



Dicus, Mary Nell (Whitten)

1935-2022

By ops@our-hometown.com | Published on November 30, 2022

Mary Nell Dicus, beloved mother and grandmother, woman of faith, strict grammarian and master librarian lived a full and joyous life. She loved well and baked well and was incredibly popular with her grandchildren, great-grandchildren, nieces, nephews and students. She made the world's best gingersnaps and could balance a spoon on her nose. Her warmth and good nature were joined by a firm commitment to correct grammar and the proper way of doing things. She was thrilled to attend weddings, always arrived thirty minutes early to hear the music and worried weeks ahead of the event over whether the newlyweds would smash cake in each other's faces. But she had a generous heart and quickly overlooked any missteps with the cake.

Mary Nell is survived by a large family who will miss her immensely: daughter Judy, son-in-law Michael, daughter-in-law Rhonda, son Philip and daughter-in-law Judy Eileen, along with grandchildren Summer, John, Aaron, Lauren, Emily, Josie and

Ryan, great-grandchildren David, Jacob, Bryan, Rand, Brandy, J.T., Andrew, Isabella, Ian, Layla, Evie, Madelyn and Michael, great-great-grandchildren Maria, Lydia, Jacob and Brie, and siblings Wilma, Jean, David and Jack. She will be missed by her nieces, nephews, in-laws and countless friends. She is preceded in death by her husband, Herman, parents, David and Adele, her son David and her great-grandson Caleb.

Mary Nell Whitten, 87, was born on Feb. 2, 1935, on a snowy day in her grandparents' home near Bridgeport. She was the second of five children born to David and Vivian Adele Whitten. She spent her youth in Cisco, where she fondly recalled a humble but happy childhood with her siblings as playmates. They had no electricity or indoor plumbing, but the young Whittens were blessed with faithful parents and a home filled with love and good humor. That carefree childhood was marked by the untimely death of David Whitten. Mary Nell was only 12 years old when she lost her father, something she mourned for the rest of her life. Before his death, David obtained a clarinet for young Mary Nell, facilitating her membership in the Cisco band where she was later band president and sweetheart. She was a gifted student who excelled in her studies. Leaving Cisco, Mary Nell moved on to Decatur Baptist College (DBC) where she was basketball sweetheart, campus favorite and earned an associate degree in 1954. During her time at DBC, Mary Nell met and married Ansel Fortenberry. They settled in Decatur and went on to have three children of whom Mary Nell was fiercely proud: Judy, David and Philip. Mary Nell cared for her young family while teaching English and earning her bachelor's and master's degrees in education at the University of North Texas. She went on to serve for 36 years as the librarian of Decatur High School, a role which sometimes hampered the antics of her high school aged children but greatly blessed the young people of Decatur. She is remembered as a much-loved faculty member and spoke often and fondly of students and fellow teachers. A lifelong learner and curious woman, she quickly adapted to the computer age and ushered in a wealth of new technology to the Decatur High School library. Mary Nell was "Gran" to seven grandchildren, 13 great-grandchildren, four great-great-grandchildren and countless family friends. In 1998, Mary Nell married Herman Dicus. Her grandchildren were old enough to tease her about her dating life at the time. She tried to be stern with them about that behavior, but her good humor mostly got in the way. Mary Nell and Herman enjoyed many happy years together before his death.

Mary Nell had a brave and adventurous heart. As a school child experiencing a flush toilet for the first time, a fellow classmate informed her that if you sat on the commode while flushing, you would die. Well, she took her life in her hands and tested that assertion. Fortunately, she survived to take that same spirit of bravery and adventure to the rest of her life. She traveled widely with friends and family, particularly enjoying trips to the Holy Land, Europe and then Disney World for the first time at the age of 75. Mary Nell traveled to all 50 US states, with her children organizing trips for her to the hard ones. Judy and Michael took her to Vermont, David and Rhonda to Hawaii and Philip and Judy Eileen to North Dakota, a state she visited at the age of 85 during the middle of a global pandemic. Her last excursions were closer to home, and at 87 years old and while confined to a wheelchair, she cheered on the fighting Texas Aggie football team, had her picture taken with the Yell Leaders, watched the Aggie band march and dined on beer and nachos with

her granddaughter and returned to her assisted living facility at 2 in the morning. Her sense of adventure had limits, though. She drew the line at some of the exploits of her grandchildren and great-grandchildren, but they enjoyed teasing her with videos, and she enjoyed calling them idiots.

Mary Nell was a gifted seamstress, learning to sew beautifully at her mother's knee. They made her wedding dress together, and Mary Nell went on to craft her daughter's wedding dress and an unreasonable number of bridesmaid dresses for her granddaughter. Her quilts are beautifully crafted and will be treasured by her family, though many of her offspring remain disgruntled about the amount of time they spent by her side in fabric stores. Mary Nell's sewing skills were equally matched by her prowess with desserts. She was recruited as Head Dessert Chef by her young great-grandson for her prowess with banana pudding, coconut pound cake and marshmallow cream puffs.

Mary Nell was a joy to be around, and her wide smile and quick laugh will be missed. She was a good friend and a woman of strong faith. She loved her family and had the deepest admiration for her mother. She knew all the best nursery rhymes, and bought first copies of Little Women, Winnie the Pooh and Black Beauty — all carefully protected with laminated library covers — for her children and grandchildren. Well into her 80s, she was up for family board games and was wily enough to defeat her adult grandchildren in a game of Shadows over Camelot that will haunt them for the rest of their days.

Mary Nell was a sensitive woman and felt keenly. She was not necessarily the person you wanted with you right after an injury. Her sense of alarm over the situation wasn't comforting and she would correct your grammar in even the most trying circumstances. "Blood is the noun and bleed is the verb," Nell would say. But she was the one you wanted with you for the longer, harder work of recovering and mourning. She had a tender heart and ministered to those around her with compassion. And she forgave readily, freely and without being asked. She loved well. She walked through the world with an open heart and a gracious spirit. That's no small thing in a world where she took a lot of slings and arrows, losing her father in childhood and a beloved son later in life. It represented great fortitude and intention. If you are related to her by blood, marriage, friendship or adoption, she prayed for you and genuinely grieved for you when you struggled. She gloried over your triumphs. She saw you as the best version of yourself. And she told the rest of us about it. She uplifted us in one another's eyes. Now these three remain — faith, hope and love, but the greatest of these is love. Mary Nell Dicus led with love, and we are so thankful for it.

A funeral service will be held at First Baptist Church in Decatur 11 a.m. Friday, Dec. 2. Visitation is 5-7 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 1, at Hawkins Funeral Home in Decatur.

Hawkins Funeral Home Decatur 940-627-5959 Hawkinsfuneralhome.com