



## Rita Jane Johnson

Rita Jane Johnson--friend, caring partner, devoted pet mother, and lover of Motown music --died unexpectedly on April 7 in Houston, Texas. Rita was born in Charleston, West Virginia in 1961. She graduated from West Virginia State University with a Degree in Environmental Science and received a Master's Degree in Industrial Engineering from West Virginia University - 'Go Mountaineers!' She started her career with Union Carbide and was currently employed with Dow Chemical in Houston. In addition to being a bright and decisive engineer, Rita was also a mentor and guide for numerous young employees who worked for her--though, according to her many, many friends at Dow, it never seemed as if Rita was their boss, but rather their champion and cheerleader. An avid scooter rider and exercise enthusiast who loved nothing more than to sweat, she could often be found at the Dow gym, where she always had a kind word of encouragement for other members of her spin class. Rita's ability to see the best in everyone was not only applied to her professional environment. She had a unique ability to make anyone feel as if their talent for anything made them the most talented at a given trait. She could rarely be seen without a smile, warming instantly to new acquaintances and making strangers feel as if they'd been friends with her for years. Long-term relationships were a priority for Rita, as evidenced by her eclectic parade of mourners: friends from the office and the neighborhood, extended family and the strays she would invite over for Central Market ham on Thanksgiving--but also her hairdresser who brought her back to blonde when she finished

chemo, and the accountant in West Virginia with whom she grew up playing tennis. Rita was what might best be described as "a serial Facebook stalker," becoming unabashedly acquainted with her friends' comings and goings through their posts--then asking them about their trips or their cousins' high school graduations or about the restaurant a person ate at the next time she saw them in person. When Rita was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2009, she went in just a few months, from being fearful of treatment to crossing the finish line at the Komen walk, while she was still going through chemo. She joked to friends that chicken soup had cured her, when really it was Rita's will to follow through treatment. She celebrated five years cancer-free the week before her death. Rita was an exceptional planner--task-oriented and meticulous, she lived a highly organized life while, somehow, never being or seeming like a rigid person. Rather, Rita was easygoing and warm, and her regimentation always came from a place of consideration. It was important to her to arrive home at the same time every day to feed and walk her beloved dog, Abby, whom she adopted after bribing animal shelter employees with treats, to make sure no one else could adopt the sweet mutt first. Rita is survived by her longtime partner, Jennifer Smart; mother, Frances Johnson, Nitro, WV; brothers George Richardson (Pat), Lynchburg, VA; Doug Johnson (Vida), South Charleston, WV; nieces Jennifer Eppolito (Sam), Pleasant Unity, PA; Isabelle Richardson Borfiga, Boston, MA and Jordyn Johnson, South Charleston, WV. Rita's ashes will be spread in one of her favorite places in the world, Key West, where she visited every chance she got. A celebration of Rita's life will be held on Sunday, April 26, 2015 at the Historic Heights Fire Station, 107 W. 12th Street, Houston from 2:00pm to 4:00pm.