



## Melissa Grant Parks

April 17, 1953 - October 3, 2023

Melissa Grant Parks, 70, died on October 3, 2023. Born April 17, 1953 in Loudon, TN to Claude and Mary Grant, she left us too soon.

Melissa, known to most as Missy, was a gifted athlete growing up in west Knoxville TN and excelled at ballet, swimming and tennis and grew to especially love flag football. She graduated from Bearden High School in 1971, where she was the captain of the cheerleading squad.

Pledging as a Tri Delta at the University of Tennessee and eventually earning a Master's in Special Education, Missy became an exceptional teacher of young children for Anderson County Schools. Her energetic teaching style and loving presence with her pupils was greatly missed when she retired early to take care of her parents.

Missy married Randy Parks on July 16, 1981 and eventually moved to Jacksonville, FL. where she put her teaching skills back to good use, becoming the director and primary teacher for The Brooklyn Reading Center. Missy became a mom when her daughter Emily was born in 1991. After Emily was diagnosed at age two with a progressive form of Muscular Dystrophy, known as SMA, she dedicated her unrelenting and determined spirit to champion for her physically disabled daughter; seeing Emily grow up to graduate from UNF with two college degrees with honors and then help her go on to earn a master's in Social Work from Florida State University.

A mysterious and chronic intestinal disorder severely debilitated and limited Missy for the last twenty years of her life. A normally fatal event involving her

colon eight years ago left her with only her strong heart and a determined will to live. After eleven days in the ICU Missy stunned everyone, especially her medical team, and came back to us.

Struggling so much with her health along with the inevitable isolation, Missy rarely let her difficulties dampen her glass half-full attitude. She never stopped planning trips back to the Tennessee Mountains, delighted in her grandnephew, Malcolm, and cherished every moment spent with Emily.

Missy's fierce loyalty to her people was legendary in our family and community. You did not have to guess about being someone she cared about. Our niece said 'Missy always loved so big!' From her childhood friends to the helpers for our daughter, yes, she did love people so big.

Many called her their best friend, including me and Emily. We are thankful for the time we had with Missy and wanted so much more.

So, rest in peace for now. Your extraordinary and beautiful spirit will be far more at home in the fullness of the Kingdom to come. And all your best friends look forward to seeing you.

PS: I 'll be the thin guy with a full head of hair and Emily will be laughing and running to hug you with both her strong arms opened wide.

Missy is preceded in death by her parents, Edgar Claude Grant and Mary Alice Myers Grant, and her brother Joseph (Joe) Grant, and a special aunt, Ida Brown.

She very reluctantly leaves her daughter, Emily Allison Parks, husband of forty-two years, Randy Parks, Godson Joey Gaskin, Goddaughter Ariel Gaskin, brother John Grant-Dooley and sister-in-law Jean, sister-in-law Joan, nieces Susan Grant Moser, Mary Elizabeth Grant Balentine and her husband Nathan, Jessica Janes and her husband Jerod, nephews Joey Grant, John Parks and his wife Kyra, grandnieces Ellen and Mary Elizabeth Parks, Willa Janes, and grandnephews Christopher Moser and Malcom Balentine.

A celebration of life service for Missy will be planned for 2024. In lieu of flowers, the family has requested a donation to NMD UNITED, <<https://www.nmdunited.org/>>, an organization dedicated to the connecting of adults living

with neuromuscular disabilities.