



Cornelia "Nelly" Gail Sanford

February 21, 2026

Cornelia "Nelly" Gail Sanford of Fort Collins, Colorado, passed away at home on Saturday, February 21st.

Nelly was born October 11, 1956 in Fort Polk, Louisiana to Elfriede "Hilda" and Owen "Willie" Ashworth. She was the middle child of five with two older siblings, Ingrid and Heinz, and two younger sisters, Anita and Angela. Education was important to her mother and evident in Nelly, who eventually held a Bachelor's degree in Music Education along with two Masters - Special Education and School Psychology. She raised two daughters from her first marriage, Ashley and Elise, and later adopted Jason into their home. She met the love of her life, Joel Sanford, in 2000 in New Orleans, and they recently celebrated their 25th anniversary. Her last greatest loves were her four grandchildren. She lived the first 52 years of her life in Louisiana and carried this culture to Colorado in 2008 through sharing of food and hosting gatherings.

Her love of music and passion for service of God and others propelled her path through life. She was a choir director, youth group leader, music educator, and organist for her churches starting at age 15 and into her sixties. She served not only through music but with numerous mission trips to Uganda and Tanzania, Haiti, Peru, Puerto Rico, and post-Katrina New Orleans. She formed lasting relationships on these adventures and ensured continued

support to a beloved nurse of Uganda, Stella, and her local pharmacy. Locally, she helped displaced immigrant families navigate new lives through ESL tutoring, driving lessons, and countless meetings for school and medical advocacy. Nelly was passionate about forming connections with God, family, friends, and people in need. She organized host families for the Watoto Choir of Uganda on their visits to Colorado, and she formed the Heseder Group at Saint John's Lutheran Church, inspiring young and old to take up their calling for how they can help the world. She was willing to feed and host anyone and was known for "taking in strays." She wished nothing more than for a loving world in which people take care of one another.

Nelly's silent strength was evident in her 21 month battle with pancreatic cancer. She never wavered in her faith and was able to continue an active lifestyle through the dedicated efforts of Dr. Lynn Matthew of UC Health and Dr. Jason Henry of Sarah Cannon Research Institute, for which the family will be forever grateful.

A service for Nelly will be held Friday, March 6 at 2 pm (MST) at Our Saviour's Lutheran Church in Fort Collins, Colorado. Service can be viewed online at Memorials - Our Saviour's Lutheran Church (<https://our-saviours.org/memorials/>).

In lieu of flowers, please consider donations to Stella's pharmacy, Watoto Choir, or the LCMS Mercy Medical Teams. Checks or online payments can be made to Our Savior Lutheran Church of Fort Collins with the note "Nelly Sanford Memorial Fund." Giving - Our Saviour's Lutheran Church (<https://our-saviours.org/breeze-giving-form/>).

Previous Events

Church Service

MAR 6. 2:00 PM (MT)

Our Saviour's Lutheran Church
2000 S Lemay Avenue
Fort Collins,, CO 80525

Tribute Wall



“ Goes Funeral Care & Crematory created a Webcast in memory of Cornelia "Nelly" Gail Sanford



Goes Funeral Care & Crematory - February 27 at 01:01 PM

NY

I only had the honor to meet and visit w Nellie a few times when she and Joel traveled to Iowa for their daughter Ashley's baby shower and to share in our lovely (granddaughter) Myriam's birthday. Sitting and visiting on these few occasions w Nellie made me feel like I knew her for years. She was surely a sweet, kind and loving person. She will surely be missed. I will always remember her kind and friendly personality. Prayers sent for Joel and their children for strength to deal with their loss. May she rest in peace. Dr. Tahseen and Nancy Yehyaw

Nancy Yehyaw - February 27 at 09:39 PM

EG

“*Heaven has truly gained a serving soul. Nelly was an inspiration to everyone who had the privilege of knowing her. Through her unwavering will to serve—both as a friend and as a member of the Heseder servant team of Fort Collins, Colorado—she embodied compassion, purpose, and dedication. She wasn’t just part of our team; she was our heart. She kept us focused on what mattered most: serving others.*

When Nelly recognized a need, she immediately began looking for ways to help. She explored options, organized resources, and prepared us to mobilize for the next mission. Her leadership was quiet but powerful—never forced, always encouraging, and consistently rooted in love for people.

One memory that will stay with me forever is our trip to New Orleans to help with recovery after Hurricane Katrina. During that week, it was clear that Nelly carried a deep affection not only for the people affected, but also for the vibrant culture of New Orleans itself. Together, we touched many lives, offering support to those who were still rebuilding their worlds. And it was Nelly’s spirit—her drive, her compassion, her example—that made it all possible.

Nelly had a rare gift: she inspired others to serve simply by being who she was. Without her passion and leadership, we could never have reached as many people or made such an impact. She radiated purpose, hope, and kindness everywhere she went.

Her legacy lives on in every act of service she inspired. And as we continue the work she loved so much, we carry her with us—in our hearts, in our missions, and in our commitment to serve others just as she taught us.

Eric Gardner Fort Collins Colorado

Eric Gardner - March 02 at 11:22 AM

RS

Thank you for your heart felt comments. You have described my time of knowing and being with Nelly. She inspired me and helped me know how to serve the Afghan children. Her legacy will live on in our hearts and in all we do for others.

Rebecca Shelley - March 06 at 10:45 AM

MR

“Nelly and I met in Charleston, SC at an Order of St Luke Conference five years ago. We met at the feet of Jesus where we both were devoted to serving our Lord in the full power of His Holy Spirit. We became spiritual sisters through our shared commitment to healing the sick across the third world through missions and prayer. We lived 100 miles apart, so we had prayer sleep-overs visiting each other to pray and worship together. What a precious gift Nelly has been in my life! I look forward to our heavenly reunion. She was the brightest light for Jesus radiating His love to all!

Marcella Rejoice Ruch - February 28 at 08:44 AM