

# Considering Jessica

By: Dee McKinney, with Gilbert Head

Over a month has passed since Jessica Hanna and her kids died in a car wreck. It's been forty days of many tears, shared memories, and reconnecting with anyone and everyone who knew Jess. A dull ache I suspect will remain with me always has replaced the raw pain, and now I find myself wanting to look at all my old pictures and videos. Memories both beautiful and anguished are what I have. And I want to share them. These are *my* recollections of Jess, shining and tarnished.

I first spent time with Jessica while working on a large project for the Society for Creative Anachronism. She sat in my living room and listened to Oingo Boingo songs with me while we painted a decorative canvas. Later that spring, I watched in amazement as she voluntarily (and speedily) regrouted a tub where she was housesitting. That was typical Jess—give her a candy bar, and she'd do gobs of work.

Some of my best memories come from various campouts, in Asheville , Bryson City , and nowhere South Carolina . On that latter trip, I recall her yelling out, “Hey, here’s a moss-covered log so it’ll feel nice for your bum!” Every backpacker, bear, and bug for miles around must’ve heard that. And yeah, it was a pretty soft log.

Most everyone who knew her was thrilled when she decided to go into nursing, convinced of her future vocation after she cared for a friend worshipping at the porcelain alter at one of our New Year’s gatherings in a house no larger than a postage stamp. While she did her practical work, I was a starving grad student (well, maybe not starving, but never one to turn down a free meal). I served as her brave pincushion, in exchange for a spaghetti dinner. She treated me to a variety of different blood-drawing techniques. I looked pretty bruised by the next morning and got a lot of stares from my students and colleagues.

“Maid of honor” was too boring a title for the role I served in her wedding, so I was “best maid” instead. Jess had seen my handwriting, so I didn’t get to address any invites, but I can’t count how many hours we spent polishing silver. We kicked her fiancé out of the house the evening before the nuptials, and I gave her the obligatory back and foot rub before we settled in to read comic books before bed. Next morning, I nearly burned down the hair-dresser’s building when I set the toaster on fire. I’ve never seen anyone so happy and laid-back at her own wedding as Jess.

Lest you think we were angels, I also recall a lot of disagreements, particularly over issues of pregnancy and parenting. Sometimes I’d bang my head against a wall, and I’m sure she did the same. It doesn’t matter, though; all kinds of memories are what I’m clinging to these days.

This is only a short list, but I hope it gives folks some insight beyond Jessica’s known roles in the community as a nurse, animal lover, and great mom to Ben and Heather. Suffice it to say, she was one of the most wonderfully out of the ordinary people I’ve ever known. We talked once about sitting around in big floppy dresses on a porch, watching our grandchildren together. I’ll reserve a spot in a vacant rocking chair for her presence, always.