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## Susan Chamberlain: 1956-2012

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By Global Aquaculture Alliance

**‘Extraordinary person’ was the driving force behind the *Advocate***



Susan Chamberlain “would happily tackle almost anything – and usually succeeded.”

The news of Susan Chamberlain’s sudden death on February 12 put our worlds on hold for a time. Her many wonderful traits – kindness, generosity, dedication, optimism, friendliness and trustworthiness – had made their mark on our hearts. We weren’t ready to say goodbye.

Perhaps best known as the wife of George Chamberlain, founder and president of the Global Aquaculture

Alliance, Susan was also a devoted mother of

four, a true friend, willing community volunteer – and so much more.

For the larger GAA family, she was also the steadfast anchor at the organization's core, often serving as its heart and soul – “the glue that kept her associates focused,” in the words of GAA Executive Director Wally Stevens.

## Extraordinary



After GAA outgrew its literal “home base,” Susan and George opened the GAA Home Office in a small office building in St. Louis County.

Susan Chamberlain played a critical role in the creation of GAA and its activities during the struggling early years. Her hard work and dedication contributed to the formation of GAA, established important connections with producer organizations around the world and helped the *Global Aquaculture Advocate* grow from a fledgling newsletter to the premier magazine it is today.

“For those who didn’t know Susan in the beginning, it didn’t take long before we realized what an extraordinary person she was,” Peder Jacobson, an original GAA board member, recalled. “Her administrative and people skills were evident with every interaction.”

“What I remember most about Susan in the early days was her selfless determination to support the development of the dream we all had for GAA,” recalled long-time GAA officer Bill Herzig. “There was no money, so we all just had to figure out how to do it. For Susan and George, that meant devoting themselves personally to it – despite already having incredibly busy lives with family and business.”



Susan often worked trade shows with Betty More to promote GAA's magazine and Best Aquaculture Practices program.

"What most people never realized was Susan's commitment behind the scenes to rise to the occasion regardless of the obstacles," George Chamberlain said. "In 1999, just before the Christmas holidays, our newly launched magazine was threatened by the loss of our graphic designer followed by a computer crash that erased all the files. Susan figured out how to fix the computer, reload the software and recreate the files by working long hours straight through the holidays."

"Whatever needed to be done, she just threw herself into it," Herzig added. "Susan never wanted thanks for what she did. She just cared passionately about the principles we were about."

## Committed

The GAA Home Office started in the Chamberlains' living room. Susan inspired the whole family to get involved. Sons Brian and Jordan installed the I.T. systems and handled meeting photography, and daughters Kassie and Sarah helped at trade shows. Even Susan's mother helped stuff magazines at the office.

Whether managing the "real" office later or setting up a trade show booth on the other side of the globe, Susan put her – and GAA's – best foot forward. She promoted GAA's original Codes of Practices for Responsible Shrimp Farming and worked tirelessly with Betty More to help establish and administer the startup of the Aquaculture Certification

Council, the forerunner of today's BAP program.

At trade shows, people from all over the world came looking for Susan when they had questions or just to say "hello." Susan was central to everything GAA, so she had the answers.

"She was committed to her responsibilities and dedicated to working through the day-to-day challenges when GAA was struggling to become a recognized entity," Betty More said. "Her efficient administrative management made the best use of everyone's time and talent in those first years."

Always ready to help with a smile, Susan largely organized the ground-breaking Global Shrimp Outlook and Global Fish Outlook conferences that preceded the current Global Outlook for Aquaculture

Leadership (**GOAL** (<https://www.aquaculturealliance.org/goal/>)) events. Her skills and motivation were driving forces in raising GAA to the forefront of aquaculture trade associations.

"Despite her responsibilities, Susan always managed to project in her voice and correspondence the friendliness and optimism that came to characterize the GAA personality," Jacobson said.



Susan was a tireless worker and was often the busiest person at GOAL conferences.

## Family



Susan was a supportive wife to George Chamberlain and devoted mother to (from left) Sarah, Kassie, daughter-in-law Erin, Brian and Jordan.

For Susan, GAA was important, but family always came first. "Her family meant everything to her," Susan's mother, Patty Ball, said.

"For about a month before each GAA meeting I didn't see much of Mom," recalls youngest daughter Kassie. "She pretty much lived at the office, and when she wasn't there, she was stationed in her office at home. I liked to stay up late on weekends, so we had a running joke that Mom was starting her workday just as I was going to bed. Even during those months, though, Mom made time each day to drive me home from school so we'd be able to spend a few minutes together."

## Ride on

Susan Ball Chamberlain, it seems, was constantly in motion. Born in Berkeley, California, USA, she spent her early years in Utah, Texas and the country of Iran, where her father worked for Chevron Oil Co. She graduated from Texas A&M with a B.S. in fisheries science and worked several years before becoming involved in the widening world of international aquaculture.

She married George in 1977 when he was a graduate student in aquaculture at Texas A&M University. The two started a family and later moved with their four children to St. Louis, Missouri, USA. Susan supported her children's interests by becoming a Girl Scout leader and a high school band booster who sold candy and served barbecue to raise funds for school trips. Despite her nagging knee problems, Susan helped load up the family van to move her teens into and out of college dorms when George was working out of the country.

After juggling the administration of GAA for 10 years, Susan left to follow another passion – helping children with special needs. She became a budget and development officer for Ride On St. Louis, a non-profit group that helps disabled children through equine-assisted activities and therapies.

Many of the skills polished at GAA came quickly into play for the group. Susan honed business plans and projected budgets. She set up and ran fundraising events. She loved the gentle horses and the way they helped their young riders, physically and emotionally.

## Making a difference



The GAA crew honored Susan's retirement from the organization with a party that recognized her many years of dedication.

"Many people wonder all their lives if they've made a difference," GAA's Stevens said, "but certainly not Susan Chamberlain. She was a person who would happily tackle almost anything – and usually succeeded."

"Without Susan's drive and dedication, I think many of us would have given up on GAA during its early years," *Global Aquaculture Advocate* Editor Darryl Jory said. "She was truly a source of inspiration."

"She is terribly missed by those who had the privilege of knowing what a special person she was," Herzig said. "Much of what has been achieved today is a result of her tireless, selfless devotion."

## Memorials

To honor Susan and her work, the Susan Chamberlain Memorial Fund has been established under the non-profit Seafood Industry Research Fund. The memorial will provide annual funding for aquaculture-oriented research. Contributions can be made online at [www.sirfonline.org](https://sirfonline.org) (<https://sirfonline.org>).

The Chamberlain family has also set up a memorial fund to continue Susan's legacy of unselfish giving to others. Donations made at [www.susanchamberlain.org](http://www.susanchamberlain.org) will be dispersed as grants to organizations committed to helping children with disabilities and other groups.

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