

# Discover Platte County

'A gem in Dwyer'

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## Gem discovered in Dwyer by local geologist

BY MARK DELAP

mdelap@pcrecordtimes.com

**DWYER** – Where others see rocks, geologist Silvia Rutherford sees gems. In Dwyer, Wyoming she found diamonds. In the rough.

Diamonds are formed under conditions of intense heat and pressure. The gem eventually comes to the surface. In the heat and pressures of this life, certainly Westgem Gallery has surfaced as that diamond once in the rough of only her imagination.

From the minds and creativity of Rutherford and her late husband, Gale, these two University of Wyoming geology students charted a course to the lost mines of an exciting future to be glorified rock hounds, but fate directed them to another field of gems.

A field that included repurposing an old school and a deserted church, hard, honest work as ranchers and raising their own diamond in the form of their only daughter, Elyse, born in Wheatland, Wyoming, who is now attending the same university where her parents are alumni.

Silvia Rutherford was born in Ger-

many on a US Army base and says that she actually had to become a nationalize citizen of the United States when she was 15 years of age. She grew up in Long Island, New York where she went beachcombing and boating and was a self-confessed “bookworm” and “nerd,” and considered herself very shy.

To boost her confidence her parents enrolled at the Barbizon Modeling and Acting School which was created as a high-end finishing school in New York.

“I went to that school because it was nearby and I was so shy that they thought it would be good for me and to help me come out of my shell,” she said. “I gained confidence, meet people, carry on conversations and it also helped me gain my first degree or certificate, so to speak.”

Leaving New York for Wyoming at age 17 came from her love for geology and was advised to go to the University of Wyoming which has an outstanding geology program. It’s the story that dreams are made of in that a city girl from New York meets a Wyoming Cowboy from a small town, they fall in love, find that their dreams of heading to the oil fields fizzled and they end up on the family ranch in a small town but a big prairie. So, the question that remains in many inquiring minds reading this is how a fine jewelry store was planted in the middle of



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**Elyse and Silvia Rutherford of Westgem Gallery in Dwyer have gone through ups and downs, good times and bad, have stood toe-to-toe with death and have come through the storms leaning on one another. Their legacy of creativity and kindness has raised the bar on the prairie.**

nowhere.

“I had this crazy idea to open this store out on the prairie, here along the Oregon Trail,” Rutherford said with a bit of an ‘I can’t believe it myself’ kind of laugh. “I married a cowboy that I met at the University of Wyoming and we were both studying geology and graduated in 1982. We met in a lab class.”

The couple were married and although life did happen while they were making other plans, the couple had the same vision to create something out of nothing.

“We came back to the family ranch,” she said. “Since cattle ranching was his thing, I decided I needed to do my own thing and so I took my courses from the Gemological Institute of America and got my gemologist degree in 1990. Although I’ve given ranching a try and even wrestled some cattle, I just decided to open this

place up.”

Rutherford opened Westgem Gallery in 1993.

The couple had been married for 32 years building their dreams parcel by parcel and homestead by homestead, using the old Dwyer schoolhouse as the bones for the gallery and then took and restored an abandoned church for their home. The couple had a child on the way when the ball dropped on the new millennium. In June of that year, Elyse was born and life was good. For the next 14 years the couple worked and created and had no plans of letting up any time soon.

And then suddenly and without warning Gale was diagnosed with stage 4 pancreatic cancer and died a few days later. 18 days before Elyse’s 14<sup>th</sup> birthday.

“We found out on a Friday, and he

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## Gem: 'That was the roughest time we've ever had ...'

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was gone on a Monday," Rutherford said. "That was the roughest time we've ever had."

Elyse who was a seventh-grader was of course devastated as she was her daddy's little girl.

"It's been almost six years," Elyse said sullenly. "We found out that he had type II diabetes and he was taking care of that. I was getting done with seventh grade and I was supposed to go on a National History Day trip and right before

that we ended up going to the Cheyenne hospital. That weekend definitely left a mark on my life for sure."

To go through a death of this magnitude can be rough, but as an only child it left unfinished memories.

"I really remember a lot of numbness," she said. "I was so in disbelief as I was such a daddy's girl. It certainly didn't feel real. It taught me about the importance of cherishing people I know."

The strong bond beyond mother and daughter was not only cemented

even stronger during the tragedy, but there was a leaning into each other that can be seen to this day. Taking on the duties that were now left to chance caused both women to roll up their sleeves and shore up not only the ranch, but also the gallery.

"Everything happened at one time," Silvia said. "I just had to cowgirl up and I had to just do it. And I had my little one and she helped me through it. I knew that she was counting on me and I was the only one who knew what needed to be done, so I just had to do

it."

And six years later, the ranch is still running. The gallery is alive and well. Elyse is heading to her second year of college, majoring in marketing, and Silvia is designing fine quality jewelry, painting pictures, running two businesses and still raising a daughter.

And Elyse is one who truly champions her mother, and there is just something about the strength of a team that does that.

"She's done painting, and all my life she's been one of the most creative people I know," Elyse said. "She's always able to just whip something up. She can sketch things out, she drew her own logo, and yeah, she's really talented."

The gallery after COVID-19 is open by appointment only at this point, and business is booming for Silvia as she has developed a reputation for being one of the best jewelry design and creators in Wyoming. Whether it's a wedding ring to order or having one made from the pages of an imagination, she is a woman that knows something about accomplishment – even in the face of life's greatest odds.

Life has thrown her family some nasty curve balls, but they keep hitting home runs. They continue to persevere and looking at the little gem on the prairie, they have truly adopted the frontier spirit to conquer and to live life to the fullest.

The Westgem Gallery is located at 43 Dwyer Road, Wheatland, Wyoming. For an appointment you can call Silvia directly at (307) 322-5336. You can also find them on Facebook.



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The Westgem Gallery located at 43 Dwyer Road in Dwyer is located on an open stretch of Wyoming prairie with repurposed buildings such as an old church that the Rutherfords remodeled and call it home.

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Elyse and Silvia Rutherford stand outside the Westgem Gallery in Dwyer, WY in a building that was at one time moved a half mile to its current location. The building was erected somewhere around 1913 and was built as the Dwyer schoolhouse.

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