

A Tribute to Jane Fowler

By Louise Clay

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My name is Louise Clay. As Jane was, I am the mother of an aging disabled child who lives at Richmond State Supported Living Center in Richmond, Texas. I don't remember just when Jane and I met, but it was around 30 years ago. Those of us who have special-needs children like ours have an instant bond, with a deep understanding of each other's past struggles plus our concerns for the present and future lives of our children and others like them.

For decades Jane was a very active parent, a volunteer, and an advocate for Richmond State Supported Living Center, which was formerly known as Richmond State School. She was a past president of the family association and over the years held every office at least once, until about 2 years ago. In earlier years she wrote the family newsletter and was responsible for sending out 600 or so copies – in the days before email. She and John kept the roster of families using an early database program. Jane served as a board member of the Volunteer Services Council at Richmond, a separate organization which raises money to provide the “extras” for the residents at Richmond beyond the very basics provided by the State of Texas. Jane organized several annual Staff Appreciation Days, when the family association honored and prepared a meal for hundreds of our children's care-givers. I could go on and on with her activities as a volunteer at Richmond.

All this activity on Jane's part took devotion, energy, leadership, and a great amount of her time – and it meant a lot of driving, because she lived a long way from Richmond. Every trip took at least an hour each way.

In recent years we family members have been engaged in a struggle to keep the Richmond facility open. More than once John and Jane and I have gone to Austin together and trudged the halls of the Capitol along with other families, visiting legislators and pleading for their support in funding this state facility. So far we have succeeded so that Jane's daughter Carol has excellent care from people who know and love her. So does my son Walt and so do all the 330 Richmond residents, many of whom have no family contact at all.

Jane and John have always been wonderful parents. They visited Carol every Saturday and when they were to go out of town, they would notify Judy Schmid, their friend who was a former employee at Richmond, and Judy would go and check on Carol. Jane always had all the bases covered when it came to making sure Carol had the best care.

Last summer I saw Jane at Richmond for the last time, and she was having obvious health problems. But we talked over the phone until recently.

Jane was extremely smart and talented, with a wonderful sense of humor. We have lost a truly good person -- a parent, a volunteer, an advocate, and just a good friend.