

Zona Gale (Ziems) Rutherford

January 17, 1942 – March 10, 2026

Zona Gale Rutherford passed away peacefully surrounded by her two children on March 10, 2026.

Gale was born in Decatur, IL on January 17, 1942, to Herbert and Margaret (Orton) Ziems. As a child, she moved to Bethany, IL where she met her husband, Richard, at Bethany High School. After High School, Gale attended Illinois State University and graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Health and Physical Education. She later earned a Master of Education from Lesley College. Gale started her teaching career in Illinois, followed by Ohio, Florida and finally retiring in Colorado, all states where her husband was stationed in the US Air Force. First teaching in Illinois, Gale served one year as a PE teacher for grades 1-12 and coached the girls cheerleading team. Her next assignment was in Ohio where she taught PE for grades 7-12 for four years. Moving to Florida, Gale taught PE for five years in grades 1-12 and even coached synchronized swimming. Finally, Gale taught PE in school District 11 full-time for 26 years. As a dedicated educator, she primarily taught PE at Monroe, King, Martinez, and Penrose Elementary schools before retiring in 2004. During this time, Gale coordinated and coached Basketball, before school tumbling, the annual track and field day event, Shape-up Across Colorado, and Jump Rope for Heart. In 2001, Gale was nominated for the Crystal Apple Award for her teaching excellence. Unable to stop teaching after retirement in 2004, Gale continued as a substitute teacher for another 13 years before finally hanging up the jump rope.

Interesting fact, while living in Florida, Gale was a walking blood donor for the Apollo-Soyuz test project and several of the Apollo space missions.

Gale devoted time to Crossfire Ministries where she organized donations and created a volunteer schedule. As a member of First Presbyterian Church, she dutifully served as a deacon, host, chairperson of Golden Circle Food Committee and member of the Community Blood Drive Committee. In addition, Gale was a loyal and beloved member of Pathfinders attending services every Sunday. True to her teaching roots, she was also an active member of Alpha Delta Kappa Sorority, dedicated to educational excellence and altruistic contributions to society.

When not volunteering, you could find her at work in her picturesque yard, tending to her flower gardens and keeping the grass neatly trimmed. She also enjoyed taking walks throughout her neighborhood, hiking local trails, and attending sporting events. Most of all, she relished long cross-country drives, stopping at every national park, on her way to visiting her children on the east and west coasts.

Gale is survived by two children, Rebecca (Dale) Gassman and Robert (Courtney) Rutherford, two grandsons, Hayden and Alex Rutherford, in-laws Jeannie and Bill Walters, a sister, Katherine (Gary) Brightman, and many nieces and nephews. She was preceded in death by her parents, Margaret and Herbert, her husband of 56 years, Richard, two brothers, Allan and Michael, and a sister, Loni. Gale and Richard are interred together at Pikes Peak National Cemetery.

Gale was an active presence in the community and at church. She will be deeply missed. In lieu of flowers, please consider donating to one of the charities she supported, The National Park Foundation, National Parks Conservation Association, The Nature Conservancy, Habitat for Humanity, Wreaths Across America, Crossfire Ministries, or planting flowers in her memory.