

Eulogy for Jo Ellen Farricker

Hello, my name is Laury Hammel, and I'm a partner with Jo Ellen and Myke Farricker of The Longfellow Clubs, but more important, a proud friend of Jo Ellen Farricker for almost thirty years. It's my honor and challenge to speak of her on this sad day.

We are all in disbelief and shock, and unbearably sad to lose Jo Ellen, but we were blessed to have known this magnificent person. We love her and miss her so much. To know her was to love her. This was evident last night when nearly a thousand people came to pay their respects and say goodbye to Jo Ellen. At the end of the long and touching evening, some in the receiving line joked that they wished Jo Ellen might have had even a teeny weeny little mean streak, so there wouldn't be so darn many people to greet. They were exhausted and yet so enlivened by the love present in the room.

When she lay down in bed Friday, she was at the top of her game. All was good in her world, and she was making things good in our world. It's still incomprehensible that she never woke up.

Last night I wish I could've recorded all the wonderful things shared about this lovely lady. How she practiced kindness and care, but didn't preach. How she could turn the other cheek and forgive. How she welcomed everyone always and was an equal opportunity recruiter for so many things, especially dancing. So much good to celebrate. And we human beings are a greedy bunch, we so appreciated what she gave us, but boy, we wanted much more of her.

When someone passes on we often wonder what would they want? In Jo Ellen's case, we know what she would want. She'd want tons of purple everywhere, her chosen color. She would definitely want us to feel the pain of loss, weep together, and mourn her passing. Then she would say, hey, it's New Year's Eve, 'party on', celebrate my life and our community--those present here today and those unable to attend. We are her life's work, a community of souls brought together by a gentle one. We are in the midst of an emotional Tsunami reaching out with its ever-widening ripples. Today and future days will be about crying, and laughing, and remembering Jo Ellen. She understood the paradoxical nature of life and would encourage

us to mourn her leaving and at the same time to celebrate all the memories she left us with.

Most who knew Jo Ellen, knew only a thin slice of who she was--she lived such a full life. She was a renaissance woman with a deep appreciation for so many aspects of life. You can't define Jo Ellen by a role or even multiple roles. She is best defined by her huge loving heart. We will remember her by the kindness and enthusiasm, she exuded and by how we felt around her—warm when she hugged us, affirmed when she complimented us, encouraged when she recruited us to dance or come to a party, inspired to see her many skills at work, happy to hear her infectious laugh, and above all, loved whenever we were near her.

How she manifested this love, is best illustrated by sharing a few snap shots of her life. Jo Ellen was one of the humblest people I've ever met, and yet she'd want you to know more about her.

Rebellious and Doting Daughter

Jo Ellen adored Joe and Eleanor (Nonnie) Orsillo. Although she gave her parents fits in her younger years, their patience with Jo Ellen's adventures paid off in the long run. Jo Ellen and Nonnie, her 100% full-blooded Italian and proud-of-it mother, had grown incredibly close in the past twenty years. She loved her Dad deeply and he died way too young.

Mothering Biker

Jo Ellen was a good-finder. She always looked for the good in people. In her twenties this led her to mothering a group of bikers, cleverly called the Grave Cheaters. Once one of her 'boys' suggested she go to a garage to get her old clunker of a car inspected. It failed. A few days later a suspicious fire hit that garage. Jo Ellen then figured out she was probably in the wrong crowd and moved on.

Spiritual New Age Devotee

Jo Ellen met her first husband (Bert, Robert, or Bob--take your pick—West, father of Sarah West) in a bar in Seattle. He later introduced her to his spiritual teacher, Guru Maharaji, and the Divine Light Mission. They became devotees and hung out with this outfit for a few years. And at their wedding, some of her old buds from the Grave Cheaters showed up on their bikes late and made quite a colorful commotion.

Caring Nursery Director and Waldorf Teacher

I first met Jo Ellen twenty-nine years ago at a Waldorf School parent-teacher meeting for our three-year old children Sara West and Jed Hammel. They were teaching us how to do water colors, I must say Jo Ellen's work that night was beautiful, and mine, well let's say our children's work was superior. Jo Ellen has always had a strong connection with children.

In fact, that's how I happened to introduce Myke and Jo Ellen. It all began when I called and woke up Jo Ellen around 6 am one morning, and asked her if she would like to create a Waldorf experience at our Nursery at Longfellow. Why she agreed is still a mystery. She did a fabulous job and one of her children she cared for, was her future daughter, Abby Farricker, daughter of Myke and Joani Mountain.

A few years later, Jo Ellen, Myke, Vicki Hammel, and I founded a Waldorf nursery and kindergarten in Sudbury. When our head teacher left, she became the teacher of the little ones, including Jason Hammel. And as you'll see, there are many more children of all ages, who are here to mourn the loss of Jo Ellen Faricker.

Savvy Entrepreneur and Business Leader

One of Jo Ellen's proudest accomplishments was being an owner and partner of The Longfellow Clubs with Myke and myself. She began as the Nursery Director and worked her way up to management and then ownership. Jo Ellen is known for her sweetness and light, but she was always a fierce protector of the mission of Longfellow and passionately believed in our purpose of making the world a better place. She was a rock that we could lean on. I relied on her insights, and in the words of Malcolm Gladwell, she had a highly refined 'blink'. She was a founder of the first association of socially conscious businesses—New England Businesses for Social Responsibility.

Her work at Longfellow spanned twenty-five years and her robust capacity to learn, led to several careers.

Health Nut

Jo Ellen was a beautiful person inside and out, and, she knew what it was like to struggle with her weight. Ten years ago she made the decision to take care of herself and become more healthy. She engineered her own transformation and enlisted the aid of her friends. When she reached the milestone of losing 100 pounds, she announced it with a poster and a before and after photo. She was truly a poster child for Longfellow. And she wasn't done, she was taking it to the next level, always participating in Teresa Newton-Moineau's motivational fitness games, and continuing to grow. And I must mention that Jo Ellen was into eating healthy food, and she and I shared a mission of expanding Myke's diet beyond grilled cheese and burgers. She made much progress on that front.

Popular Swim Instructor

Jo Ellen was a much beloved and sought-after swim instructor. She specialized in teaching scared, crying children to learn to swim and love the water. Kids loved her, and hundreds of children, many who are now fully grown adults, are now swimming because of Jo Ellen.

Motivational Water Fitness Instructor

Jo Ellen looked for twofers, she figured why not get paid for working out. When she began taking water exercise classes, according to Jane Polley, it was basically assumed she'd become a certified water exercise teacher. She was teaching three highly popular classes a week and I know that many of those devotees are here today.

Dynamic Dance Diva

It causes us so much pain to realize that Myke has lost not just a life partner, but a dance partner. For Christmas he had put in Jo Ellen's stocking nine certificates for lessons with the top dance instructors in New England. She never saw those gifts.

Ten years ago Jo Ellen and Myke accidentally began their career in dance. Starting with line dances organized by Linda Wright and moving to the Two-step led by Steele and Mary Shane, these two dancing novices evolved into legitimate dance fanatics doing every kind of dance imaginable (she was even part of a hip hop group organized by Sue Cath). Myke and Jo Ellen became competitive dancers. This passion for dance motivated Jo Ellen to build one of the largest and most respected centers for all types of dance in New England. Every week throughout the year Jo Ellen would put together

one or more dances coupled with dance lessons by the country's finest dance instructors, no mean feat. She created what can honestly be called Jo Ellen World.

She was so well organized that everything is lined up through March, and she has left an enduring legacy for Longfellow and the New England dance community. A legacy we are determined to continue.

We know she's up there and already organizing the angels, using the latest angel-mail technology, and doing the Angel Two-step, the Heavenly Swing, the Cherub Cha Cha, and more.

Treasurer, Rummage Sale Queen, and Art Teacher

She was the efficient treasurer of the Handi-Racket Tennis Program for over twenty years, and the Queen of the First Parrish Church annual rummage sale. Her flair for creating beauty led to teaching visual arts to young children in Wayland.

Devoted Surrogate Mother and Grandmother

Jo Ellen had a knack for taking people in. She so loved Jamie and Cara Zibbell and their two children.

Sister, Cousin, and Niece

She grew up in the tight-knit Orsillo family, and was known as Jo Jo. She was the oldest and was always loved and looked up to by her sisters and brother. She viewed herself in the context of a larger than life extended Italian family--her cousins, aunts, and uncles were all so important to her and served as a platform for how she lived her life.

Devoted Wife

Myke, you and Jo Ellen were beautiful together. To see you care for your daughters with such elegance and commitment was beautiful. You successfully navigated the mixture of currents that happen when spouses are also business partners. And as I said we loved to watch you dance together, so much grace. It was a beautiful thing, to see the fervor in which the two of you approached your dance competitions, how hard you worked, and of how patient Jo Ellen was when Myke stepped on her toes. Just kidding! You two were into it. The bubble's coming down? Hey, it can wait till we finish our lesson with Alan Gaskell. You had your priorities straight.

Loving Mother

I want to say a few words to her beloved daughters, Sarah, Abbey, and Zoe. This is such a tough time for you. You know she loved you beyond measure, and she structured her life around you. She chose to work part time so she could spend more time with you. She was so proud of you and all that you have become. Leaving now was not what she wanted, she so enjoyed watching you grow. But she was a glass half-full kind of gal, and she would want you to remember the glorious blessings and the wonderful years you shared together. As unbearable, and unbelievable, as it is to lose her...you were, in a funny way, the fortunate ones, not many daughters have had a wonderful mother like Jo Ellen.

And a few special words to you Zoe. Your mom won't be here for you in the normal way. But she will be with you. Your mom wasn't a particularly religious person, but she was a deeply spiritual person. We shared many conversations about the nature of higher worlds and our spirit. She knew that we are part of something bigger and something more profound than what we see with our eyes. Whenever you want to talk to your mom, you can, just think about her and ask her questions in your mind. She'll always be there, and sometimes she might even give you the answer you need. Sometimes you might even get in an argument like all teenagers do. And your devoted Daddy will always be there to love and support you at every turn. He rocks, and is one awesome dude! And all of these people here, we form a village of friends of yours and we're all eager to help you whenever you need us. Your mother left you with a community of people tied together by love, and we are there for younow, and always.

Good Friend

Jo Ellen was a good friend. Her tenderness, compassion, and ability to empathize with people, was extraordinary. Who could remember a time when she didn't greet you with a big warm smile, and she always had time for people. Ask her how she was and she'd say, 'just peachy'. She was a peach-- the epitome of warmth and kindness. It was who she was!

*Jo Ellen loved the book *The Prophet* by Kahlil Gibran. Quoting from the book...*

And when asked about friendship he said,

*And let the best be for your friend,
If she must know the ebb of your tide, let her know its flood also,
For what is your friend that you should seek her with hours to kill?
Seek her always with hours to live.
For it is her, to fill your need, but not your emptiness.
And in the sweetness of friendship, let there be laughter, and sharing of
pleasures.
For in the dew of little things the heart finds his morning and is refreshed.*

Abby participated in an annual program called the Christmas Revels that was founded by John Langstaff who died recently. They would end the evening with a song that I have slightly reworded and sweetly speaks of Jo Ellen's life.

Please 'ooo' the tune with me first, then join in if you know the words, or keep 'oooing'.

*Dance, then wherever you may be,
I am the Queen of the dance said she,
and I'll lead you all wherever you may be,
and I'll lead you all in the dance said she.*

Dance!

*Laury Hammel
December 31, 2005*

