

MARCH 2024

SOUTH HILL

NEIGHBORS



**KIMBERLY
& LEON
FRECHETTE**

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KIMBERLY & LEON FRECHETTE

BATTLE AGAINST FRONTOTEMPORAL DEMENTIA

BY LAURA SMITH-JOHNSON WITH LEON A FRECHETTE | PHOTOS BY SHAY CAREY PHOTOGRAPHY

How can two individuals be running on parallel courses, being so close to each other, yet so far apart? Such is the case with Leon and Kimberly, both born in 1954 — Leon in Springfield, MA, and Kimberly in Pittsburgh, PA.

Kimberly's father, a Lieutenant Colonel, and Leon's grandfather (his mother's father), a Technical Sergeant, were both transferred to Fairchild Air Force Base in Airway Heights, WA. Both families settled on Spokane's South Hill; Kimberly lived at 17th and Bernard, while Leon resided at 12th and Monroe. Kimberly attended and graduated from Marycliff High School, a Catholic all-girls school, in 1972, the same year Leon graduated from Lewis and Clark High School. Notably, the two high schools were only four blocks apart.

Despite sharing mutual friends, Leon and Kimberly never met. It wasn't until after experiencing a decade of marriage and subsequent divorces that they finally met in 1984, through the introduction by Kimberly's younger sister, Kristi, and Leon's younger brother, Robert.

In 1985, they married, rented a home on 29th Avenue close to S Arthur Street, and eventually purchased it from the original owner who needed to sell it due to a divorce. Intriguingly, this home was originally part of a three-story structure built in the Manito area in 1928. The first floor, where the Frechettes now reside, was relocated to its current location in 1957. Additionally, a grocery store that once stood somewhere in the 15th and Grand area was moved to the back side of their home in 1957, to complete the daylight basement. The original stairs, which would have led to the second floor — now an attic — are still intact. Leon has always considered adding a second story.

To this day, the home remains a work in progress. Many of the how-to articles on Leon's home-improvement website are inspired by their hands-on projects. Leon is a former remodeling contractor and a published how-to author. The Frechettes have continued to live in this home ever since.

On a seemingly ordinary morning in May 2006, Kimberly, a celebrated sales champion in Spokane's furniture industry, awoke

to a perplexing ringing in her ears. What seemed like a minor annoyance on her 52nd birthday was, in fact, a harbinger of a life-altering storm brewing on the horizon. She had tinnitus in both ears, and Leon became a caregiver for the next four years.

For 48 years, Kimberly had been the backbone of her industry, her dedication unwavering. Her former boss, Rick Ennis, would say in his special way, “She was a phenom.” But in 2021, a series of uncharacteristic errors in customer invoices revealed a hidden struggle. Leon, her devoted husband of close to 39 years and a seasoned entrepreneur for 48 years with multiple businesses, sensed a disturbing change in her memory. Despite seeking medical advice in March 2020, their concerns were initially overlooked.

Tragedy struck on July 31, 2021. Kimberly’s condition forced her into an unexpected medical leave from Ennis Fine Furniture, the job she loved, culminating in a heartbreaking job loss three months later. As her physical health declined, Leon transitioned from a supportive partner to a full-time caregiver, all while managing his businesses.

Their journey through the healthcare maze was fraught with challenges. Multiple neurologists turned them away, leaving them grappling with uncertainty. It was not until late 2022 that Providence Stroke and Cognitive Care Center accepted Kimberly, leading to a diagnosis that shook their world: Frontotemporal Dementia (FTD) Stage 2, a condition notably similar to that of actor Bruce Willis. On December 27, 2023, her neurologist changed her condition to Behavioral Variant Frontotemporal Dementia (bvFTD) Stage 2.

The prognosis was grim: an average life expectancy of six years post-diagnosis. Yet, in the face of adversity, Leon’s resolve only strengthened. He invested their life savings and Kimberly’s 401K to ensure her comfort, focusing on diet, natural supplements, and specialized care. Through his unwavering dedication, Kimberly’s physical health showed signs of improvement, but the cognitive decline continued its relentless march.

Navigating the complexities of caregiving and business, Leon faced another hurdle: the limitations of the caregiving system, exacerbated by a lack of coverage by medical insurance. With only minimal support available, Leon shouldered the immense responsibility of caring for his wife while keeping his businesses afloat.

“Kimberly’s world is a delicate balance. Her mind, trapped in a perpetual loop, oscillates between the innocence of a child and the awareness of an adult,” Leon shares. “Caring for someone with bvFTD is a testament to love and endurance. It is a full-time commitment that extends beyond the capacity of one person.”

Male caregivers often feel more isolated and unsupported, and they are less likely to ask for help and emotional support. Last month, in December, Leon reached out to his family and friends to let them know what has happened over the most recent years. The response he received was welcoming.





The Frechettes are the last of the longstanding neighbors in their neighborhood. Many have passed on to the spiritual world. Leon connected with two of four neighbors who moved away. Jim and Jill moved to a farm and now stop by every Sunday to bring fresh eggs and visit. Buzz and Ingrid moved to Florida. Buzz had been diagnosed with dementia and has since passed. Leon communicates with Ingrid daily now through Messenger to share their experiences with this terrible disease.

Leon also maintains regular communication with two high-school friends, Joel and Nancy. These recent communications with friends and former neighbors are helping to reduce his stress as he fulfills the role of a full-time caregiver to Kimberly.

We stand in solidarity with Leon and Kimberly during this challenging chapter. Leon continues to operate his e-commerce businesses from his home on Spokane's South Hill: Nutty Bavarian Northwest, Spud Spikes, BondhusTools.com, and AskToolTalk. His resilience and dedication to Kimberly are a testament to the power of love and the strength of the human spirit.

Together, we can extend our support and understanding to the Frechettes, who remind us of the profound impact of compassion in times of adversity.

In a heartwarming display of community support, a business associate has initiated a **GoFundMe** campaign to assist the Frechette family during this challenging time. This thoughtful endeavor aims to provide financial relief to ride out the difficulties ahead and show solidarity with the Frechettes as they navigate the complexities of Kimberly's condition.

ABOUT US

OUR EMAIL:

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OUR WEBSITE:

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OUR CAMPAIGN:

<https://gofund.me/56ec2e27>

AN ARTICLE ABOUT US:

<https://bit.ly/48yuSyV>