

[Sue Ann De Boer](#) had a passion for life and loved unconditionally. Sue Ann never met a stranger, was a hard worker and a talented athlete. She was an exceptional person and this was evident to everyone she met for they could clearly see the way she loved, worked, gave freely, and how she never ever gave up!



Sue Ann De Boer was born with Down syndrome to Larry and Sue De Boer in Ridgewood, New Jersey on August 3, 1967 but moved to Shelby County just two years later. Over her lifetime and throughout Central Alabama, Sue Ann and her mother worked tirelessly as advocates for those for those with special needs in the area. Through their efforts, education and job opportunities are readily available in Shelby Country.

A 1987 graduate of Pelham High School, Sue Ann enjoyed competing in the Special Olympics for many years. She ran track, even though she did not like getting sweaty, was an excellent swimmer, competing in aquatic events, and also competed in snow skiing in the regional winter games. A talented bowler, she qualified to participate in tournaments across the country. When bocce was introduced in Special Olympics, she and her best friend, Mickey Crabtree, teamed up and won the state championship and represented Alabama at two international Special Olympics games.

Through it all, Sue Ann demonstrated a great work ethic as she prepared for every sport in which she competed," said Gay Litton, who knew Sue Ann from working with Shelby County Special Olympics. "Her parents and her Aunt Ann, were always on the sidelines, encouraging, cheering, and if necessary, arguing with the officials!" she said. After every competition, Sue Ann always celebrated with her signature victory dance.



Sue Ann was a perfectionist at her job at the Pelham YMCA, where she worked for 18 years. She was a laundry attendant and was responsible for rolling and stacking towels. "If anyone didn't do them just right, she let them know. She would rearrange the towels and fuss at them for not doing it right," said her older sister, Tammy Rowe. "Everybody there loved her." When Sue Ann was laid off from her job during the recession, Rowe told her she could still go in and volunteer. Sue Ann replied, "I need a payin' job!" She was on the phone before noon that day looking for another job, although it wasn't long before she was rehired for her old position.

An active member at New Hope Cumberland Presbyterian Church, Sue Ann sang in the choir with her dad, played bongos, danced, and did sign language with the worship team. "She had really good rhythm," Rowe said, "and along with the bongos, she played other percussion instruments, including shakers and cowbell. She even got lessons from Bo Bice, who attended church there before achieving American Idol fame. He tried to help her play her part on the instruments correctly, but she was happy with the way she did it.

Sue Ann received standing ovations every time she signed to "God Bless America." Her performance moved any crowd, from school assemblies to cruise ship talent shows. She never shied away from a competition, either. And she usually ended up on the winning team whether it was a game of Skip Bo or Alabama Football. **The real winner, though, was anyone who met Sue Ann.**

Stubborn, in a good way, the words "no" and "can't" weren't part of Sue Ann's vocabulary. "Once she was set on something, she would not budge," Rowe said. "She never gave up, and when she wanted to do something, she persisted," she said. Less than a year ago, Sue Ann was diagnosed with a precursor to leukemia. Rowe said when she heard those words, she decided she didn't want to die, she wanted to live. She elected not to receive chemotherapy treatments and keep the best quality of life she could. Her first request was to go on a cruise with her family.

"We went on a cruise to the Caribbean. She swam with dolphins. She was chosen to participate in a "Dancing with the Stars" type competition and won. By midweek, everyone on the ship knew her by name and would stop and tell her what a great dancer she was," Tammy said. The last few months, Sue Ann had a great quality of life with no pain. She passed away on December 24, 2014. She was 47. Her service was held at Southern Heritage Funeral Home in Pelham. Rowe said that her service was "beautiful, funny and full of love."



An excerpt from the program at her memorial service said that "Sue Ann loved her family, friends, Savior, church, job and her country. She taught others how to love and how to live. Her outgoing and uninhibited nature made all who met her feel loved and accepted. She knew what was important in life: caring about others, sticking to her commitments, working hard and enjoying celebrations. She put all these into action. She would give everyone a hug and when you told her you loved her, she would say "I love you more!" and she did.