An inspiration to others, Sharon Earley dies at 61

By AUBREY GRANUM
Argus Leader Staff

BRANDON – Sharon Earley served as an inspiration and role model to other cancer patients.

After being diagnosed in January 1985, Earley fought cancer four times.

She often spoke with other cancer patients, inspiring them with her positive attitude.

Last spring she was recognized by Gov. Bill Janklow for her courage as a cancer survivor.

"She didn't look for miracles but wouldn't give up hope," said her husband, Ronald. "She was a fighter the whole way."

Sharon Lee Early, 61, died Saturday, Aug. 14, 1999, at Avera McKennan Hospital from cancer.

Throughout her illness, family was most important to her. Family had a lot to do with helping her through it, her husband said.

Last month she and her husband and children and their families took a trip to Canada.

"We had a wonderful time," said her husband.

She also enjoyed spending Christmas with her family. She spent hours decorating and preparing big meals.

Even when she was sick, she was in charge of the kitchen.

"She was the leader of this family," said her husband.

Earley also loved to entertain friends.

Everyone loved coming to our home because she made them feel comfortable, Ronald said.

For nearly 30 years, Earley was a tutor and student aide at the South Dakota School for the Deaf.

After she was hired she began taking sign-language classes.

"She was very skilled at it," said her husband.

She had a great influence over the students and kept in touch with many of them after they left.



Sharon Earley

"She loved the kids," he said.

Sharon Lee Wilcox was born Jan. 29, 1938, in Flandreau. She graduated from Flandreau High School in 1956 and attended Augustana College.

She married Ronald Earley Aug. 22, 1957, in Flandreau. They lived in Sioux Falls from 1965 until 1978, when they moved to Brandon.

She was a charter member of Risen Savior Catholic Church where she was also a group volunteer.

She was a charter member of the National Guard Ladies Auxiliary and a recipient of the National Guard Molly Pitcher Award.

She enjoyed golfing, painting and reading.

In addition to her husband, survivors include five daughters: Shelley Heinzerling of Parker, Colo., Tammy Earley of St. Paul, Terry Koens and Debby Hodkinson, both of Sioux Falls, and Wendy Kutter of Cloquet, Minn.; 11 grandchildren; one great-granddaughter; one sister, Linda Olson of Dell Rapids; and her aunt and uncle, Kenny and Clara Doyle of Flandreau.

Funeral Mass begins at 11 a.m. Tuesday at Risen Savior Catholic Church in Brandon, with burial at 2 p.m. in St. Simon & Jude Catholic Cemetery in Flandreau.

Visitation will be from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. today at George Boom Funeral Home. Visitation continues at 6 tonight at the church in Brandon with the family present following the rosary and wake service at 6:30 p.m.