



Donna Van Arkel (Ruggles)

September 24, 1959 - June 19, 2024

Our Beautiful Mother

We have been tasked with writing the obituary for my mother—a heartbreaking, dull assignment. We can't think of a tribute less fitting to the extraordinary creature who so recently left us than the typical laundry list of facts and statistics that usually gets printed. So, in honor of the indomitable spirit and utterly inappropriate attitude of Donna Van Arkel (Ruggles)... here's how it was.

In no particular order:

She was a believer. A dreamer. A truth seeker.

She drank whiskey and took her coffee light and sweet. She smoked Misty Menthols but rarely finished one. She taught her children how to order from a menu by the age of five. She rode her bicycle with no hands.

She got her heart broken. She hated her disease.

She had fabulous taste and draped herself in turquoise set in silver.

She planted flowers for God, and she loved David Letterman. Cake was always a yes, ice cream was always a no.

She laid brick patios and built fences from cedar. She planned rodeos. She read Hemmingway and Dave Barry.

She was a libra and a lover of classic rock. She always voted and she raced grocery carts in the HyVee parking lot.

She was allergic to everything.

She was a feminist and raised her daughters to be the same. Fiercely.

She was married, then not. She drove like a demon with its tail on fire. She did things for luck and for love, but mostly for fun.

She had regrets, and she had triumphs. She had friends and lovers. She had children and pets and a passion for stand-up comedy.

She was her father's daughter, and she had his laugh. She saw the wonders of Yellowstone through his eyes. She found a home for her heart in the mountains.

She preferred milk chocolate and Renaissance art.

She wasn't supposed to be here, yet somehow, she was. And that is her most revealing tell. The truest testament of stubbornness in all things. She was here because she chose to be. And we are luckier for it.

She believed that to see your loved ones in the afterlife, you needed to understand what they believed. I have no doubt that her first stop is to the belt of Orion to visit her sister, then onwards.

This Chapter: September 24, 1959 – June 19, 2024

With love from: Samantha, Scarlett, Bryan, Marshall, Ruby, Tucker and Jacky.

Tribute Wall

KR

“ I ran with Donna in junior high with a group of other kids. We would gather at her house and literally walk and run around evenings and nights, young and energetic. No drivers' licenses among us yet. I am so very pleased she had children who would write an obituary like this one. Flit about in joy, Donna. Blessings to you and those you love.

Kathy Reiley - October 16, 2025 at 10:00 PM

JS

“ Jerry Smothers lit a candle in memory of Donna Van Arkel (Ruggles)



Jerry Smothers - October 16, 2025 at 02:53 PM

LW

“ I saw her obituary shared on Tik Tok... What a woman! I am sorry for your family's loss, but am so thankful she was so loved. She was clearly a wonderful and memorable soul who leaves behind priceless life lessons and love. May that legacy live on in all left to cherish her memory.

Libbie Willert - August 18, 2024 at 11:21 AM

AB

“ Dear Samantha and Scarlett,
I was so sad to hear of your Mother's passing. We had lost touch the last years since we no longer worked together. Life's different paths and all the stuff that always consumes our time... Reading your eloquent and spot on tribute to your mom brought back so many memories of all the things I loved about Donna. She was "all that"! God Bless you both as you and your families navigate life without her. Ann Thorp Brouwer

Ann Thorp Brouwer - June 25, 2024 at 10:26 PM

TJ

“ I remember the first time I met Donna. She gave me a hug and said to her daughter: "he'll do". Although I only knew her from 2014 onwards, she always made me feel welcome and as a part of the family. My fondest memory was April 1, 2016 when we got a semi-cranky phone call when Jimmy John's delivered to her house on accident, as we were house sitting for her a week or two prior and I forgot to update the address for delivery. I swear that it wasn't an intentional April fools joke but in the end we had a good laugh about it. I'll miss you Donna. Your sage words of wisdom always gave me strength to believe in family.



Tiberius James - June 21, 2024 at 11:23 PM

LL

“ So sorry to hear of your mother's passing Scarlett. Know you and your family are in my thoughts. Lisa Landgraf

Lisa Landgraf - June 21, 2024 at 01:14 PM

JS

“ I did not know Donna either, but what a beautifully written, heartfelt tribute! Thank you for sharing it at such a difficult time. My condolences.

Jean Stanford - June 21, 2024 at 09:05 AM

RO

“ I did not know this person, but after reading the Obituary I'm sorry our paths didn't cross. You have wonderful memories to carry you through till you meet again. Very sorry for your loss at this time.

Rod - June 21, 2024 at 08:38 AM

JS

“ With my deepest sympathy, I will always remember her as one of the "gang" who went to the Chicago concert at the Iowa State Fair

Jeff Spain - June 21, 2024 at 12:30 AM

MD

“ I worked with Donna (Your Mom) for many years!! Liz, her, & I hung out at the cellar many a nights! Will remember the good times!!
Marlis (Ringler) Davis

Marlis (Ringler) Davis - June 20, 2024 at 02:49 PM

TM

“ Sorry about your mom worked many years with her at Apac very fond memories

Toni morris - June 20, 2024 at 02:40 PM

MS

“ So sorry for your loss

Mary Stout - June 20, 2024 at 01:17 PM