

Kim Poikonen was born on August 11, 1949. She was the daughter of Carl and Bertha(Kazokas) Poikonen. Carl, nicknamed Skinny, learned the bakery business from his father, who had immigrated to Gardner from Finland. Skinny went to work at the Co-op in Fitchburg after World War II. Even though our fathers worked at the same grocery store Kim and I had never met at any Co-op gatherings. One fall day in 1965 one of my buddies needed a ride to Fitchburg because he wanted to follow up with a girl he recently met. I was glad to give him a ride. It didn't quite work out for him. But it really did for me. This was the first time I met Kim. Little did I know this was the start of a long relationship.

Kim graduated from high school in 1967. Her father had suffered for a number of years with cardiovascular illnesses. For 10 straight years Carl was hospitalized for a least a month in Boston area hospitals. Extra resources to support Kim's advanced education were hard to find. The only way she able to go to Fitchburg State College, now Fitchburg University, was by receiving a scholarship from the Rollstone Congregational Church in Fitchburg. She majored in Mathematics for Secondary Education.

We were married in 1971 and soon were living in the Syracuse area of New York. While there, Kim continued to work as an instructor with the American Red Cross in their Swimming program. She had started teaching swimming at 14 years old, continuing to get additional Water Safety certifications. In fact, Kim eventually received the highest certification in The Red Cross Water Safety Program. This was indicative of the way Kim always handled herself- in a professional, understanding and helpful way in everything she did for others. While we were living in New York, because of her work with the Red Cross and other activities, Kim elected to start a master's degree program in Recreation Administration at the State University of New York in Cortland. She would drive there two nights a week to attend classes.

In January of 1981, I attended a meeting in Florida representing Up State New York I came back from the meeting representing Chicago. Without hesitation Kim supported me in my increased responsibility, and we agreed to find a home near a place where she could continue to pursue her master's degree. We settled in Wheaton, and she was the first student to pursue a master's degree in Recreation along with a bachelor's degree in Secondary Mathematics at George Williams College, now part of Aurora University in Aurora, Illinois.

Along the way, Kim was required to perform a work study and the College of DuPage agreed to conduct her work study at the athletic department. Athletic offices in colleges are not the shining example of best practices in business management. However, when Kim arrived to help them out, it didn't take the Athletic Dept. long to recognize she had exceptional talent. As soon as she graduated from George Williams College she was hired full time in the Athletic Department and went on to hold a variety of positions within the College.

In whatever capacity Kim was asked to participate, whether work related programs, church committees, our family adventures in Finland or neighborhood groups, Kim always had a happy face and was willing to do anything to get the job done in a professional, productive way. She was the consummate volunteer and gave a hand to everyone who needed help. She was loved and admired by everyone.

If it wasn't for that initial scholarship from the Rollstone Congregational Church, perhaps all of this could not have happened. If she were here now she would say, "It is time to give back, so others can benefit from our good fortune."