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“After 13 years in coma, accident victim dies”

By Latasha A. Gethers

Faithful parents nursed her at home

Susan Von Stetina, armed with her parents unwavering faith, fought off death for almost 13 years before she surrendered Thursday morning as her mother, Mary Von Stetina, stood by her side clutching her hand.

“I thought she was holding her breath, but that was not the case. Her heart just stopped,” said Mary Von Stetina, 68, “She rallied, but I guess it was just too much for her.”

Susan Von Stetina died at Holy Cross Hospital in Fort Lauderdale, where she had been since July 3, battling a bad case of pneumonia, Mary Von Stetina said. Susan Von Stetina was 40.

The Tall, athletic red-headed young woman gained wide-spread public attention 13 years ago after an operating-room accident left her comatose. During surgery at Florida Medical Center after a November 1980 car accident, no one noticed for 28 minutes that her respirator had failed, causing her to slip into a coma. She never emerged.

A Broward County jury awarded her family \$12.47 million, at the time the largest medical malpractice verdict in U.S history, but the state Supreme Court ordered a new trial because of a technical flaw. The Von Stetina family ultimately settled for \$8.4 million.

In 1995, her parents moved from their home of 30 years to a bigger house in Fort Lauderdale’s Coral Ridge section so Susan could stay with them. Their faith gave them the will to endure.

“I had her. I could hold her, which is what most parents don’t have when they lose a child,” Mary Von Stetina said.

Susan Von Stetina was a music lover. She played the guitar, gaining her love for music from her father Leo, 76 a musician. Before the accident she was an assistant manager at Sound Advice in North Miami.

“She knew her groups. She could hear a new one and tell you if that group was going to make it,” her mother said. “And it usually did.”

Her survivors include her patents; sister Michele Kiriloff; brothers Michael, Peter, Paul and Steven Von Stetina; and nephew Matthew Von Stetina.

They are all from Fort Lauderdale.

A viewing will be held from 6 to 8 p.m. today at Kalis Funeral Home in Wilton Manors. A service will be held at 9:30 a.m. Saturday at St. Anthony Catholic Church in Fort Lauderdale.