

Shirley Dudek Demmer Chair of Research

By: Ginny Comstock Tocci

The Brain Aneurysm Foundation is pleased to announce the establishment of the Shirley Dudek Demmer Chair of Research to be awarded in September 2008. The \$10,000 grant, part of a \$50,000 gift donated by her husband Bill Demmer, will be used to fund essential research that can directly benefit those affected and help to reduce the incidence of ruptured aneurysms. Part of the gift will be used to produce an educational awareness video for medical professionals to help promote early detection of brain aneurysms. With this incredibly generous donation, The Brain Aneurysm Foundation will be able to further increase awareness of brain aneurysms both in the general public and in the medical community.

Shirley was born November 29, 1952 in Detroit, Michigan to her father John, an automotive worker for General Motors and her mother Genevieve, a homemaker. She grew up in a modest neighborhood in Detroit along with her five siblings Gloria, Robert, Nancy, Richard and Tom. Shirley's young life was traumatically disrupted when she lost her mother at age thirteen causing her to grow up overnight. Her mother died at age 44 after going into the hospital for a hysterectomy and several days later suffering what was thought to be a stroke. It became clear later that she had died from a brain aneurysm.

In the winter of 1975, she met her future husband, Bill, with whom she shared almost 30 years of a wonderful marriage. They were married in January of 1978 and moved to Plymouth Township, Michigan, a small suburb of Detroit. Later they moved just a few miles away to Northville, MI and in 1981 welcomed their first child Matthew.

The family continued to grow as their second son Mark joined them in 1984, followed by their daughter Jacqueline in 1987. Shirley and Bill remained in Northville, where she tirelessly dedicated her life to the family she cherished, the home that she treasured, and the community that she loved.

With her husband Bill, an automobile dealer in Detroit, MI, they became heavily involved with the North American International Auto Show. During Bill's years as chairman of the event, Shirley realized her passion for travel and they had the opportunity to visit many great cities such as Paris, Tokyo, Geneva and Frankfurt.

Growing up in the Great Lakes area, Shirley developed a love of the water. From the lakes of Northern Michigan to the Florida Gulf, she was in her element and loved vacationing with her family on the beaches.

Shirley had an epiphany when she turned 50 and realized she needed to return to college to finish her bachelor's degree, one of her life's goals. She enrolled in Madonna University and earned a bachelor of arts in sociology, graduating with highest honors in May 2007. She had applied to and was accepted to the

University of Michigan for a graduate program in Women's and Gender Studies. In her application she wrote: "Life is a journey with many twists and turns. Now that my bachelor's degree is near at hand, I am once again at a fork in the road. This time it is pointing me in the direction of The University of Michigan—Dearborn for the next stop on this journey called "life."



Tragically, Shirley's journey ended way too soon. Suddenly in mid-November of 2007 and without warning, she had a brain aneurysm rupture causing catastrophic damage and her life slipped away. In the weeks before her brain aneurysm ruptured, she had experienced vision problems and consulted with her eye doctor. Unfortunately, the family history of brain aneurysms was not clear at that point and a potential screening for a brain aneurysm with the possibility for an early diagnosis was not done. In the midst of preparing dinner, Shirley suffered a ruptured aneurysm and sadly she passed away the next day.

Shirley was a person of extreme warmth and caring. Throughout her life, she was dedicated to family, faith and community. Her philanthropic efforts, particularly in the area of women's rights and violence against women, had a remarkable effect on everyone whose lives she touched.

Shirley continues to impact the lives of the family she left behind. After her tragic death, her husband Bill sought to learn as much as possible about brain aneurysms. He consulted with a family member who is also an Emergency Room doctor, The Brain Aneurysm Foundation and other medical professionals. In reviewing his late mother-in-law's Certificate of Death and finding cause of death was noted as possible ruptured aneurysm, he urged his children Matthew, now 27, Mark, 24 and daughter Jackie, 21, to be screened via MRI/MRA for brain aneurysms. Fortunately, the screenings did not reveal any abnormal results.

In addition, he urged Shirley's siblings to be screened as well, as there was a genetic predisposition for brain aneurysms in the family. It turned out Shirley's sister Nancy did in fact have a brain aneurysm. She recently underwent a craniotomy and the brain aneurysm was successfully clipped. Fortunately, Nancy made a speedy recovery and is grateful to be living a full life.

Bill Demmer, in making this generous gift in memory of his beloved wife Shirley, will help keep her legacy and dreams alive. This wonderful donation in memory of Shirley Demmer will have a tremendous impact and save lives by helping The Brain Aneurysm Foundation fund critical research and support aneurysm awareness initiatives to promote the early detection of brain aneurysms.