

# Linda Joyce, former executive director of Kitsap YWCA, dies | Passages

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Linda Joyce

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**BREMERTON** — Linda Joyce, former executive director of the Kitsap YWCA, succumbed to her battle with cancer late March 22.

Her son was with her at Martha & Mary in Poulsbo. Joyce was 62.

Joyce had lived in Kitsap County for more than 20 years and came here when her then-husband, Rodney Joyce, was assigned to the Bremerton Navy base.

She announced her retirement from the YWCA last April after 20 years as the leader of the women's organization. Although she spent the last three years of that time working while undergoing chemotherapy for ovarian cancer which was diagnosed in 2011, Joyce said the decision to retire was a difficult one for her.

"I've come to this decision in my life reluctantly," Joyce said last April.

"This (the YWCA) has been my heart, been my baby, been my soul."

Since retirement, Joyce had been living at her home with the help of Hospice of Kitsap County and many friends who would stay overnight with her. In February, when her family became concerned that she shouldn't be alone during the day, she agreed to move to Martha & Mary.

Joyce began her career in social work. The Indiana native began working with domestic violence survivors in southern California before coming to Kitsap County.

During her tenure that began in 1994, the YWCA relocated from a rental to permanent space on Pacific Avenue in Bremerton, renovated the Y's ALIVE shelter, and added other programs that provide services for more than

6,000 people each year.

Joyce always said that she never intended on working when she moved to the Bremerton area, but that there “weren’t enough shoe stores at the mall,” and she had to find something to do.

When she saw the advertisement in the paper for executive director of the YWCA in Bremerton, she wasn’t even sure she’d apply.

“I called and got the application sent to me,” Joyce said, in an interview last May. “It took me more than a week to fill it out because I kept trying to talk myself out of it. What changed my mind was that everyone I talked to at the YWCA was so friendly.”

Joyce grew up in Gary, Indiana, one of seven children. Her father worked in a steel mill and her mother was a cafeteria worker for the public schools.

She called her family traditional and religious, having gone to the Baptist church weekly growing up. Her parents were married 66 years.

Her work with victims of domestic violence wasn’t just something she did without knowing the need. She had been in an abusive relationship when she was young. As an unwed teenage mother at age 16, she finished high school and married the baby’s father. When he became abusive, she left.

She kept going to school and eventually she graduated from college and got a job working for the Indiana State Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services. She was a social worker in the welfare department, helping other single women with children to find ways to make ends meet.

With this stability, she also had her son, Dion, with her. Her parents had been caring for him while she was in college.

She soon met Rodney Joyce and they were married. He was in the U.S. Navy and within a few years, the Joyce family was transferred to Long Beach, California. They lived there for 12 years and Joyce continued working as a social worker.

The Navy next offered them a move to San Diego or Bremerton. They chose Bremerton. Eventually, they divorced, but remained friends. She told friends that she was glad of that and he had visited her in her home a few months ago.

Joyce was well into her work at the YWCA and, after the divorce, despite her family being in California, leaving Kitsap County never crossed her mind, she said. Her son, Dion, is a deputy sheriff in Los Angeles County. And her grandson, Dion Jr., graduated from high school there last May and is studying dance and theater.

Joyce was honored last May with an official retirement party. It was there that Kitsap County Commissioner Charlotte Garrido summed up what many people think of when they think of Linda Joyce.

“It’s that laugh,” Garrido said. “We all love your laugh.”

More than 200 people were there to wish her well.

Garrido spoke about a time when she worked for the YWCA on Bainbridge Island and helped put together the plans for the Y-ALIVE domestic violence shelter.

“Linda, you are a complete treasure,” Garrido said. “Every day each of us think about you. We love your sense of sisterhood. We love your sense of community.” Garrido also mentioned something else that Joyce is known for.

“And any of us who have gotten a note from you cherish it because of your beautiful handwriting,” she said.

Longtime friend Vivi-Ann Parnell, who worked with Joyce on the board of the Kathleen Sutton Foundation, said Joyce taught her compassion.

“You have a contagious positivity,” Parnell said. “There’s such an honesty ingrained in you. I admire your positive look on life.”

Following that, Joyce thanked those who attended.

“The YWCA is my home,” she said. “It’s never been a job. It’s a mission. It’s a place where I’ve chosen to love the people who have loved me back. So my last words to you are, ‘I love you.’”

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