



## Karen Elizabeth Barbezat

March 1, 1941 - September 3, 2022

### Obituary for Karen Elizabeth Barbezat

Karen Elizabeth Leichner Barbezat, a retired teacher of forty years, who taught at St. Joseph's Catholic School in Fort Collins for over twenty of those years, passed away at home on Saturday, September 3rd, gently and without pain. She had developed leukemia toward the end of last year, and though she was in remission, was unable to recover from her treatment.

A daughter of teachers, Karen was born to Violet Carmel Thorson and Richard Kortlander Leichner in Helena, Montana on March 1, 1941 and raised in Boise, Idaho. She was in the first graduating class of Boise's Borah High School in 1959, and attended the University of Idaho, where she earned her B.A. in education in 1963.

Karen taught in the Boise area after her graduation, spending her summers with the Idaho forest service, before taking a job with the Department of Defense teaching children of active military personnel overseas. She started in the autumn of 1966 as one two U.S. instructors in the Dutch city of Zwolle, responsible, with the principal, for twenty-two children grades 1st through 8th. In November of 1967 she was transferred to Wiesbaden, Germany, where she would stay for the next six years.

Karen had a close knit friend group in Wiesbaden and spent this time period traveling Europe both alone and with friends, including trips to Russia and Morocco. In Basel, Switzerland, on December 22, 1970, she married Eugene LaVar Barbezat, an intelligence officer in the Air Force stationed at Wiesbaden. Their first child, Michele Lyn, was born the following September.

In 1973 Gene was transferred to Washington D.C., and the family rehomed in Alexandria, Virginia. A son, Sean Michael, was born in February 1975, and in 1976 Karen's family was excited to be able to experience the U.S. bicentennial year in the nation's capital. In 1977 Gene was stationed back in Germany, this time at Patch Barracks near Stuttgart, and Karen again taught for the Department of Defense. In 1980, the family relocated to Belleville, Illinois, where Karen taught for four years at Wolf Branch Elementary, her children's school.

After Gene retired from the Air Force in 1985, the family moved to Littleton, Colorado. Karen worked as a substitute teacher for the Catholic School system in the Denver area for a handful of years including a year at Notre Dame Elementary. In 1993 Karen and Gene settled permanently in the Fort Collins area, and Karen began her employment at Saint Joseph's Catholic School.

While teaching at Saint Joseph's, Karen specialized in developing and pushing her students' reading skills, culminating with an annual Author's Day, when the school's first graders would present stories they had written, made into laminated booklets, to their classmates and parents in a formal celebration. One of Karen's favorite activities was taking her students to area senior care homes where the children would visit one on one with residents to read to them or just to talk. She was so proud of the grace and sincerity shown by her students, year after year, on these visits.

—Mom's passion for teaching never abated when she was outside of the classroom. She gathered articles and supplemental materials all of her life, shopped and rummaged for holiday decorations, learned crafts to supplement her classroom and to teach to her students, and collected over a thousand books for their fluctuating skill levels. Once retired, she turned her crafting skill to card making, both for herself and others. She also stored bins of gifts, clothing items, and school supplies to continuously donate to toy drives, shelters, and education charities.

It was her great joy that she was recognized and lauded often by former students for the contributions she had made to their lives as a teacher; and it is with deep appreciation that her children, Michele and Sean, have discovered the many beautiful thank you notes, letters, and heartfelt gifts received by Karen from students and parents during her time in Fort Collins.

Karen was blessed with close and wonderful friends over her life, from her childhood and everywhere she lived and worked. Her family would like to express their gratitude for these friends, new and old, former coworkers and families of students, for their support and affection for Karen over the years. Karen passed at peace with her life, feeling loved and appreciated. This was a tremendous gift— thank you.

Karen is survived by her children, Michele and Sean, and her granddaughter, Naia Rubbo, all of Windsor; her beloved siblings: sister, Gail (Steve) Moen of Sun Lakes, Arizona and brother, Rich (Konni) Leichner of Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. She will be buried beside her husband, who died in 2019, later in the year at Arlington National Cemetery.

Funeral and burial arrangements are being conducted by Goes Funeral Care of Fort Collins. A Rosary service will be held at Saint Joseph's Catholic Church in Fort Collins on Thursday, October 6th at 6:00 p.m. The Funeral Mass will be the following day on Friday, October 7th, at 3:30 p.m., followed by a reception. The Mass will also be streamed online here:

<https://www.facebook.com/StJosephChurchFC/>