

REMEMBERING KRISTEN ROBINSON OLSEN

by *Kristin Varner*

For almost two decades, Kristen (“Kristi”) Robinson Olsen pragmatically advocated for the legal rights of others in the Riverside community. Since 1998, she practiced law her entire career with Varner & Brandt, LLP. Kristi specialized in civil litigation and the resolution of labor, employment and business disputes. She excelled at advocating for her clients and practicing law in a professional and solution-oriented manner.

Her role as advocate was not limited to her law practice. Kristi raised awareness for and was committed to a number of local organizations that serve our community’s youth. For over fifteen years, Kristi passionately advocated for the rights of abused children through her work with Olive Crest. She was committed to Olive Crest’s mission of preventing child abuse, treating and educating at-risk children, and preserving the family. She played a key role in starting “Black Tie Bowling,” a signature fundraising event benefiting the children of Olive Crest.

Together with Barbara Robinson, Kristi helped found the Loma Linda University Children’s Hospital’s Big Hearts for Little Hearts Riverside Guild. Serving as a board member to that organization for over six years, Kristi increased awareness about the needs of children facing life-threatening illnesses and raised funds for medical equipment and resources necessary to help those children.

Kristi also served as a leader to the Girl Scouts of San Geronimo Council Troop 1661, in which her daughter, Mallory Olsen, was a girl scout for many years. Kristi believed in empowering girls to achieve beyond their own expectations and led by example. She was admired by other girl scouts leaders and the girl scouts in Troop 1661 for being honest, hard-working, trustworthy, dependable and fun.

In 2006, Kristi was diagnosed with breast cancer and faced three cancer recurrences over a nine-year period. With warrior-like resolve she endured constant and often-times debilitating cancer treatments, demonstrating tenacious strength and courage. Although the cancer treatments frequently made her feel tired and ill, she



Kristen Robinson Olsen

continued advocating for her clients and the children benefitted by the organizations which she served. At times, her body was weak, but her inner spirit and will to make the most of every day remained fiercely strong. She never lost her sense of humor nor her selfless giving to others.

Kristi inspired others to never give up hope and to keep moving toward a next endeavor, whatever that may be. She adopted the motto “life is a playground” and made it a practice to enjoy the beautiful moments in each day, no matter what.

She found much joy in her vegetable garden and frequently gifted her home-grown squash, lettuce and herbs to her family and friends. Her kitchen was also her playground and she had a reputation in her gourmet food group for making the best desserts ever. Caring for and nurturing her many family pets (dogs, cats, tortoises, bunnies, fish, and guinea pig) also brought her great joy.

Kristi believed that relationships are the crux of life, and was an authentic and loyal friend. I’ll never forget the time when Kristi was suffering through her first chemotherapy treatments and she learned of some health issues I was experiencing. Despite feeling lousy from the chemo, and even though my health issues were minor compared to hers, she made a point to come to my home for a visit to give me a “strong heart,” a heart made of beautiful stone to remind me of the beauty in life and the inner strength needed to get through tough situations. I held that stone many times in subsequent weeks and each time I was reminded of how deeply Kristi cared for me and how fortunate I was to experience such true and authentic friendship. She knew how to love well and be a great friend.

On September 3, 2015, Kristi passed on. She was, and still is, deeply loved by many and is survived by her husband, Craig Olsen and daughter Mallory Olsen; her parents, Jim and Barbara Robinson, and a brother Jamie Robinson, all from Riverside. She will always be remembered for being rooted in strength and courage and rich in love.

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