO" but sternly recommended it wasn't the best idea...and you would grin from ear to ear and chuckle under your breath. The special dinners we shared and your birthday celebration were times we will cherish forever. The visit on Christmas night is an occasion that Jeff and I will always remember and treasure as we celebrate Christmas in the future.

Every time we were in your home for our check-in's, there wasn't a time laughter wasn't present, even though some of the visits were extremely challenging as you progressed through the journey but you never lost sight of always finding a way to be positive and grateful, which was a God given gift you shared so graciously with others. I witnessed many times your compassion to those that came in and out of the home whether it be a nurse, aide, friend, family member, etc., you were grateful for each and every one of them and what they were doing for you. Stephanie, you were her angel and we are extremely grateful for all you did for her and the comfort you brought her.

Your love for Arthur and Joseph was exemplified so sweetly every day. Those two men were your world and you always made sure they knew it (sometimes it was shown in a way that other's might not have thought it...such as being hit with a long straw Kelsey gave you for ease in drinking...which quickly became a tool for you to keep everyone in line and became a huge laugh for us all every time we saw you picking it up to take a swing). Even in your last days...the straw remained with you and you utilized it to its fullest potential. You were such a strong woman!

I want to personally thank Arthur and Joseph for an extraordinary job of caring for your wife and mother. God bless you both for the way you loved and cared for her even in some very tough circumstances. In our work, the display of love every day and the commitment you showed to her isn't always normal and for you Arthur, on this 38th Wedding Anniversary day, you carried out your commitment of "until death do us part" to the fullest. Joseph, I will not forget your mother's desire for you to find a soulmate before her journey ended. She prayed for God to place someone in your path that would be the perfect companion for you. God answered her prayer by bringing Susan into all of your lives. She couldn't wait to tell me when I arrived to the house for a visit about you and Susan. Her eyes lit up and her face sparkled like a diamond and she had such contentment in her heart. She was so excited and thrilled to see your happiness. Susan, thank you for how you stepped in and cared for her in such a special way and shared JoAnne's last days with Joseph and Arthur.

To the Lusketeers, Cindy and Betty...your commitment, as long-time friends and cousins, was amazing and is to be commended. Our chapter was formed by a "friend commitment" of bringing awareness to Arkansas for ALS so your compassion and love for JoAnne was extremely precious for us to participate in and witness. Thanks for always being there for her and taking her on outings and bringing her continual laughter and happiness. All of you were her rock.

JoAnne, I miss you terribly and will never forget the impact that you had on me, my husband, our board members and staff. There is no doubt that our lives were forever blessed by being a part of your ALS journey. I look forward to the day when we are reunited and can't imagine the jewelry you will have made (Kelsey and I are wearing ours today in your honor). All of God's Angels will be wearing a piece of your art that you so uniquely designed individually for those who were blessed by receiving your gift. I was truly honored and blessed to be a part of caring for you and your family during your journey.

Until we meet again, there will not be a day that your preciousness isn't a part of my daily life. I love you.