



Mary Ellen "Mel" Burchess

March 14, 1948 - March 22, 2025

Mel Burchess, of Grand Island died from a cerebral hemorrhage at CHI Emergency Room March 22, 2025. All Faiths Funeral Home has been entrusted with arrangements. Online condolences may be left at www.giallfaiths.com.

Mary Ellen Gembala was born to her mother Rita and father Ray in Honolulu, Hawaii on March 14, 1948. Her father Ray was a pilot in the Navy. After her father left the Navy they moved to Loup City, Nebraska where she started school.

The family moved to Grand Island where she attended Blessed Sacrament School. The nickname Mel later came from siblings who replaced Mary Ellen with the conjugation "Mel". Another promotion for her dad moved her family to Kearney where she graduated from Kearney Catholic in 1966. She attended Kearney State for one year and that was enough. Her adventurous spirit connected her to Craig Burchess for the next fifty-seven years. They lived in Hastings then Kearney while Craig was a machinist at Rockwell at night and a student at UNK during the day. They had two daughters, Jamie Lynne, Shelia Kae while living in Kearney and a son Adam seven years later in Grand Island after Craig had taken a teaching job there. Jamie died of birth defects at the age of seven after years of exemplary full-time care from Mel.

In her lifetime Mel altered clothing for stores, delivered the Independent with her kids and worked at Platte River Quilting across the street and later downtown. She also labored constantly with her husband improving their neglected house. She taught Quilting Classes and was celebrated as one of the best. She later worked at Hobby Lobby in framing eventually becoming department manager. She was collegial, hardworking, creative with excellent taste in all her employment.

Her family skills were beyond compare. The best cooking period, The best home decorator with limited resources ever, cleanest house, best flowers, support for all family members with an optimistic outlook and impeccable fashion sense. Eleven dogs & three cats, five rescued from the streets knew she was Mom. Reciprocal love and affection.

Mel is loved and survived by her husband, Craig, daughter Shelia, son Adam, granddaughter Jordan, grandson, Jack, brother, Ray, sister Kathy and sister Cindy.

"A well lived Life & a Loving Wonderful person who is missed."

At Mel's request there is no service, or solicitation for flowers or money!

Tribute Wall

LD

“ Craig-I am so sorry for you and the kids at the loss of Mel. She helped me get the shadow box for the American flag after Duane’s death, and I have never forgotten her kindness at such a tough time for me. Please tell Adam I’m sending a hug and thinking of all of you.

Linna Dee Donaldson - March 26, 2025 at 10:45 AM

MO

I knew Mary Ellen from blessed Sacrament Church & school. and also from Loup City. I’m originally from Loup City and my parents were friends with her parents. I graduated from Central in 1966. She was one of the sweetest girls I ever knew and I really missed her when she moved away. God bless her soul and all of you family members. Take one day at a time.

Marge Ockinga - March 27, 2025 at 05:36 PM

JM

I met Mel at Hobby Lobby when she worked in the framing department. I am sure many of her framing customers became friends with her as I did. I told her that I was a wood carver and also made decorative gourds and that we displayed our work at Art in the Park. She was interested and liked my work. She bought several pieces of mine over the years. I was sidelined for a couple of years with health issues and was unable to show very little. She was disappointed and I promised to have something the next year. She showed up this last summer and went home with a bark carving. She was so talented and had a great appreciation for art of all kinds.

It took my breath away when I saw her obituary in the newspaper. It was a tribute to a life unwasted--using her energy, time and talents to improve herself and do for others. She was a model for many of us to not squander our time here but to make the world a better place which she did.

I will miss her but I am grateful that I knew her. I am deeply sorry for your loss.

Jean McMindes

Jean Mcmindes - April 02, 2025 at 11:31 AM