



## Belle Jean Thomas

April 21, 1961 - January 13, 2013

Belle J. Thomas

Belle Jean Thomas , “Talisi” was born on April 21, 1961 in Bellingham, She passed away at St. Joseph’s hospital from complications due to (Systemic) Lupus on January 13, 2013

Belle is the daughter of Earl M. Thomas, Sr. and Theresa Mary Thomas, one of eight daughters. The Thomas’ raised her at their family home off Haxton Way by the Red River.

Belle attended Ferndale Schools and graduated from Ferndale High School in (1979). During her school years she became friends with many seated here today.

It was pointed out by Irene that she and Belle attended Upward Bound at Western Washington University where they made several friends who included Richard LaClair, Yvonne LaClair Cagey and Ted Pratt. If any of you who attended Upward Bound together with Belle are here, please stand so the family can recognize you.

Thank you She remained your faithful friend all these years. Please be comforted by remembering she smiled and was happy every time she saw

you.

During that same time, she fell madly in love with John John Benny Leathers, Sr. Belle gave her whole heart and soul to John. She often traveled with him fishing in Alaska and around the Puget Sound. Belle gave birth to their only son, John John Benny Leathers, Jr.. Tragically, John Sr. passed away in 1982.

She was surrounded by her family, and although she slowly recovered from losing her mate, she never gave up her love for her husband. In her heart and soul, she remained Mrs. Leathers, and part of the great Leather's family, forever.

But she did eventually meet and marry Larry Priest. Her family often told the Catholic faith members that their sister married a Priest. But then theyd have to explain that his last name is Priest. She loved becoming a Mom to Chad and Rena, along with John John over the next twenty years.

Belle and Larry opened an archery equipment sales store that the two operated out of their home. Uncle Smitty recalled that Belle and Larry Priest started an archery club called the Native Archers. The club had some 40 archers, and the club's archery range is where the Wexliem is located now. Uncle Smitty said there was almost a protest against the construction of Wexliem at this site.

Double D recalled that Belle and Larry sold him a bow he loved to shoot and he became very good at hitting the bulls eye. One day some of the family looked at his bow and asked, aren't you left handed He said yes and then they said, well your bow is a right-handed bow. He took the bow into Belle and Larry and they exchanged it for a left handed bow. He said he could almost never hit the bulls eye, again.

After June, Guy and Belle's mother Theresa passed away in the early 1990's, Pam's brother Jim Hester returned and moved to Lummi from his home in California. He began to work at Sears. Cathy Jefferson recalled talking to Belle about being bored. They said to each other then let's go to the Bellis Fair Mall and fill out some job applications. Soon after Jim Hester hired Belle to work in the Sear's lawn and garden department.

Belle and Jimmer were joined at Sears for a short while by her brother, Earl and nephew Robert Paull. She worked there for eighteen years and developed several new friendships. Are there any of Belle's co-workers from Sears here today? The family asks that you stand to be recognized. Please give them a round of applause.

Thank you.

During that time of her employment at Sears, she would visit her father, Earl, who lived by himself at the family home. Soon after Belle's mom Theresa passed away, and to pick up her dad's spirits, they participated in a bowling league at Park Bowl in Bellingham. Belle would line up her body in line with the center of the floor, swing the bowling ball back and 'whammo' STRIKE! Belle was the only rose amongst the thornes, she would turn around and act as though she had been there before as the men on her team would yell and clap their hands in appreciation of another strike.

Belle and her dad had a special bond. Anytime he needed to go across the border to visit family, he asked Belle to drive him up there so he can deposit or withdraw money from his account. He trusted Belle so much that later on in his life he would put her on his account so she could get his money for him. Belle had Tuesday's off from work at Sears. During the summer, Earl and Belle liked to go to the beach at the Stommish Grounds, and Belle would take

him there. They would light a fire on the beach and roast hot dogs. Others family members found out Earl and Belle were down there, and they began to gather with them. Earl and Belle would listen to the Mariner's play baseball and watch the setting sun.

Belle's sister, Andrea would present younger ones to Earl, Sr. and make them tell him what was happening to them in their young, little lives.

After a few years, the family grew tired of hot dogs but never grew tired of Carol Veale's potato salad, and Belle along with the rest of the family, would chant for Carol's potato salad.

Then Belle made her world famous macaroni salad, and it was a delicious war of salads under the burnt orange sky of the Stommish beach.

Bernie Thomas started a trend of remembering and repeating song lyrics or lines from favorite movies, but they were always supposed to be in the correct context whenever the situation presented itself.

For example, from the movie, As Good As It Gets, Jack Nicholson said "Lots of people have good times, with pretty stories that take place on lakes with noodle salad. That's their story, good time, noodle salads.

That's our story, too, good times, but we had macaroni salad and potato salad

After a few summers, the family branched into other foods, and the gatherings and food became more intricate and the gathering itself became known as HOTT DOGG TUESDAY's..See you at Hott Dogg Tuesday.

During the school year, Hott Dogg Tuesday's shifted to Sunday's with the same understanding of celebrating birthday's, the good news of

accomplishments of children, and supporting one another during the bad times. Often the gatherings took place after church on Sundays too at Bill's house. Earl was also called Bill for being mistaken by a fellow longshoreman, who called Earl, Bill. Earl told the story to the family at one of these gatherings, so the question to each other became, "Any Bill's? or after something funny, "Very funny, Bill".

Along the way, Belle met Michael Simmons. Early on in their relationship, Mike came to yet another Hott Dogg Sunday, and the family was laughing at Aaron Thomas' imitation of Eddy Murphy. One of the children came crying into Bill's house complaining of being stung by a nettle. Someone hollered for Camphophenique to put on the wound. Aaron and Mike started hollering. Camphophenique? Eddie! Camphophenique? Eddie! We didn't have Camphophenique when we were kids, did we Eddie! Noooo! We had MUD!

Since that time, Mike Simmons became Eddie. It took many in the family a couple of years to remember that his real name is Mike.

At around the same time, when someone would say something funny, family members would shout out, Dang, Gina! It was said so often, when Belle said something funny, Richard Peters would holler, Dang, Gina B! Dang, Gina, B! She became known as Gina B.

Also there is a song where part of the lyric goes, Oh my God, Becky. But we won't say the rest of the lyrics, but for awhile they were all saying that to each other.

And....how about a shout out to the Roses! Gina B was a Rose, too.

Belle loved to dance, even if she was the only one on the dance floor, and during those joyous occasions at Traveler's in Seattle, Irene said, she'd be

dancing even after the music ended.

At the family Fourth of July celebrations, the whole family would dance the Electric Slide before pulling Earl out on the floor to dance to Earl and Twee's favorite romantic love song, "Sweet Caroline" Ba Ba Baaa! Sweet Caroline. That song has become the anthem for the family. for Belle's mom and dad, for sure, and all their Fourth of July gatherings.

Good times, so many good times. We always thought Belle would be there for all the good times.

Belle was always there for any of us in need. She was generous to a fault. She would give her last dollar to someone in need, even if she didn't know them, and even if it meant she wasn't going to have any money until the next week. As long as she had gas to get herself to work that made her happy. She did it so often, that Eddie could never figure it out. She loved to travel even if it meant the trip would be just right down the I-5 corridor for just a night or weekend. as long as the scenery changed she was happy

Belle loved to go hunting with Angelo and Cathy Jefferson. Remember that first elk, Larry? It took awhile to clean up after that one, huh?.

She loved to play board games with Jim and Carol, and Eddie.

She also loved to go and meet Larry Priest and Eddie together. Whenever Michelle Mike would go out with Belle, and both Eddie and Larry Priest would show up, she would say out loud, "What the ....heck! Irene said A word to the younger women, your Aunty Belle could have her cake and eat it, too. Lesson learned.

Belle worked at the McKenzie ROC providing her sweet gentle character to the after school tutoring, games and activities for the school age children. Doris Jefferson helped her get started, and organized a tracking of the educational progress of each child there. Many of the ROC Children are seated with honor here today. Will Belle's kids please rise to be recognized by the family? Thank you. (Given them a round of applause.) I believe that many of these decorations were made by Belle's ROC children — please acknowledge their gift to these ceremonies with another round of applause. Belle loved you like her own. You belong to Belle, and now to us. You are loved. Here at Lummi, no one is an orphan who has the love of the rest of us. You have our love. We hope you will honor Belle by making something important out of your lives in honor of her memory. Just remember her love and as Doug James would say, the best way to hold her love is to give the love she gave to you, to everyone in your lives.

Belle was sick with the disease that took her for more than a dozen years. She explained it to the family when she first learned it was fatal, but since little could be done to cure the disease, she never spoke of it. Instead, she tried to find joy in being a part of our every day, ordinary lives. Recently, she repaid all her debts, leaving none. She never wanted to leave us, but she must have known it was her time. She never wanted any of us to worry about her, ever.

On behalf of the family, it is a great honor to share these last few steps with our dear sister with each of you. Thank you all for being here. Your presence will not be forgotten. Mike, you made her happy these past nine years. Larry, thank you for remaining in her life and for the twenty years you were together.

Belle is survived by her Mate; Mike Simmons (Eddie), her son, Chad Priest, daughter, Rena Priest and son John John Benny Leathers, Jr. Grandchildren: Lela Childs, Ostin and Olivia Belle Priest,

Belle is also survived by her sisters, Theresa, Lorraine (Dodie), Emily (Aunty Raww), Andrea, Irene, Amy, and brothers, Bernie and Earl Thomas, Jr.

The family are descendants of Thomas and Mary Kathryn Jefferson, John and Ozinia Thomas, great grandparents, and Mathias and Annie (Clagget) Paul and Frank and Agnes (Clark) Hillaire, Richard and Zeta Hillaire and Andrew and Maria Thomas.

#### Farewell Tribute Information

Prayer Service Thursday, January 17, at 6:00PM. Funeral service Friday, January 18, at 10:00AM. Both services at Wexliem Community Building.

# Tribute Wall

RM

“ My thoughts and prayers are with the Thomas family and Lummi community as you say good-bye to your beloved Belle as she continues on her journey. My heart is with you.

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**Ramona Menish** - January 13, 2013 at 12:00 AM

RV

“ What a wonderful tribute to your beautiful sister. It amazes me time and time again how life throws us a curve ball...Belle will be remembered with Love; peace be with the family.

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**Raquel Vigil** - January 13, 2013 at 12:00 AM

RS

“ I remember when Belle started at sears-she was so quite-I thought that it would be hard to get to know her-before long she fit right in!Belle was always so sweet but also alot of fun!We love you Belle-you will be forever missed!Dan and Raylene Stredicke

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**RAYLENE STREDICKE** - January 13, 2013 at 12:00 AM

LG

“ I worked with Belle for 12 years at Sears she was one of the finest sales associates that Sears had, they were very lucky to have her. I ran into Belle about 9 months ago she was sharing information about her new job working with children the passion that was in her voice about the children was so caring i could tell she was truly happy. I feel very blessed to have known her and sad that she is gone .Love you Belle!

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**Lila and Chris Gray** - January 13, 2013 at 12:00 AM



“ *I miss you Belle love you so much*

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**Hayley Lynn Loomis** - January 13, 2013 at 12:00 AM