

DEBORAH "DEBBY" DUFF BOOKER



Deborah Duff Booker (Debby) died peacefully on December 19, 2024 in the company, of course, of her family and friends. She battled for years with Parkinson's disease, which killed her like a rich man goes broke: a little bit at a time and then all at once. After all that, her last act in life was exactly what anyone who knew her would have expected: she smiled.

Debby was born in 1951 and adopted soon after into the Duff family of Murray Hill Avenue in Squirrel Hill. Her mother Anne and father Jack had long wished for a daughter, and they adored Debby from the moment she arrived. In the Duff household, Debby learned to love nature, language and a good (or bad, but lengthy and elaborate) joke. Debby was a devoted daughter to both her parents, particularly her mother, who she cared for over many years.

John and Dan, Debby's big brothers, were impressed from the start by Debby's fearlessness as a toddler with the family's giant Airedale terrier. Her close relationship with her brothers was a joy throughout her life. When she was 21, while she was finishing a degree in sociology from Carlow College, her brother John and sister-in-law Viki set her up on a blind date with a young lawyer from the Mon Valley named Dan Booker.

Debby and Dan married after a ten-month courtship and embarked on a fifty-one year romance. They moved to Washington DC, where Debby worked as a copy editor and photographer and as a model for a fake fur campaign (although she later softened on that position) on the magazine Defenders of Wildlife, combining her lifelong love of animals with a passion for photography and the English language.

After a while, Debby and Dan returned to Pittsburgh and had two children, Mac and Sparky. Debby was a devoted mother who delighted in her children's oddities, encouraging them to follow their interests rather than dictating to them. She made everything so fun, however, that her children wanted to follow in her footsteps. They became, like her, lovers of books, language, and comedy.

Among the things she taught her children: How to construct a joke. How to construct a sentence and then how to take it apart again. How to appreciate a poem. How to use a typewriter. The seriousness of a joke and the absurdity of self-seriousness. How to be consumed by fits of giggles.

By her example, she also taught her children how to be kind: not just to family, not just to friends, but to everyone. They never saw her encounter a person in crisis who she did not try to help. She often succeeded. Sometimes she failed. She never stopped trying.

Debby was also, for Dan and for her children, a stalwart advocate. Her loyalty to those she loved was unwavering. A prime example was her support of Dan's career at Reed Smith. She saw and embraced the firm as a community, not just as a business. The granddaughter of a judge, the daughter of a lawyer, the niece of two lawyers, and the sister of two lawyers, she not only came naturally to the view that what her husband did was important and honorable but also found at the firm many close friends. So she put up with the long hours, inconvenient client needs, and demanding partners. She even supported (but never pushed) her son going into the profession.

Debby was passionate about sports, especially volleyball, which she played for many years. At age 50 she was named MVP of her coed team in the Huntsman World Senior Games. She was also an enthusiastic golfer and excellent pickleball player. Perhaps some small amount of her competitiveness was passed down to her progeny as well, embodied in the viciously contested annual family pickleball tournament, the Gasparilla Open.

In recent years she enjoyed the arrival of grandchildren, and sometimes enjoyed their behavior, especially their sporting pursuits. She has lately been a fixture at Ellis middle school field hockey and basketball games. The names of her grandchildren are Pearl, Teddy, Solomon, Billy, and Sam. They called her Gigi and will miss Gigi very much.

Debby was deeply invested in her neighborhood and in Pittsburgh. She served for many years on the Democratic Committee for the 7th Ward and in various roles with the Shadyside Action Coalition. She served on the Board of Trustees of The Ellis School and for more than a decade on the board of, and then as Chairperson of, the Allegheny County Housing Authority. The Deborah D. Booker Community Center in Natrona Heights was named in honor of her Housing Authority service.

Debby is survived by many of the above and more: her husband, Dan; her children and their spouses, Kate formerly Davis and Brian still Mac Devitt; her brothers and their spouses, Victoria and Heidi; her five grandchildren; many Booker brothers and sisters-in-law; nieces and nephews as numerous as the fish of the sea; and many devoted friends, to whom she was "made for fun".

Friends will be received at **JOHN A. FREYVOGEL SONS, INC.** (freyvogelfuneralhome.com) 4900 Centre Avenue at Devonshire Street from 6-8 on Sunday, December 22 and from 2-4 and 6-8 on Monday, December 23. Debby loved flowers, but in lieu of flowers, it is suggested that perhaps you might send a few bucks to WESA, which Debby listened to day and night, or the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy.

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