

In Memory of...

Sheila L. Westfall



Sheila L. Westfall, 63, a resident of the Vernonia community, died Saturday morning, December 19, 2020 at her home.

Sheila L. Westfall was born March 13, 1957 in Augusta, Georgia

and is survived by her parents Eugene "Ed" and Bonnie Taylor. She was raised in Phoenix, Arizona where she received her childhood education. She and her family moved to Aloha, Oregon in 1974 and she graduated Aloha High School Class of 1975.

She was united in marriage to Mark J. Westfall on July 21, 1984, in Oregon City, Oregon. They celebrated their 36th year of marriage this past July. Following their marriage, they resided in the communities of Portland, Banks, and Cornelius, Oregon until December 2014 when they moved to the Vernonia community, where she had resided since.

Sheila had worked for Farrell's Ice Cream at Washington Square. She was employed at Tektronix in Beaverton, Oregon for 11 years until she earned an early retirement and became

a homemaker. She ended up waitressing on and off at a few restaurants including Joe's Diner and The Log Cabin, and she worked as a barista at Espresso and More in Banks, Oregon as well. After that she was busy raising her sons.

She was a member of the Forest Grove Church of Christ. She also enjoyed visiting and attending services at many different churches along the road with her husband Mark. Among her special interests, Sheila enjoyed travelling alongside her husband who is a long-haul truck driver. She loved looking through and going thrift store shopping. She was an AVID Elvis Presley fan and liked to collect his memorabilia. She was very proud to have won the Elvis trivia in Graceland on live radio, and had been to Graceland 13 times. She really loved spending time with family and friends.

Survivors include her husband Mark Westfall of the family home in Vernonia, Oregon; her son Matthew Westfall and girlfriend Carmen Campuzano and grandson Landon, her son Jacob Westfall and girlfriend Kayla Oxley and grandchildren Wyatt, Myla, McKenzie Westfall; her brother and sister-in-law Steve and Juli Taylor, and her sister and brother-in-law Penny and Dave Mery; and several nieces and nephews; as well as her cat Miss Sunshine.

Celebration of life is still to be determined.

To sign the online guest book or to send a condolence to the family go to www.fuitenrosehoyt.com.

Fuiten, Rose & Hoyt Funeral Home in Vernonia is entrusted with the arrangements.

Vernonia Equality and Racial Justice – Fighting For Everyone in Vernonia *continued from page 7*

town or disrupt traffic, but instead to stay in one place, away from any businesses, for their demonstrations. "We live here in Vernonia. This is our home too, and we are a part of this community. We've always made that a top priority when we considered what actions we're going to take – what is right for Vernonia and what is actually helpful for Vernonia? We love this community, and we're not here to destroy anything."

The group did have several conversations with individuals who stopped during their demonstrations, with several people expressing discomfort or outright opposition to the protests. "I don't think anyone changed their mind during those discussions, but we were able to hear each other's different opinions," says Aiuto. "To me those are really valuable experiences."

Working collaboratively on a social issue was especially challenging during the year of COVID, and the group was not able to do the work they originally conceived because of the pandemic restrictions. Initially the group discussed hosting "community conversations" that would have been open to the public, where people could share their views about racism and discrimination in an open forum.

Warfield was a big proponent of the "community conversations" concept. "If you get a chance to talk with someone over a period of time, and you can keep the tension down, what you find out is that, once you use up the rhetorical statements, then you have to use other words," he explains. "You have to talk about it if you can survive the initial interactions where the rhetoric gets tossed around. If someone comes to that site, then they want to talk. They either want to learn or test something they think they believe in, or bring a concept or an idea and have it validated. The only way

that can happen is if people are allowed to have discussions. If you can get people together you will get results, if you bring the right attitude. I've seen people come away from face-to-face conversations truly changed because they had a chance to get something clarified in their mind that they thought was different. And in a small community you have the advantage of making ripples that can actually reach the edges of the pond."

Changing embedded ideas about racism is slow and incremental work, says Aiuto. "You're not going to change anyone's mind in one conversation, but that's not the goal. It's about trying to hear each other and make small steps toward understanding each other. And that was one thing we were able to do this year when circumstances allowed us to be face-to-face with someone. I'm really looking forward to the day when we can do more of that."

The group's experience working with the City Council and city staff in a collaborative effort to draft the Resolution that was passed unanimously was a positive one, says Aiuto. Five members of VERJ joined two City Councilors, Dale Webb and Susan Wagner, and City Administrator Josette Mitchell, City Recorder Stephanie Borst, and Police Chief Mike Conner in several work sessions to agree on the details, before the final draft was presented at the December 7 City Council meeting. "We all came to the table with our own unique backgrounds and perspectives, but everyone was able to listen, compromise, and change their minds," she says. "It was regular people trying to hear each other and work toward a positive, common goal." Aiuto was especially pleased and encouraged that the other three members of the voting Council each joined in with the process and brought their own concerns, before passing it. "It was a total team effort and we just really want to thank the staff who worked with us and the Council for their approval."

Warfield sees the work of changing ideas

about racism and about people belonging as especially relevant to the Vernonia community. "Vernonia is an area where old families have lived for generations maintaining a fairly conservative, right leaning political/social environment," he says. "But it is also a place with a changing demographic. More people are beginning to move here from differing communities, and perspectives. Vernonia is going to have to deal with this because change IS coming here. This is becoming a real bedroom community and there is an influx of new people with different histories, ideals, and values. You can't stop it! Check out the Vernonia Community Facebook page, and see what I am referring to reflected, among the responses to various issues that are raised there! If people here don't take the opportunity now to open up a little bit, it's going to be more painful than it needs to be later and there's going to be a lot of conflict that doesn't need to happen."

Moving forward into 2021, the group intends to continue their work for racial justice and equality issues. They have a general goal of helping to educate the community about racism, bias, and discrimination. That might include public presentations, guest speakers, those community conversations, and working with the School District or the Pioneer Museum, says Aiuto. They will work with the City to ensure that the Resolution is followed and help set up ways to track incidents in the community. "We have lots of ideas about things we would like to do in the future, including some fun and educational things for people to do and learn from. Because of the current state of things with COVID, we don't really know what we'll be able to do this year, but at some point we would like to do things in the community that are helpful and unifying. We wanted to be a transparent and approachable group, but it has been difficult this year."

"My hope is that this group can help Vernonia process these issues and move forward," says Warfield. "Not break down barriers, but provide resources through which Vernonia can begin transitioning into this new world we're moving into."

"We're not saying Vernonia is a terrible place. In fact we're saying the opposite – that it's a great place," says Aiuto. "And we want to ensure that it's a great place for everyone."

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Vernonia School Board Meetings are held on the second Thursday of each month. The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, January 14, 6:00 pm. Please check the District's website for updates/changes: www.vernonia.k12.or.us

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