



Nancyann Failing

September 3, 1934 - January 13, 2021

Nancyann Failing (September 3, 1934 – January 13, 2021)

Nancyann Failing died peacefully in her sleep on January 13, 2021 after enduring a battle with dementia for several years. She will be remembered for her quick wit, infectious laughter, can-do attitude, adventurous spirit, generosity, and commitment to serving others. Family and friends also remember her disdain for public speakers who dawdle at the microphone, inconsiderate smokers, and golfers who feel compelled to retell their round, hole-by-hole and shot-by-shot.

Nancy was born in Grand Island, NE on September 3, 1934 to Charles and Irma Yungblut. The family moved to Scottsbluff, NE when Nancy was seven years old. It was in Scottsbluff where she met her first husband, Dave Raber, in the 6th grade. She graduated as the Valedictorian from Scottsbluff High School in 1952, where she also published the school yearbook and led the cheerleading squad.

Nancy came to Santa Barbara in 1955 when the Raber family moved west. She had a daughter, Carol Crego, born in 1955. Her son, Steve Raber, came along a few years later in 1959. Nancy quickly made Santa Barbara her home and immersed herself in community activities and charities right away. She was an active member of the Episcopal Church at All Saints by the Sea.

Whether it was sorting donated clothing for the Junior League rummage sale or directing the entertainment for various fundraisers, she rolled up her sleeves to do the dirty work while making sure that everyone showed up on time and had fun.

Nancy joined the fight against cancer in the early 1960s as a volunteer for the American Cancer Society (ACS). In 1977, she became the first woman to serve as Chair of the California State Board of the ACS. She also devoted herself to making life better for girls and young women. After more than 50 years of service, she received the inaugural “Strong Smart and Bold” Award from Girls Inc. for her role in raising funds to build a state-of-the-art gymnasium on East Ortega Street and the Girls Inc. Goleta Valley Center on Hollister Avenue in 2008. As the Executive Director noted in 2012, “Nancy never saw a capital campaign that she didn’t like.” She worked tirelessly as Board President of the Scholarship Foundation of Santa Barbara where she raised funds, interviewed scholarship applicants, and took joy from seeing underdogs receive the money they needed to go to college and pursue their dreams. After her own kids became adults and left home, she fulfilled her lifelong dream of becoming a Registered Nurse by enrolling in the nursing program at Santa Barbara City College in 1980. She worked part-time as a nurse for several years and served on the college Nursing Advisory Board for 12 years. Her nursing highlights included recognizing that a young actor was in danger from hypothermia after filming several takes that required him to dive into the cold ocean water – she persuaded a nearby homeowner to allow the young actor to warm up in his beachfront hot tub.

In 1977, Nancy married Dr. Robert M. Failing in a small ceremony in Jackson Hole, WY. They shared a love of travel that took them all over the world while Bob scaled mountains on every continent. Nancy enjoyed observing the natural beauty in the world and learning about different cultures. She visited Africa several times, including a few trips with her friend Marlin Perkins (of

Wild Kingdom fame) and his wife, Carol. On one trip, Nancy and Bob spent a day in a Kenyan jail after Bob was spotted taking photos of a building that had been bombed by the African National Congress. Nancy also visited the Soviet Union during the height of the Cold War, China, Israel, Easter Island, and the Galapagos Islands. She dreamed of owning a flat in London, her favorite city in the world.

Nancy stayed active into her 80s. She hiked with Bob in the mountains around their Colorado summer home and jogged locally around the Bird Refuge in the mornings. During one morning jog, she encountered a man who was deep in prayer with his back to the ocean. Nancy gently interrupted him and suggested that if he was intending to face east to make his prayers count, he should turn 90 degrees to his right because the Santa Barbara coastline faces south.

Nancy loved good books and animals of every species, especially the birds that were drawn to her bird feeders. She made sure that all the holidays were fun – baking Christmas cookies with grandchildren, refereeing the Angel-counting contest, and leading the “Most Beautiful Turkey Parade” at Thanksgiving became established traditions. Above all, Nancy valued service to her community. She once said, “Service to your community is the rent you owe for the privilege of living there. And when you live in a place like Santa Barbara, you owe a lot of rent.” Her service to the community was formally recognized when she was named the 2002 Santa Barbara Woman of the Year for her “significant volunteer contributions to the Santa Barbara community.” Her friend Marilyn McMahon, who introduced Nancy at the awards ceremony, summed it up this way: “Nancy is that rare volunteer who will give money, ask for money, do messy work like teaching girls how to cook, chair a ball, and make it all fun.”

Nancy is survived by her children, Carol Crego (husband Robert) and Steve Raber (wife Blair); three stepchildren, Robert Failing, Jr. (wife Mari), Lee Scheuermann, and Margaret Wrath Esposito (husband Gerard); nine grandchildren, Matthew Crego, Judith Gronna, Jessica Gronna Llort, Kate Raber, Maggie Raber, James Scheuermann, Elise Scheuermann, Kylee Wrath, and Jared Wrath; two great grandchildren, Evelyn and Esmé Llort; and her brother, Steve Yungblut (wife Linda). She was predeceased by her husband, Dr. Robert M. Failing, her stepdaughter, Sarah Failing Gronna (husband Richard Gronna), and her brother, Larry Yungblut (wife June).

No services have been planned at this time. The family will host a celebration of Nancy's remarkable life at a later date when it is safe for people to gather. Donations in memory of Nancy can be made to Girls, Inc. of Greater Santa Barbara or the Failing Scholarship Fund at the Scholarship Foundation of Santa Barbara. The family wishes to express gratitude to the staff at Oak Cottage who kept Nancy comfortable and provided excellent care during the last few years of her life.