

Betty Johnson

Betty Elaine Johnson (nee Schroeder), formerly of Pelican Rapids, MN, died peacefully on January 13, 2021 in Amery, WI. She was 93.

The fourth of five children, Betty was born on a Schroeder homestead near Erie, North Dakota on March 1, 1927. She was baptized a Presbyterian, and raised in a faithful Christian home. In adulthood she joined her husband as a member of the Lutheran Church (ELCA).

Betty inherited her mother Charlotte Marie (Kelly)'s Irish wit and her father Willis Milton Schroeder's mild disposition.

Born to a musical and creative family, she discovered the hard industry of farm life eased around the upright piano. Her kith and kin harmonized with brass and strings, performing congregational hymns and upbeat, patriotic songs.

Fleet of foot, she was a competitive student athlete and ran for Erie Public School's coed track team. Her speed also earned her a spot on the school's basketball team, despite her short stature.

She and her sister Margaret wrote, staged, and starred in dramatic productions on the farm. Gentle Betty showed especial talent portraying a fire-and-brimstone preacher pounding her lectern--the family Bible stand. Her childhood amusements stood her in good stead as life unfolded.

Betty sang in the Concordia College Chapel Choir and, in 1949, the Moorhead, MN institution awarded her bachelor degrees and teaching certificates in English and Biology. She taught junior high and high school English, and directed school musicals, comedies and dramas in small Midwestern towns most of her adult life. She was a Minnesota Teacher of the Year nominee, and received top honors from her local district three consecutive years. In retirement she substitute taught at the Minnesota State Academy for the Blind in Faribault MN.

A WWII veteran with a big personality captured Betty's heart. On June 18, 1950, she married Carl T. Johnson, a fellow Concordian from Stephen, MN. The pair moved frequently as Carl, too, pursued a career in public education. With each relocation, Betty instructed her offspring to "Rise, take up thy bed and walk." (John 5:8, KJV)

When Carl served a U.S.-based school near Tokyo in the early 1960s, Betty embraced Japanese culture. She learned ikebana flower arranging, and visited with young people wanting to improve their English. Carl and Betty cherished life-long memories of their stint overseas.

Stateside, Betty and Carl preferred their curtains white, their furniture French provincial, their chandeliers vintage or whimsical—and their children well behaved.

The Christmas holiday allowed Betty to indulge in the color red, which she adored, and often wore. She enjoyed decorating. While Carl hung garland, she painted sacred scenes on the windows of their home. Fine china, crystal, and the scent of spiced cider welcomed their guests.

The couple retired to Lake Lida near Pelican Rapids, MN where they made a home, surrounded by good neighbors and sentimental treasures. They spent their last years in Amery, WI, nearer their sons.

Relatives recall Betty worshipped the sun, and wore the best tan in the family. Some consider her potato salad and chocolate chip cookies legendary. Others note Betty's insistence on good grammar outlives her whenever her grandchildren correct each other's speech.

Betty lived with grace, kindness, humility, and a mischievous sense of humor. She set a high bar, surviving cancer and successfully living with diabetes. An active parishioner, she sang in eight choirs over forty years, and was well regarded in the many church communities she called home.

In the late 1990s, Betty drove to Sunday morning choir practice at Trinity Lutheran Church, Pelican Rapids, MN. The lake road was icy and rutted. Her car found the ditch, and she suffered a traumatic head injury which damaged her short-term memory. Carl assumed her initial care giving, then coordinated her care. With age, they shared caregivers, close partners once again.

Betty's family recognizes the many caregivers, private and facility-based, who helped Betty and Carl at Lake Lida, Pelican Rapids, and Amery. Special thanks to those who helped Betty aspire to a joyful life despite her health challenges.

Betty is survived by her children: Stephanie Hagen-Johnson (David M. Hagen) of Moorhead, MN and Sun City West, AZ; Craig (Jane Edmister) Johnson of Amery, WI and their children Paula (Peter) Tonn and their sons Levi and Greg, of Lodi, WI; Laura (Stuart) Radde and their daughters June and Maeve, of Minneapolis, MN; Christopher (Justine Mueller) Johnson and their sons Cole and Cameron of Eau Claire, WI; and Steven (Beth Hoback) Johnson of Hudson, WI and their children Elaina of Minneapolis, MN, Carter of LaCrosse, WI and Andrew of St. Paul, MN.

Her sister Margaret Vawter of Twin Falls, Idaho, brother-in-law Luther Johnson of Stephen, MN, and many other relatives and friends of the family also remember Betty's life.

Preceding Betty in death include her husband of 68 years, Carl, who died of stroke complications April 23, 2019; her siblings and their spouses Robert (Gen) Schroeder, Genevieve (John) Fuhrken, James (Ruth) Schroeder; in-laws Irma Garbarino and Donald Vawter, and many other close relatives and friends.