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Wendy Rice was focused on nature

Fred Smith's daughter praised for photo work

By Jane Roberts

[Contact](#)

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The plane that carried the first Federal Express package in 1973 forever memorializes Sandra Windland Smith Rice.

Ten years after its maiden FedEx flight, father Frederick W. Smith flew the reconfigured Dassault Falcon 20C to Washington as a gift to the National Air and Space Museum, where it is on exhibit today.

He nicknamed it Wendy for the little girl -- his oldest child -- who was 3 when the company lifted off.

Mrs. Rice, 35, a triathlete and marathon runner, died Tuesday in Memphis while visiting her mother, Linda Grisham Smith McFarland. Cause of death was unknown.

She was a consummate nature photographer and a champion for wildlife around the world, said former senator Howard Baker of Tennessee, who spent several days shooting "scenics" and wildlife with Mrs. Rice near her home in Jackson Hole, Wyo.

"She had a remarkable eye and sensitivity for nature and particularly animals," Baker said.

He remembered that when China was preparing to send the second pair of pandas to the National Zoo in 2000.

"I asked if she would be interested in participating in that effort," Baker said. "FedEx was the principal sponsor of the exhibit, and I've always assumed Wendy was the reason why."

Mrs. Rice accompanied the pandas from China in a FedEx plane the company repainted to say "Panda I," photographing the mission for Fujifilm, which used her work around the world, said her sister, Laurie Hooper.

"Her work was featured in Audubon calendars. She did work for National Geographic, Nature's Best and Coldwater Creek and won many awards."

Mrs. Rice was one of a handful of photographers around the world selected to participate in Daybreak 2000, the epic nature photography exhibit released on the

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first day of the new millennium.

In her own words, the best way to photograph animals is "to never forget that humans are only a couple of strands of DNA away from the wild kingdom," Mrs. Rice told aspiring photographers through Fuji's Web site.

"In all my 20-plus years in the photography business, I never met a person more passionate about nature and photography," said Steve Freligh, publisher of Nature's Best Photography magazine and president of Nature's Best Foundation.

Mrs. Rice served on its board and on the board for Earthfire Institute, an Idaho-based nonprofit that provides safe homes for wildlife no longer able to survive in the wild.

"Windland was a member of our advisory board, helping with all our fund-raising. She wrote beautiful letters, letting people know what we were doing and how important she thought it was," said executive director Susan Eirich.

"She believed so strongly in what we are doing because she wanted there to be wildlife when her children grew up."

Mrs. Rice graduated from St. Mary's Episcopal School in 1988 and from Duke University, where she studied drama, in 1992.

Private services were Friday at St. John's Episcopal Church.

Mrs. Rice, the wife of Jeffrey Scott Rice, also leaves two sons, Mason Frederick Rice, 2, and Alden James Rice, 8 months; five sisters, Stacey Hydrick, Kathleen Smith, Molly Smith, Rachel Smith and Samantha Smith; three brothers, Richard Smith, Arthur Smith and Canon Smith; her stepmother, Diane Smith, and grandmother, Sally Wallace Hook.

The family requests any memorials be sent to Nature's Best, Earthfire Institute, the Mayo Clinic Foundation, St. Mary's Episcopal or Duke University.

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