



Adelheid "Heidi" McNeil

July 14, 1931 - November 9, 2020

Adelheid (Heidi) McNeil, age 89, of rural Preston, Iowa, passed away peacefully on November 9, 2020, with her loving husband Archie at her side. Heidi was born in Zuckenriet, Switzerland (Canton of St. Gallen) on July 14, 1931, to Ernst and Philomena (Cordani) Waltert. Growing up as a young girl, she helped her father in his blacksmith shop, which is how she developed her love of horses. After her grade school years, her parents moved to the larger town of Niederuzwil, Switzerland, where she attended high school. During high school, she learned how to speak and write in 5 different languages. Heidi attended college, where she graduated at the top of the all-male class. During college, she worked as an assistant to a lawyer. She had wanted to attend further college classes to become a veterinary, but was told "women aren't allowed to do that." Instead, she went to England for 2 years to improve her English language, where she worked first as a governess to a British Lord and his family, and then as a student nurse at an orthopedic hospital. Upon returning to Switzerland, she made excellent use of her multilingual abilities by working as a secretary and interpreter in a large factory in Niederuzwil which did business all over the world. Heidi told many entertaining and sometimes shocking (and sad) stories about growing up in Switzerland while World War II raged throughout Europe.

In the summer of 1953, she met a young American GI (Archie McNeil) who was travelling through Switzerland on leave from his military station in Salzburg, Austria – thanks to a rainstorm that made both of them seek shelter at a small festival in the fields near Niederuzwil. After exchanging countless letters and visiting on weekends when Archie had furloughs, Heidi and Archie were engaged. Archie was officially discharged from the US Army on January 23, 1954. On January 30, 1954, they were married in Heidi's Lutheran church in Niederuzwil. After spending their honeymoon touring the Italian Riviera, the couple arrived in the United States on March 5, 1954.

The couple initially made their home in the farmhouse where Archie was born near Preston. In 1958, Heidi and Archie built a new home on the 50 acres north of his parent's homestead that Archie had purchased prior to his military service. They lived there for

nearly 63 years until moving to Clover Ridge Place in the Fall of 2020. Heidi loved living on the farm and kept busy helping Archie with running the farm, as well as raising their three children. She loved all of the farm animals, particularly the horses and the hogs. She was a tremendous help to Archie in the farrow to finish hog operations (even when the local Lutheran pastor caught her cursing at the hogs in Swiss-German). Heidi had a unique “whistle” for calling her kids and husband in for dinnertime. She was prodded to share this “talent” during the “Husband Calling Contest” at the Iowa State Fair one year and won – much to her embarrassment.

Heidi loved gardening and was instrumental in starting the Preston Garden Club where she served as President three different times. She assisted with the Jackson County Fair Flower Show from 1959 until 2009, and won countless trophies and blue ribbons over the years for her beautiful flowers, vegetables, and creative floral arrangements. She spent many hours in the summer and fall harvesting the riches from her vast gardens and putting up many cans and jars to enjoy over the winter. Heidi and Archie took many hours of classes and instruction to obtain certification as Master Gardeners, which they maintained for numerous years. Heidi was a member of the Illowa Orchid Society for many years. Heidi also was an excellent baker and cook, and won numerous awards for her delicious baked goods at the Jackson County Fair. At Christmastime, her friends and neighbors loved to receive her mouth-watering Swiss Bread Braids and special Swiss Bratzeli pressed cookies as gifts.

Heidi was very involved in supporting her children and husband’s activities. She served as President of the Preston High School Band Boosters and helped out with countless 4-H projects and animals. Heidi loved to read books (particularly Zane Grey western books) and was a member of the Preston Library Committee which helped form a new public library in Preston. During the time that Archie served as President of the Jackson County Pork Producers, Heidi was the President of the Porkettes organization where they travelled to New Orleans to promote the pork industry. Heidi was a member of the Preston American Legion Auxiliary, while Archie was active in the Preston American Legion until age 90. She also was a long-time member of St. John’s Lutheran Church, where she was a Circle member and regular volunteer at countless church events.

In addition to her gardening and baking skills, Heidi was a skilled seamstress, making most of her clothes over the years (including her daughter Heidi’s prom dresses). She also enjoyed knitting, crocheting, basket making, weaving, and spinning wool into yarn. She was a member of the Gateway Spinners and Weavers, and was proud of her several spinning wheels and weaving looms. Heidi took joy in conducting spinning demonstrations for the local school children and at Pioneer Days in Maquoketa. She dabbled in oil

painting in her free time (of which there was little, as a busy farm wife and mother).

Being from another country, Heidi was interested in supporting foreign exchange students. She was a “mother” to two different students who attended Preston High School – one from Japan and the other from Germany. She continued to maintain regular contact with both of her “daughters” until her death. Although Heidi and Archie loved being on their farm, they enjoyed numerous trips to Europe over the years to visit Heidi’s family, as well as many trips to Arizona to visit their daughter Heidi. They travelled to Japan when their foreign exchange student daughter Yuko got married. They also visited Hawaii twice and most of the 48 contiguous states.

For many years, Heidi had to report each year to the US Post office with her “Green Card” confirming her non-citizen status. At some point in her 50s, she was told to report to Omaha, Nebraska to renew her Green Card. After discussing the situation with a gentleman in Omaha – who told her that she knew more about the US than he did – she decided that it would be easier to travel to Cedar Rapids to obtain her US citizenship. She had to take a test, which she passed with flying colors. Before the very solemn new citizen ceremony, the presiding Judge said “no photos, no talking,” but that would be permitted after the ceremony. After the ceremony concluded and the Judge was shaking hands with the new citizens, he jokingly told Heidi that he wouldn’t shake hands until she yodeled. They both laughed and she became a US citizen. Of the 70-plus individuals who were sworn in that day as US citizens, Heidi was the only person permitted to retain her Swiss citizenship and therefore hold dual citizenship for both Switzerland and the USA. She was happy to obtain US citizenship, but remained proud of her Swiss citizenship for the rest of her life. And, she remained an excellent yodeler up until the last few years of her life.

Of all of Heidi’s achievements and accomplishments in life, she was most proud of her three children, grand-children, and great grand-children. She was kept apprised of all of their events and achievements until her death.

Heidi is survived by her husband Archie of nearly 67 years; son Max (Vicky) of Preston; daughter Heidi (Bill Staudenmaier) of Phoenix, Arizona; son Tom (Beth) of Preston; six grandchildren (Adam, Albert, Kate, Carson, Jacob, and Sydney); and five great-grandchildren (Brooklyn, Zoey, Alexander, Archie and Zeke). She is also survived by two brothers, Arthur Waltert in Switzerland, and Max Cordani Waltert in the Canary Islands, Spain, as well as numerous nieces and nephews. She was preceded in death by her parents, and two brothers (Edwin and Ernst). Heidi was known to always speak her mind and wasn’t afraid to give her opinion – whether solicited or not. She will be dearly missed by her family and friends.

Due to the current pandemic situation, the family will postpone holding a Celebration of Life until sometime in 2021. Sympathy cards or notes can be sent to Archie at Clover Ridge Place, 205 Ehlers Lane, Apartment 147, Maquoketa, Iowa 52060. Memorials can be made to St. John's Lutheran Church, Preston. Cremation rights have been accorded.

Comments



“ What a cool lady. What a cool mom. I have fond memories of conversations with Heidi, some of them at auctions as we picked among the antiques on hay wagons, pretending not to show too much interest in items we really wanted:) Heidi was a great mom and community booster. Sorry to see her go, along with other parents of that generation that formed the backbone our community. Condolences to Archie, Max, Heidi, Tom and all the extended family.

John Cahill

John Cahill - November 23, 2020 at 11:58 AM



“ What a kind, sharing, caring lady Heidi was!! I want to take this time to tell you all what a blessing your Mother, Wife, Grandmother was!! She shared her love for flowers with me so many times. For so many weddings I helped decorate for, for a family that needed love, I would love to hear her stories of what every flower meant. The reasons behind her rose section, how flowers would grow at different times along the fence line. She was lovely & kind. I am glad for all the walks I took with her in her beautiful flower garden. Rest knowing the love of your flowers brought so much happiness to others.. thanks



Penny Sullivan - November 13, 2020 at 11:11 PM



“ Penny - thank you so much for the kind words about my Mom. We will dearly miss her and appreciate how much she loved her flowers and equally loved sharing her flowers with others for special events. Hugs and love to you - Heidi McNeil Staudenmaier

heidi - November 18, 2020 at 02:25 PM



“ Archie and family, my sincerest condolences in the loss of your lovely wife Heidi. What a wonderful and interesting life you both have had. I was so fortunate to meet both of you thru the Master Gardeners program.

Judy Bowling - November 12, 2020 at 06:27 PM



“ Thank you for kind words about my mom

heidi mcneil - November 13, 2020 at 08:39 PM



“ Sincere sympathies to the entire McNeil family on the passing of Heidi. What a wonderful life! Steve and Judy Driscoll

Steven Driscoll - November 11, 2020 at 08:37 PM



“ Thank you for your kind words about my mom

heidi mcneil - November 13, 2020 at 08:39 PM



“ I remember her from the flower show. I learned many things from her. She was a very sweet lady. I am sorry for your loss to a wonderful woman.

Susan Crouch - November 11, 2020 at 08:27 PM



“ Thank you - my mom loved her flowers so much

heidi mcneil - November 13, 2020 at 08:40 PM



“ Heidi and family, what a wonderful obituary sharing your mother's life with us. I am so sorry for your loss.

Kathy A Miller - November 11, 2020 at 02:47 PM



“ Thank you Kathy for such thoughtful comments. My mom will be dearly missed

heidi mcneil - November 13, 2020 at 08:41 PM



“ I will never forget Heidi!! She was the sweetest woman and she was the first person to meet my daughter, she always brought that up when ever we ran in to each other. Rest In Peace. My sympathy to Archie and all her children.

Patti Miller Schultz - November 10, 2020 at 11:04 PM



“ Thank you - my mom touched the hearts of many

heidi mcneil - November 13, 2020 at 08:38 PM



“ Archie and family you have my deepest sympathy. Your mom was always so fun to visit with. She loved to share her beautiful flower gardens for prom, senior and family pictures. She brought joy to many in Jackson county.

Marie Rossmann - November 10, 2020 at 10:29 PM



“ Thanks Marie

heidi mcneil - November 13, 2020 at 08:37 PM