



James Wheeler  
1958-2020



## About the Book

This book has been created by James' friends and family who so graciously contributed memories and photographs . If you would like to add your memory or a photo to this book, please email Joannwheeler7@gmail.com

*Thank you to all who participated.*



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## **Remembered Joy**

Don't grieve for me, for now I'm free!  
I follow the plan God laid for me.  
I saw His face, I heard His call,  
I took His hand and left it all...

I could not stay another day,  
To love, to laugh, to work or play;  
Tasks left undone must stay that way.  
And if my parting has left a void,  
Then fill it with remembered joy.

A friendship shared, a laugh, a kiss...  
Ah yes, these things I, too, shall miss.  
My life's been full, I've savoured much:  
Good times, good friends, a loved-one's touch.

Perhaps my time seemed all too brief  
Don't shorten yours with undue grief.  
Be not burdened with tears of sorrow,  
Enjoy the sunshine of the morrow.

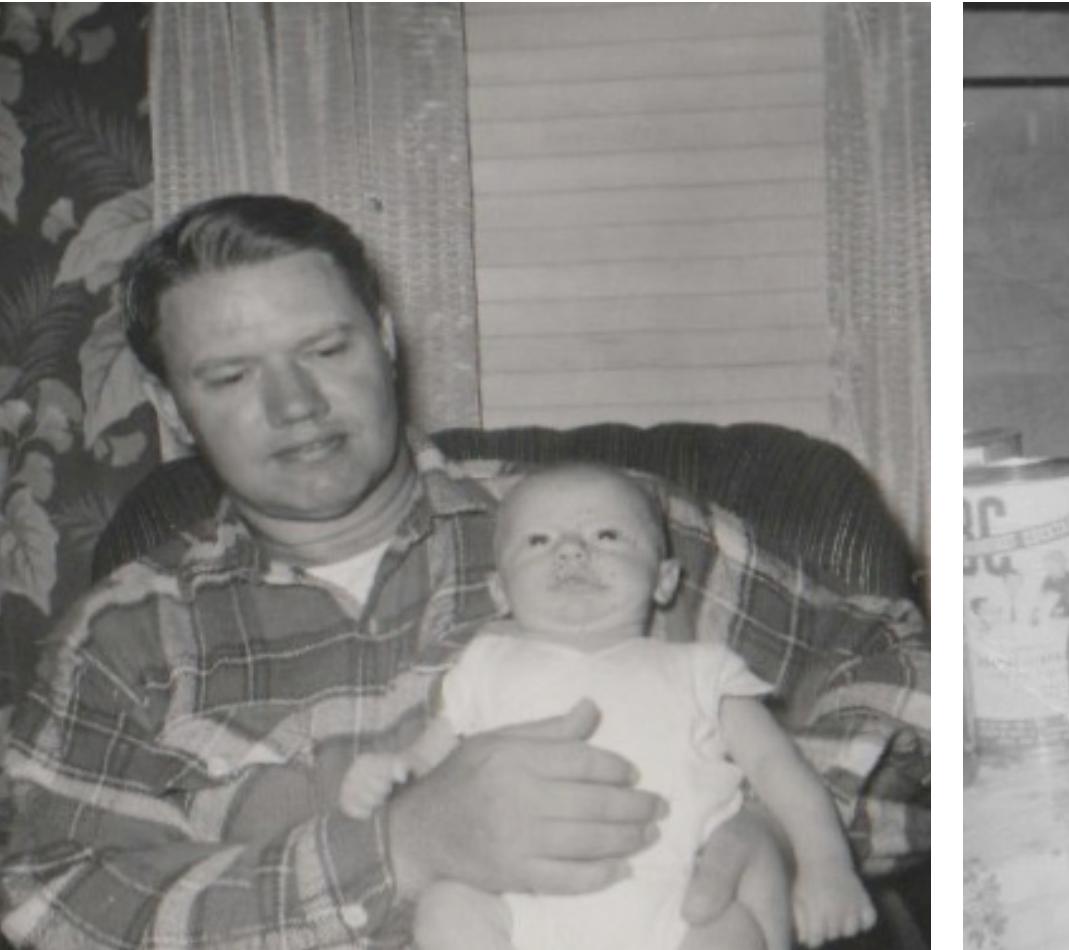


Jim's memorial service was held at Saint Philip the Apostle Church on November 24, 2020

Jim's virtual celebration of life will be on December 5th at 3:00

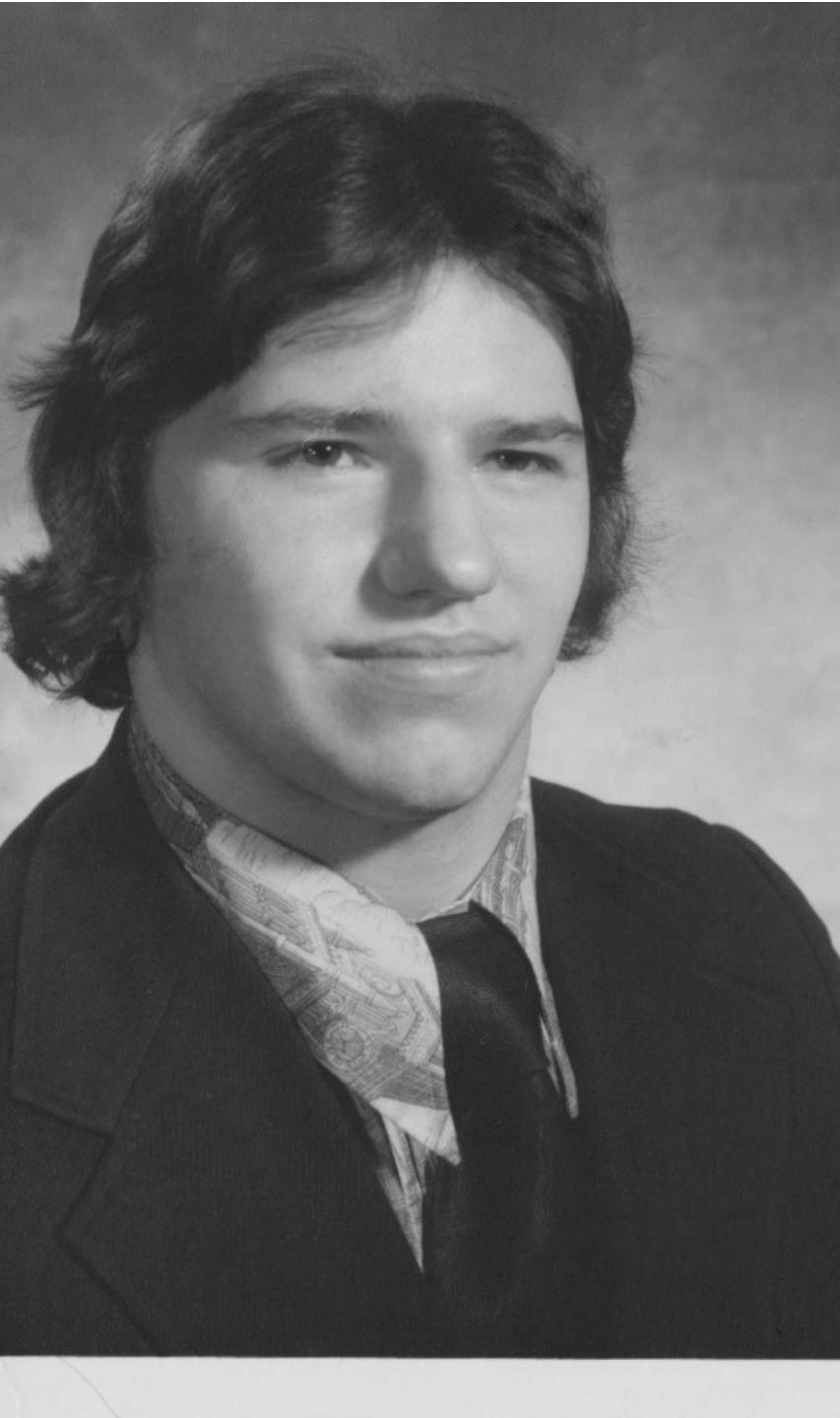


**Childhood**



## Mary Wheeler

My first memory is when we lived on Walton and James discovered bosco chocolate syrup. He was covered in it and mom snapped pictures. He was having fun. I can't find the picture. I think Phil had one. Lots of other great memories like catching snapping turtles at Eddy Creek. Looking for bears at Sand lake. Going for boat rides in Fox Lake....We had such a great childhood!





## Nancy Wheeler

Some of my memories start WAY back. I can still see in my mind that cute little curly haired boy. We called him Jamie.

As he grew, he was known for being a worrier, especially in regards to the weather. He just wanted everyone to be safe! It seems like that started even before we all went through the 4th of July tornado. As you probably already know, my folks hosted a big get-together with Aunt Anna, Uncle Wayne, and Uncle Jim, along with their families. The weather grew suddenly BAD and we all ended up in Ruby's basement. A tornado (probably a water spout) went right down our street... breaking huge trees in half, but not a single car was scratched and no one was hurt. It was certainly an adventure.

As a grown up, one time he called my sister, Terri, and said he would be near Toledo (I think he flew in to Detroit Airport for business nearby or was on a long layover). He wondered if anyone was available to meet him for a visit and lunch. We ended up at Tony Packo's. It was so nice that he reached out to us. Terri and I were able to meet with him and had a great visit. I remember it was "Fat Tuesday" and we were talking about Paczki (filled donuts). He hadn't heard of that tradition. We explained that we would eat these delicious treats the day before lent began. He seemed real interested in finding time to buy some to take home. I don't know if he was able to. But, it was so nice to see him.

Just all and all, James was the BEST.  
I will truly miss him.

BOS PRESENTS  
A NIGHT AT THE OPERA



College



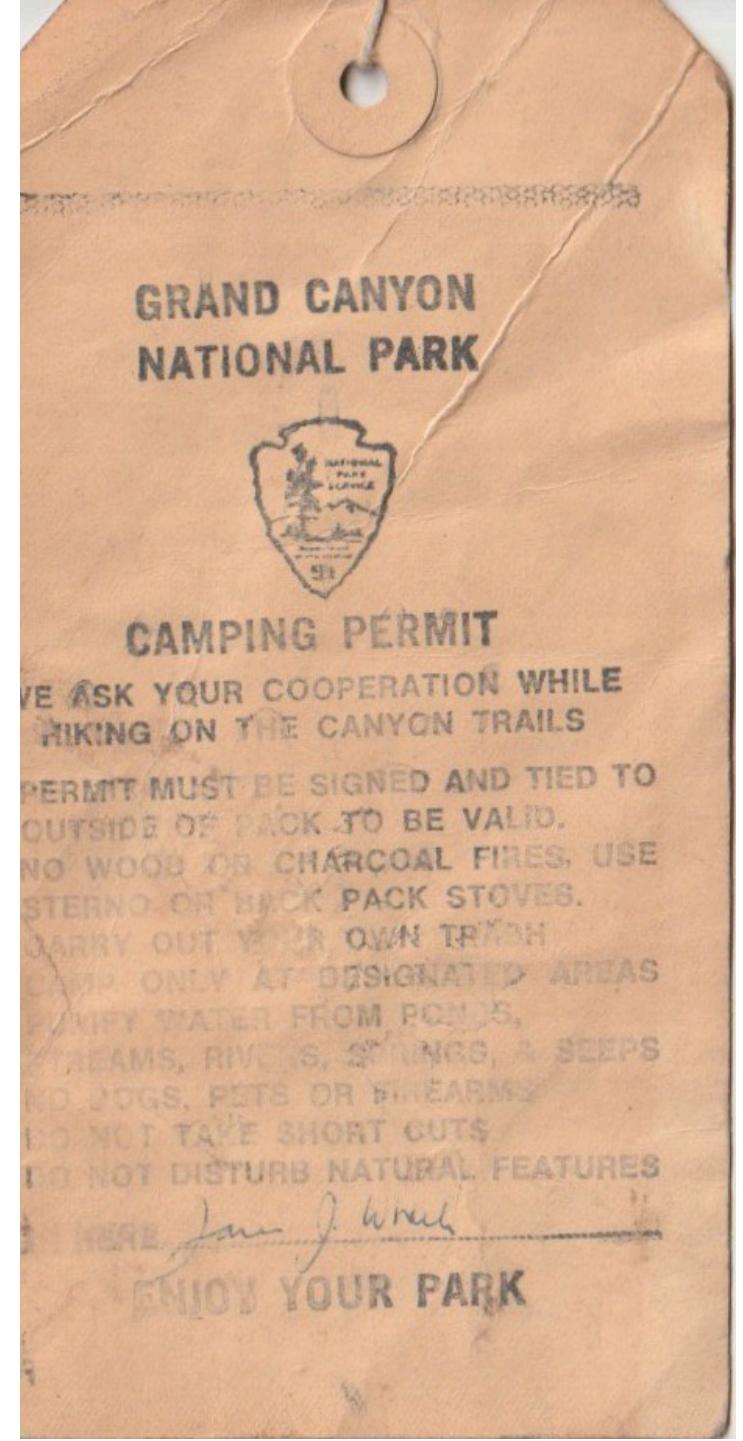
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**John Kitson** One such memory I have of Jim is when our older son Matt was only a couple days old. Jim came over to see the baby and held him belly down on his forearm. Lita and I were sitting on the edge of our couch very nervous that he'd drop our newborn son but he rocked the baby like an experienced Dad and all was fine.

Without Jim I don't think I would have graduated Augustana. I have nothing but good though of Jim.

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**Gary Polic**

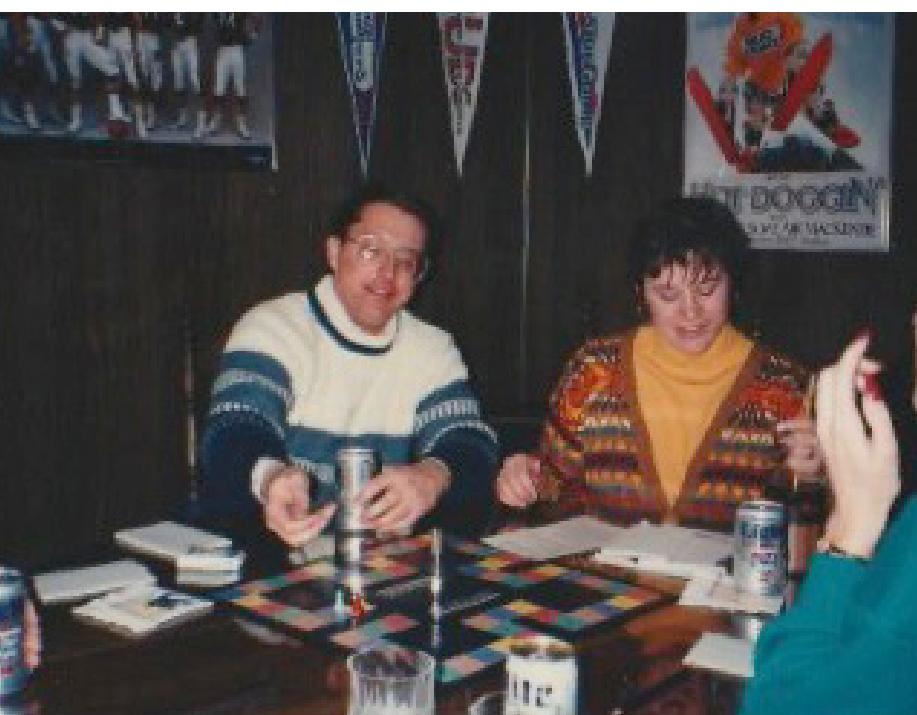
Never forget going up against him on the football field.  
He was very skilled and hit like a MONSTER

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## Friends and Family





### **Ed Kozlow**

When I was 29, I was admitted to the hospital for a calcium deficiency. I was not allowed visitors during the day unless you were Jim Wheeler. Jim showed up at Christ Hospital in Oak Lawn with a tie on, carrying his famous brown brief case. He told them that he was my attorney and they let him right up. Of course, in the brief case was a quart of beer that we enjoyed together. So many great memories and I have done more things with Jim than anyone outside my immediate family. He was just always there and will be missed forever.

### **Maureen Kozlow**

I have such wonderful memories of coming to your house for amazing food, watching football games, playing with the guinea pigs and singing along with Uncle Jim to "Puff the Magic Dragon" down in the basement. I can so clearly picture him playing the electric guitar and singing loud and proud into the microphone.

### **Erin Kozlow**

I don't remember how old I was, but I have such a great memory of being in your basement with my sisters, my dad, Alexandra, and Moriah with Uncle Jim singing along to "Puff the Magic Dragon." Every time I hear that song I think of him.





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### Linda Wolski

"It's not the length of life, but the depth of life." -Emerson

Jim was my brother-in-law for 35 years instantly becoming my family the moment he married my sister, Joann. My parents loved having a son-in-law; more importantly, they really liked him. Jim quickly adopted our traditions and ate any Polish food my mother made, albeit with copious amounts of hot sauce. After my father died, my mother wasted no time in shifting her expectations from my dad to Jim. As demanding as she could be, often expecting Jim to show up instantly, (which he rarely did!), Jim never, ever lost his patience with her.

Jim and I were only 8 months apart (he called me his Irish twin) but you'd think we came from two different eras. He was more conservative than I. But he accepted me, my past and my eccentricities. He listened to my opinions and beliefs with no criticism. We never argued, although we often disagreed. When that happened, Jim would say

what he needed to and then disengage from the so-called argument, leaving me for wanting more. It was the kindest thing to do, really.

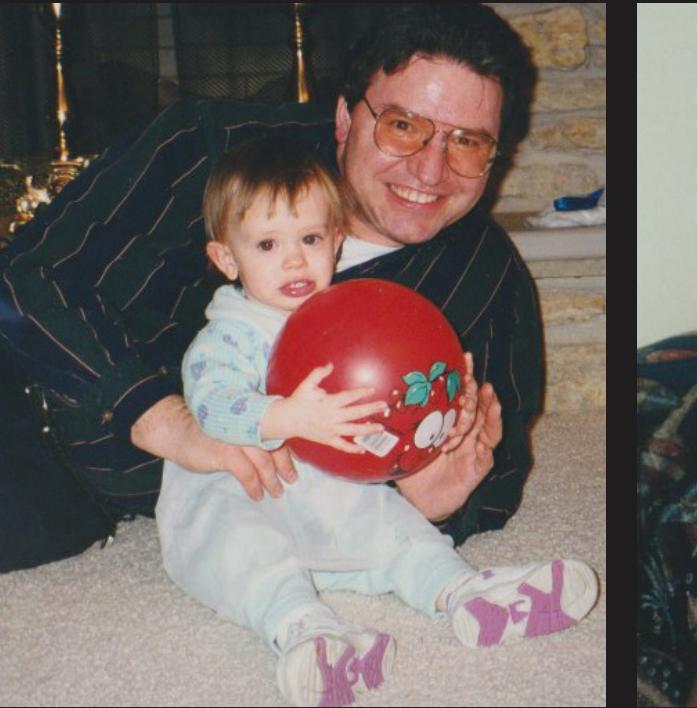
There is so much to talk about living a true, authentic life... finding the "real you". Jim was nothing if not authentic. He made no excuses, lived his life out loud and, as I find myself saying these last few weeks, not only marched to his own drummer but danced to an entire symphony composed of eclectic music from nearly all genres.

I miss my one and only brother-in-law.

His memory and legacy will live on through my sister and the two amazing daughters they brought into this world....a world surely better for Jim having lived in it.

Godspeed James.

Linda



### Susan Reich

I have some vague, long ago memories and some more recent memories. What stands out in my mind is every greeting from him was with a big smile and hug. All the years from your wedding, gatherings in your parents homes, funerals and the many Thanksgivings and other celebrations in your home. I recall watching him as he held his daughters each time. The love oozed out of him, I thought to myself, he will be a good dad. I recall a few conversations we had, some about family, some about my work, his work, the year. Although, most chats were short, I appreciated his sincere interest. I recall how he began the Thanksgiving meal, raising a glass and welcoming everyone, saying a few words of gratitude and remembering those no longer with us. Well, this year at Thanksgiving, I will raise a glass to you, Jim. I am grateful to have known you.





### Alice Sowa

James marriage to Joann for 35 years was full of love and commitment which rarely happens these days. I was fortunate enough to see James' joy when Alexandra and Moriah were born. His attentiveness from intensive care to celebrating their college graduation and watching them grow up to become beautiful young women. James always had kind words with a positive attitude and could talk to anyone as if he knew them for years! I believe James is welcomed into heaven and is celebrating with our loved ones who we have lost. My heartfelt sympathy



### Laura Naughton

My memory: On our surprise Easter wedding Jim and Joann were running late due to Joann's complications from foot surgery. We waited and waited. They kept us updated. Finally 1 hour and 20 minutes after the time they were invited for Jim and Joann arrived. The surprise wedding could take place. All the guests who meant everything thing to us were in attendance. Both Joann and Jim have been a significant part of my life. I couldn't get married without them there. In the several years Pat has known Jim he considered him a great friend. We miss Jim now...we will miss him always. We were blessed to have in our family.



## **Larry, Victor and Dorothy**

Dear Jim,

I am sorry that your time was cut short, you deserved more. I will miss your gracious smile, bolstering laugh and bear paw handshake. Whenever I visited or came for a family holiday, you always welcomed myself, mother and Victor into your and Joann's home with that big smile and the "huh huh huh" chuckle. As always, it is the simple things we remember, but that is what family is, the day to day things we do for each other. You were so enthusiastic about your Subaru Outback when I was asking about having to get a new car, "go out and check out mine, wanna take it for a drive, etc etc.". I've had my Outback for three years now and think often, Jim gave me good advice. I remember your wedding to Joann, not because we had just welcomed another great guy into the family, but the immense joy reflected on her face that evening at the reception. I also know Emil and Irene cared for you deeply. Of course, in Irene's words once again, "your holy card was full of punches and you had a straight shot up".

None of us know what the afterlife really brings, but if the stories pan out- - -

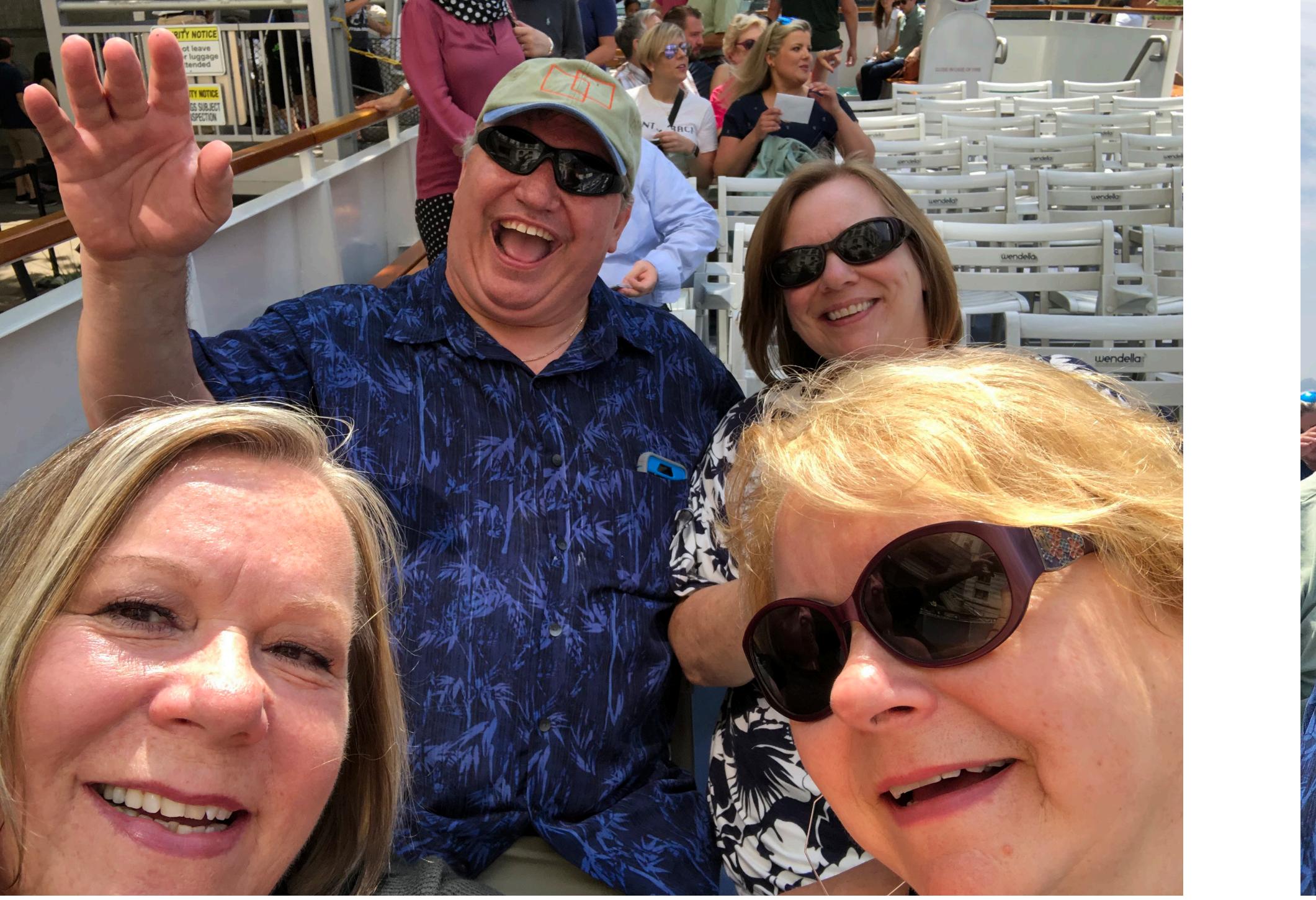
1. We now have one super bear angel watching over us.
2. You will be tossing a football with one hand while playing the guitar with the other.
3. You will be walking and running through the forest preserve with your family of pets, no aches or pains.

The shock of your sudden departure will be felt by your family for a long long time.

God speed Jim

Love Larry, Victor and Dorothy





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## **Lindy, Robert, Emma and Elizabeth**

James was a wonderful husband, father and friend. I got to know James over the years as a fun loving, kind, generous, patient and funny man. He was always ready to host any event and always made sure you had a good time. He loved giving a toast for any and all occasions and never batted an eye if there were groans coming from his audience (we never knew what he would say next) but it was always heartfelt and often funny - to us anyway. James definitely danced to his own tune and wasn't bothered in the least if we made fun of him. For instance, on one visit he came into the kitchen in broad daylight wearing a head lamp? Didn't matter to him that we had a good laugh, he had a purpose and ignored us. One thing though, James wasn't to be trusted to run "a quick errand". One of his missions was to pick up food for a

family graduation because the restaurant didn't deliver. We sent Robert along to make sure he'd return quickly, but to no avail, one hour later they returned, having stopped at a brewery near the restaurant. Definitely couldn't pass that up! His excuse? He wanted Robert to see the brewery. James will be greatly missed by all who knew him, but I know going forward we will remember and enjoy the many wonderful memories we have of him. He will always be in our hearts.



## **Maxwell Dausch**

Everyone had something to say about Mr. Wheeler's cooking. From being told stories about the man who would fry lettuce to fit more into his "salads", to hearing others sing praises about his chili, I never knew what to expect when it came to his cooking.

I remember the first time Mr. Wheeler offered me something to eat. Moriah kept whispering to me, "you don't have to eat it." No one believed me when I said I really liked it and went back for more.

There wasn't a store-bought meal that Mr. Wheeler felt could do without a bit of "Doctoring up". By the time that he would sit down to eat, there would be a new meal in front of him, completely unrecognizable from how it started. Even a loaded meat lovers pizza would be put through the paces by the time Mr. Wheeler got his hands on it.

Mr. Wheeler, I'll miss your corny jokes, our banter about sports (even though you knew I knew absolutely nothing about sport) and even helping you get the printer working every other week. You left us way too soon, you will be missed.



## Sue Sowa

There are so many memorable stories that I can fondly relate from living next door to Jim all these years: from seeing him play frisbee with Jasper, watching him refinish his deck for the umpteenth time, same with his garage door, to seeing him ride his bike through the forest preserve while wearing his neon, lime green shirt. The list can go on and on, but the following is my favorite and perfectly encapsulates Jim.

Dennis, Lauren, and I moved next door to the Wheelers in 1993. Construction was in high gear of our new neighborhood of Woodside. Our five year old daughter, Lauren, discovered a spindly, little pine tree (about 1 foot tall) growing in the open lot behind our joint backyards. Lauren, (age 5) decided this was her little tree to love and care for. Every day she'd carry a little pail of water to water her tree. When Jim would see her, he'd always come over and talk to her about it. Eventually, construction builders came and started to grade the land for what was to be Sara and Mary Jane's new home. The little tree was demolished by the landscaping vehicles. (Now, this is the wonderful part about Jim) - he knew Lauren would be devastated when she saw "her tree" was gone. So, unbeknownst to us, he went out and bought a new little pine tree and planted it in a safer location closer to our

yard. The next time Lauren went out to water her tree, she was very upset when she saw that her tree was gone, and she was very indignant that the construction workers carelessly killed her tree.

I told her the guys probably didn't even see it when they were working. Jim saw us, came over, and pointed out a little pine tree. She said that it couldn't be her tree because it was in the wrong spot. Jim convinced her it just looked like a different spot because of all the changes made to the landscape by the construction crews, and she bought the story! What a guy! Jim didn't want a little girl to be upset or sad, so he went to the trouble to buy and plant a new one to make sure that "Lauren's tree" was safe. She continued to care for it. Eventually, we decided to replant it in the area by our gazebo to ensure its future safekeeping. It's still there, and Lauren now knows the wonderful backstory. We always call it "Jim's tree." It's grown to about 3 feet now.

This story shows the kind of guy Jim has always been: caring, thoughtful, kind, and good-hearted. We will miss him, but never ever forget him. He has been a generous and helpful neighbor as well as a good friend to us all these years. Rest in Peace, Jim.



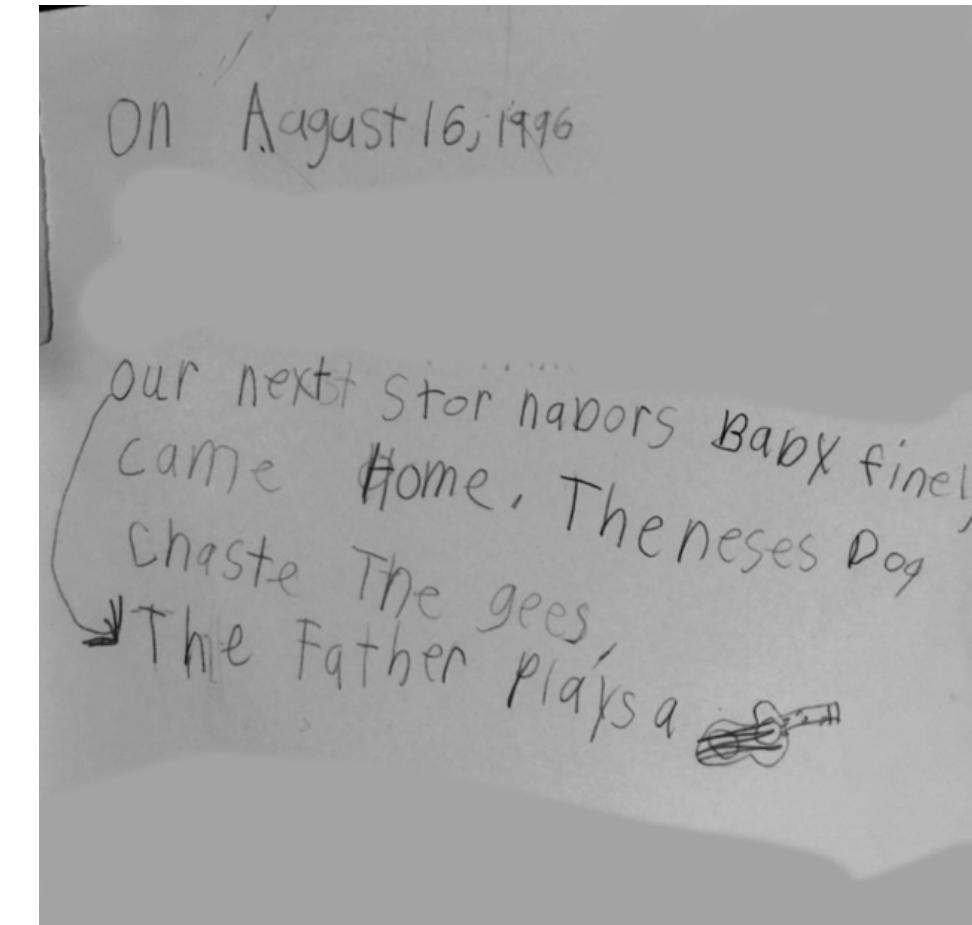
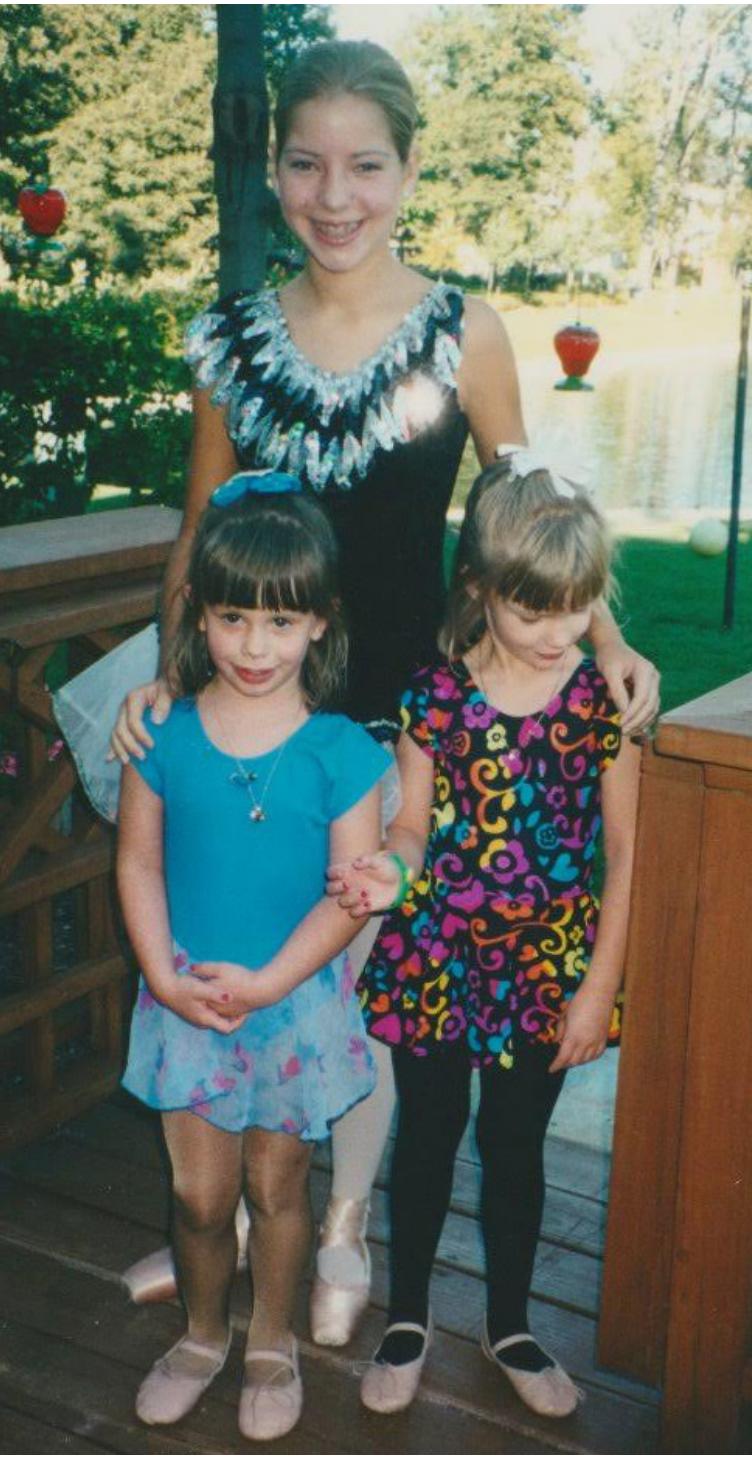
## Lauren Sowa

My first memory of Jim is from when my parents and I first moved next door. As a six-year-old, I was so excited to have such welcoming and friendly neighbors like Jim and Joann. I remember there was a small stone pathway on the side of their house (it is still there), and I would always try to sneak on it because I enjoyed jumping along the stones. My parents told me not to because it was not our yard, and "our neighbors might not want a little kid always playing on the side of their house." But I loved the stone pathway so much, I would still try to walk on it whenever I could. I remember one time, while I thought I was getting away with it, Jim had come out to the side of the house to do some yardwork. I knew I was caught, so told him I was sorry for sneaking on their stone path. I felt guilty and thought maybe our neighbors wouldn't like us anymore because I was bothering them. But Jim just laughed and told me I could play on the pathway whenever I wanted. So, the next time my parents saw me on the side of their house, I was pleased to announce, "It's okay! Jim said I could walk on their stone pathway anytime!" I knew we had the best neighbor.

When I think of home, I think of Jim. I think of him riding his bike around the neighborhood, always wearing a helmet. I think of him telling me all about Bernese Mountain Dogs and how Coogan was gentle and going blind. I think of him singing "Margaritaville" karaoke at the 90's Woodside block parties and dancing to the YMCA. I think of him

bringing out his guitar at random times to play and sing. I think of him refinishing the garage door every other year which marked how quickly time passes; "oh wow, Jim is doing the garage door again." I think of him holding Baby Alexandra up to the living room window, so I could meet her without giving her my germs. I think of him adding the 4th little, wooden bear in their backyard when Moriah was born. I think of him letting Simba outside so he could sit in the snow while Jim shoveled his driveway, and then he would shovel our neighbor Carol's across the street, and then even help out with ours if we were not around. I think of him throwing the Frisbee for Jasper out back. I think of him being at every birthday or graduation party of mine and being in the audience for all my shows. I think of him putting up beautiful, Christmas lights on the house, and the big, Halloween spiderweb every year. I think of the Christmases, New Year Eves, Thanksgivings, and Easters we spent with the Wheelers, and Jim's warm, inviting presence. I think of him always fixing something or working on a project around the house, seeing me, and giving a big jovial wave and a "hello!" with a genial smile. Mostly, I think of him wearing his Chicago Bears shirt, holding a beer, and walking-out onto the deck where I would be talking to Joann and the girls, and he'd say, "Welcome home, Lauren!"

Jim is family, and in my memories and in my heart, Jim will always represent "home."





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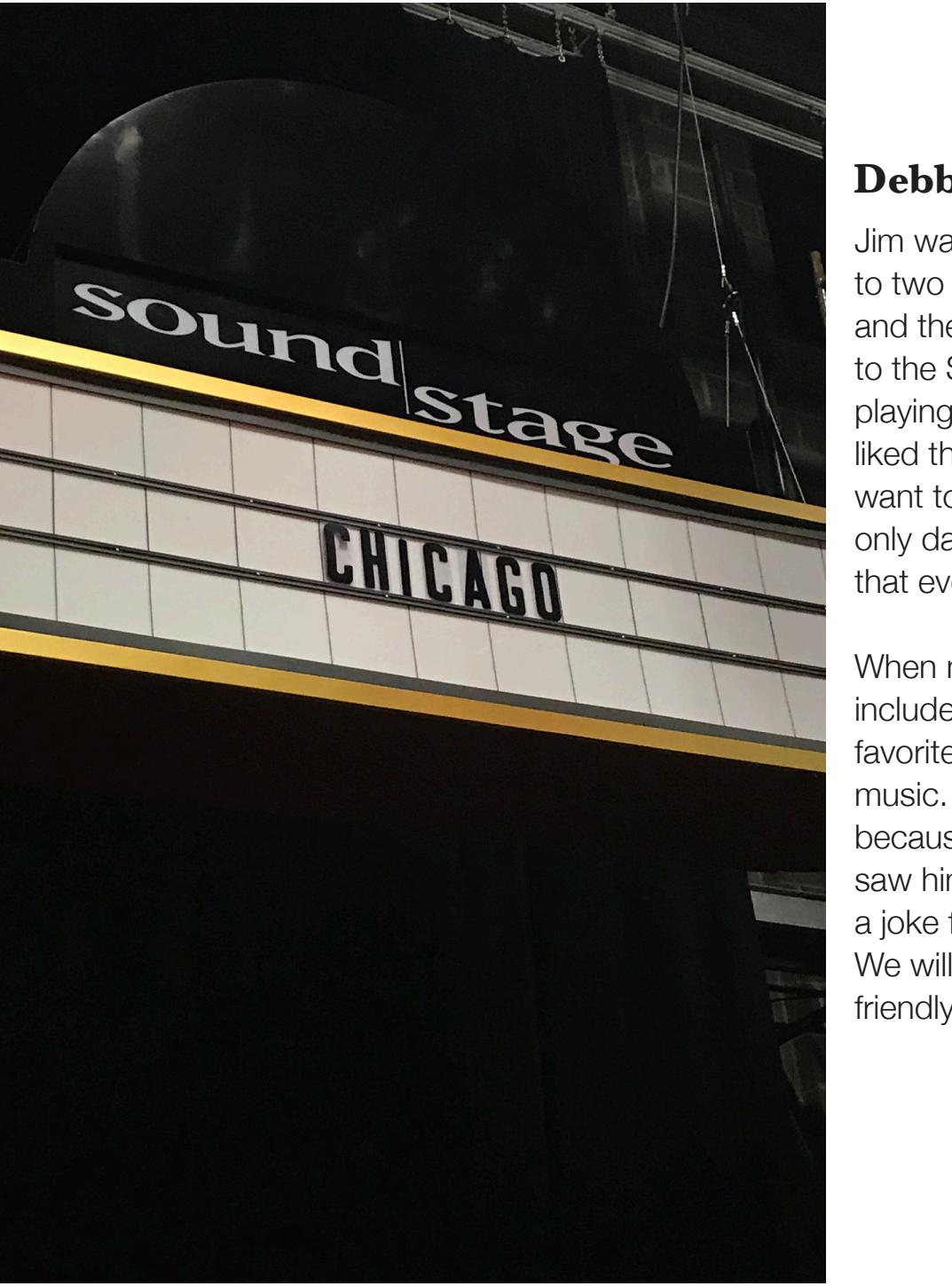
**Denis Sowa**

When Sue and I moved into Woodside in 1993, the first cheerful face and voice we met was our neighbor Jim Wheeler. Over the next 27 years, Sue and I would always remark how fortunate we were to have wonderful neighbors that truly became our extended family over time. Jim never met a deck board that did not need sanding, or a driveway crack that did not need sealing. His commitment to his family, property and our neighborhood was a model for us all.

I will miss Jim's friendship and dedication.

Rest in Peace, Jim.

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### **Debbie and Chris Fillip**

Jim was my fellow Chicago fan. Back in 2017 I had tickets to two different Chicago concerts, one at Sound Stage and the other at the Win Trust Arena. I had invited Jim with to the Sound Stage Concert. They were going to be playing their second album in its entirety. I knew that Jim liked the early music of Chicago. My husband really didn't want to have to go to two concerts by the same group only days apart. Jim and I had a great time together that evening.

When making this tribute for Jim I mentioned to Joann to include a Chicago song. She asked me which one was his favorite. I wasn't sure but I do know he liked their early music. One song that comes to mind is "Make Me Smile" because Jim, would always make you smile. Any time we saw him around the neighborhood he would always have a joke for you or say something funny to make you smile. We will miss his friendship, his sense of humor and his friendly smile.....



### **Chris and Tom Lindelof**

Jim was a fun loving and hard working guy. We always had plenty of laughs whenever we got together. We will never forget his karaoke performances of "Born To Be Wild". He knew all the lyrics and had rockin moves. He served as Vice President to the Woodside HOA for close to 30 years, helping to protect our property values and make our neighborhood a great place to live. Chris and I will miss him.



Dad





## **Joann Wheeler**

On October 5th Jim and I celebrated our 35th wedding anniversary, not knowing it would be our last. 35 years is a long time to be with someone and we learned that we were very different from one another, but it worked. I'd complain and Jim was blissfully unaware. Jim was messy and I was organized. I was punctual, he was not. One of the things I admired most about my husband was his ability to see the best in people. Things that irritated me didn't bother him in the least.

A measurement of a life well lived are the people surrounding you. This past month has reminded me what a rich and fulfilled life Jim lived. The outpouring of support from family and friends mean the world to me. Jim maintained close relationships with friends from childhood, college, neighborhoods and work. He loved you all deeply. I will miss Jim riding his bike wearing neon shirts; working around the house wearing overalls and his forehead headlight; wearing gloves when carving meat or making a salad. I'll miss new flowers every spring that Jim

secretly planted in the fall; his cooking skills and all the mystery meals (no two dinners were ever the same); the outrageous Christmas gifts he would personally select for me and the girls.

Most of all I will miss Jim being himself.

I'll forever be grateful for the life we shared together with our daughters Alexandra and Moriah. Becoming parents was such a blessing and I know Jim would agree that being a father was his greatest achievement.

Jim, I will miss you forever,

Love,

Joann



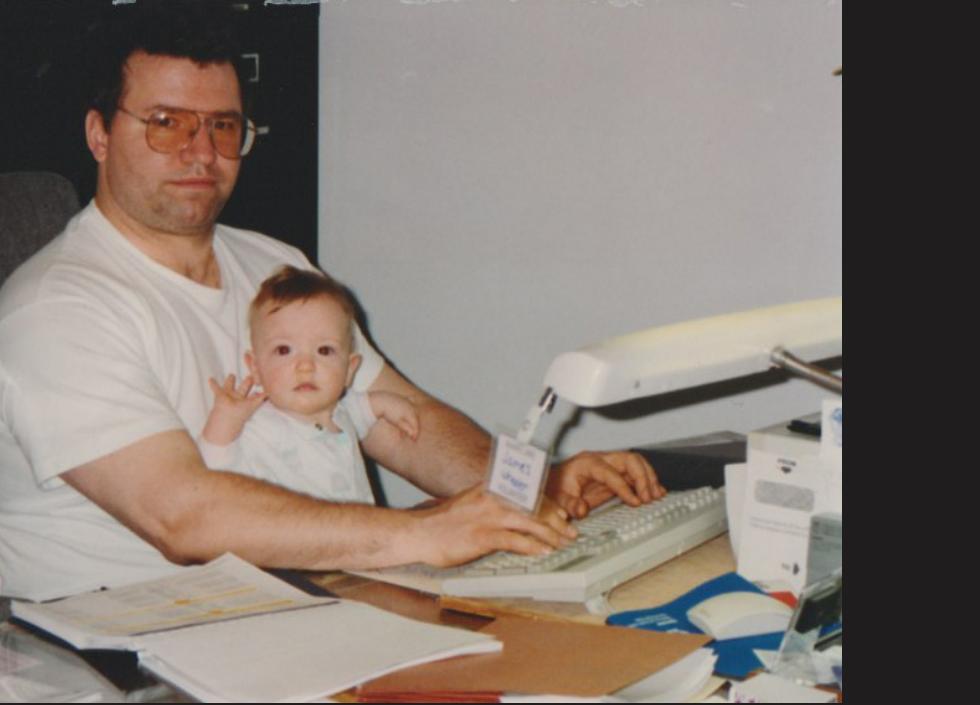
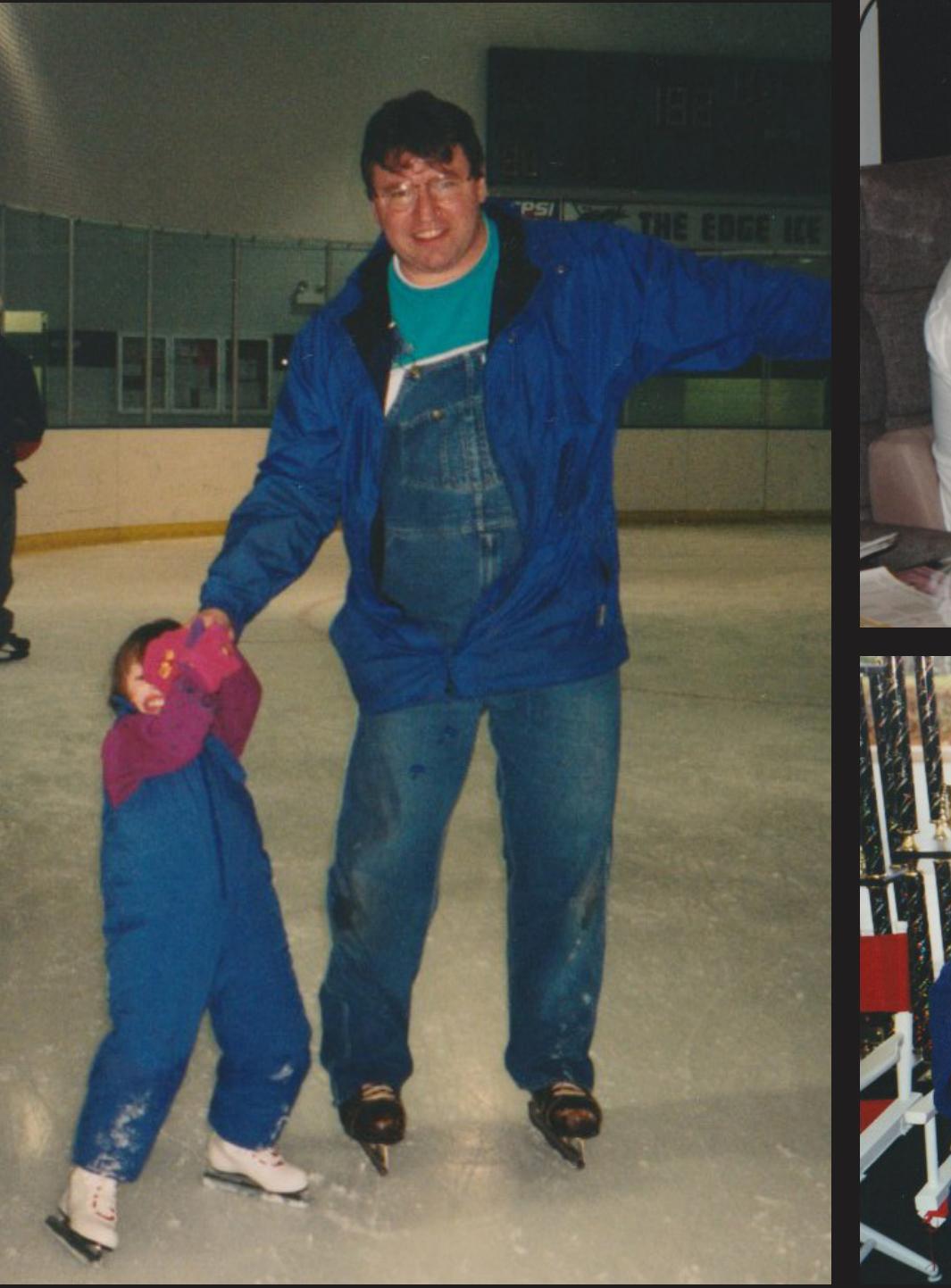
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## **The Bedtime Ritual** **Alexandra Wheeler**

I'm tucked under warm covers and my dad stands in the doorway. With his hand on the doorknob, he initiates our nighttime tradition:

“See you later, alligator,”

“In a while, crocodile!”

“Don’t get wise, bubble eyes”

“Otherwise, two black eyes!”

The door softly closes and the dark illuminates hundreds glowing stars arranged like a June sky on my bedroom ceiling. I peacefully fall asleep.



## Moriah Wheeler

When I was a little girl, I loved listening to you play guitar and sing. I would always brag about how my dad was a rockstar. I started playing guitar because of you.

When you showed me your fathers paintings, I was always so impressed and loved seeing how proud you were of your father. I told everyone that my grandpa was an artist. I wanted to make you just as proud of me as you were of Grandpa.I leaned to paint in oils because of you.

When we would go Hayward, Wisconsin, I always enjoyed being outdoors with you. I loved listening to your stories of the Grand Canyon. Your love for the outdoors inspires me. I now camp and explore national parks because of you.

I know we didn't always get along but I loved our stupid arguments. You gave me a hard time and I gave it right back! I'll miss our debates. I wish I could tell you these things now.

Dad, I know that you will always be a part of me when I paint, play guitar and hike. You inspire me to be the person I am today, and I am truly grateful that you are my father. I know I never really said it much but I hope you know how much I love you. You left too early, and I miss you every second

Love,

Moriah





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**Forever in our Hearts**

