

## ■ Denise Claire Szulc

Nurse, educator

30-3-1951 — 19-5-2001

By ANNE COWDEN

Denise Szulc was born and raised in Geelong. Her parents, Val and Harold Patten, had five children, and Denise was the eldest. With Denise's passion for people and love of life, it was perhaps inevitable that she would work in child care, and then nursing. When she moved into nursing for the aged, Denise found her niche.



Having discovered a strong affinity with elderly people, she began working as a personal care staff member at St Laurence House, a Geelong respite centre for people of all ages with memory loss. At St Laurence House she worked with Anne Cottrell to set up a memory-loss program.

Denise was responsible for the design and content of the video *Bringing out the Best*. The video was produced in 1990 by Film Victoria for the National Action Plan for Dementia Care. Denise later worked as coordinator of aged care for all of the day centres on the Bellarine Peninsula. With her affinity for carers of people with dementia and Alzheimer's disease, she set up carers' groups to support those caring for the aged. She also took on the role of educator for staff in nursing homes to share with them the technique of whole brain massage, which involves touching certain parts of the head to relieve stress in dementia patients. Her work with dementia and Alzheimer's patients was exceptional and her commitment to improving their quality of life inspirational.

Denise married in the early 1970s and her sons, Michael and Neil, were central to her existence. She took on motherhood just as she approached everything else in life — full-on. Typical of this was getting involved in the boys' school and ending up as president of the school council.

After her divorce in 1980, Denise met her soulmate in Henry Szulc. He, along with Denise's friends and family, delighted in her wicked sense of humor, quick wit and her passion for life.

When diagnosed with a brain tumor, Denise was given just three months to live after an operation at St Vincent's Hospital, 18 months at best. With her incredible attitude to life, and to her illness, Denise lasted the full 18 months. She continued working right through and even attended her regular ballroom dancing nights until just days before she died.

Denise died at home, with her beloved Henry by her side.

*Anne Cowden is a civil celebrant.*