

LOCAL NEWS

Loved ones celebrate South Bay's Nancy Paulikas, whose life ended in tragic mystery in L.A.

Roughly 150 friends and family members gathered together to share memories of woman who wandered away from husband at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 2016.



Friends and family gathered for a celebration of life honoring Nancy Paulikas at Polliwog Park in Manhattan Beach on Saturday, March 16, 2019. Nancy, who had early-onset Alzheimer's, wandered away from her family during a trip to LACMA in 2016. The two-year-

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Kirk Moody welcomes friends and family to the celebration of life honoring his wife, Nancy Paulikas at Polliwog Park in Manhattan Beach on Saturday, March 16, 2019. Nancy, who had early-onset Alzheimer's, wandered away from her family during a trip to LACMA in 2016. The two-year-long search for Nancy gained widespread attention and inspired Los Angeles County Supervisor Janice Hahn to create L.A. Found— a Countywide system of trackable bracelets used to find vulnerable individuals with Alzheimer's, autism, and dementia who wander and go missing. Her body was identified by the Los Angeles County Coroner's Office in December 2018. (Photo by Brittany Murray, Press-Telegram/SCNG)

Dozens of people joined mourning husband Kirk Moody in the South Bay sun on Saturday, sharing heartbreak and fond memories of Nancy Paulikas — a woman who lived a fascinating life that ended in a long, painful mystery.

A warm day at Polliwog Park in Manhattan Beach served as an immaculate venue for the memorial. Roughly 150 friends and family members gathered together to talk and share moments spent with the daughter, wife and dear friend.

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Paulikas, 58, was last seen Oct. 15, 2016, with her husband at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art on Wilshire Boulevard in West Los Angeles. She had early onset Alzheimer's disease and wandered away from Moody.

The last glimpse of her was on video captured by security cameras on nearby streets.

When his wife became separated from him at the museum that evening, he began an exhaustive search, visiting skilled nursing and residential care facilities throughout Southern California, offering a \$100,000 reward for information and airing ads on television.

According to the coroner's office, Paulikas's skull was found in the park off Mulholland Drive and Beverly Glen Boulevard on March 11, 2017, then bones were discovered in September 2018. They were recently identified by analyzing DNA.

How the retired software engineer wound up in the wilderness — and how she perished — remain unclear. The coroner's office listed her death date as the day her skull was found.

Paulikas grew up an only child in the Lunada Bay neighborhood of Palos Verdes Estates. Her love of animals led her to study veterinary medicine at UC Davis, though she later switched to computer science.

She then attended graduate school at Stanford University and UCLA, her father, George Paulikas, said. Paulikas and Moody met when they worked at TRW.

They last saw their daughter at a family dinner about a week before she disappeared. Her father said he and his wife are extremely thankful to all those who have supported them since the ordeal began more than two years ago.

"She was a super capable woman," Matthew Lewis, a friend of Paulikas, said just before the celebration. "She was a private pilot and an engineer ... (when she was diagnosed with Alzheimer's) it was a pretty steep decent. We couldn't communicate with her anymore."



She was an animal lover, a skier, an adventurer — and she loved to walk, her friends and family members recalled Saturday.

“She was fit, that’s why we’re here,” said Lewis. “She loved to walk around Polliwog Park.”

According to the blog created for her when she went missing, “she spent her whole life in the mountains, starting as a kid and into her 50’s, up and down the Sierra Nevadas, including the length of the John Muir trail.”

Lauren Hesler, a friend of Paulikas’ from their days attending UC Davis together, said she was “a very bright gal and an amazing mixologist,” as she recounted their college-days together.

After Paulikas earned her degree in computer science, she attended graduate school at Stanford but Hesler said Paulikas was disappointed in the curriculum, which was the thing that stuck out about Paulikas the most to Hesler — how brilliant she was.

“I really admired her smarts,” she said. “She didn’t like it at Stanford because it wasn’t hard enough.”

And Hesler wasn’t the only one who appreciated her intellect — Nancy Beck, a friend from middle school, became known as “The Other One,” after Beck had always turned her head when someone said, “Nancy,” — but they were always trying to get Paulikas’ attention.

“Since I was known as ‘The Other One’ Nancy became known as ‘The Real One,’ since she was the smarter of the Nancy’s.” Beck said. “Eventually I just stopped turning around.”

But Paulikas wasn’t all about books and computers, she had a very lively and entertaining side as well, friends said.

Childhood friend Diane Bassett talked about how they watched TV’s “Dark Shadows” — a daytime vampire soap opera that became an odd pop-culture phenomenon — after school.

Paulikas also had a unique collection of high-quality puppets growing up, Bassett said, adding that the squirrel and the owl were among her favorites. The duo would often make up puppet shows and then later perform them from behind the orange sofa in Paulikas’ living room.

“She was the smartest person I think I’ve ever met,” she said. “And a really dear friend.”

After Paulikas’ disappearance, her story became known to many around Southern



“For two years we have kept hope alive that Nancy would be found safe and could be reunited with her family,” Hahn said in a statement. “Her husband, Kirk, has been so brave. He has not only been unyielding in his search for his wife, but wanted to make sure no one else would have to go through what he did.”

“He is the reason that we now have LA Found, a countywide program to find individuals who wander using trackable bracelets,” the statement added. “I want to thank everyone who continued the search for Nancy. May she Rest In Peace.”

For two years, Paulikas’ whereabouts left her loved ones wondering. But now they plan to turn her story into a way to help others prevent such a tragedy.

“We held out hope and we’re of course disappointed,” Moody said. “The good news of course is that her story has really inspired a lot of efforts resulting in L.A. Found.”

L.A. Found is a countywide program that offers trackable bracelets to those prone to wandering.

It was launched in September and has located three people since, according to Hahn’s office. One was a woman with dementia who went missing a week ago about 2 1/2 miles away from where Paulikas wandered.

Barbra McLendon, director of public policy for Alzheimer’s Greater Los Angeles, credited Paulikas’ family with doing a public service by being open about a disease that is often painful and stigmatized.

“Her family took a tragedy and used it to make changes that are going to help a lot of families to come and I think that’s inspiring and extraordinary,” she said.

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