

Sonja (Meyer) Hilding

July 26, 1930 ~ April 12, 2020

Sonja (Meyer) Hilding died peacefully in her sleep on Easter Sunday, April 12, 2020. Born July 26, 1930 on the border of Germany in Kreutzlingen, Switzerland, Sonja lived a full life of adventure. In her early years as World War II threatened, the family moved inland to St. Gallen. From there, Sonja literally watched the war from the hillside park near her home. As a youngster, she imitated the paratroopers, jumping out of a tree with her mother's good linens. As a teen, she tried to impress the American GIs interned in Switzerland with her horseback riding skills – the horse, sadly, did not cooperate. She loved skiing, climbing mountains, playing tennis, and horseback riding. At one point, she took up waterskiing, acquiring a ski but no boat. Ever the optimist, she would stand at the dock with her ski, waiting for friendly boaters to stop by. There must have been hardships during those years, including the loss of her father in 1944, but throughout her life she focused on the joys in life.

After graduating from high school in St. Gallen, she travelled with a girlfriend to England to work as a nanny. She improved her English skills there and enjoyed hitchhiking adventures throughout the country. She also worked on a cork farm on the island of Sardinia, where she learned to drive on an airport runway — explaining her lifelong poor driving skills. At 22, she left Switzerland for the U.S. There, she ate hamburgers for the first time and fell in love with donuts. She worked as a waitress at a ski resort, a department store clerk at Frederick & Nelson's, and as a stewardess.

After a flight to Minneapolis, she was introduced to David Hilding. On their first date, they went sailing in Lake Minnetonka in April and tipped over, launching their lifelong adventure together.

She and David married on March 11, 1955. Dad didn't want any kids, and Mom did, so they settled on five. Many years followed of trying to keep children somewhat organized. Mom was primarily responsible for our education, so in addition to her strong emphasis on a good formal education, we all learned to swim, play tennis, ski, and play at least a few instruments. In her spare time, she played tennis as five children ran wild around the courts. Taking classes part-time through the years, she earned her associate's degree, but, of course, skipped her own commencement to celebrate one of her daughter's.

Throughout their years together, she and David enjoyed countless travel adventures. A year-long sabbatical in Sweden. Trips to Japan, Yugoslavia, Nepal, China, Ivory Coast, the Galapagos, Egypt, Norway, and Peru to name a few.

She was conversant in seven languages and easily made friends with people from all over the world. She was especially caring to immigrants – those who were far from families or struggling with a new language. Even when she could no longer travel, she closely followed the adventures of family and friends. She was a lifelong learner, reading constantly in two book clubs, following every detail of the lives of her children and grandchildren, and

attending weekly lectures on current events. She loved her I-phone and I-pad — googling, texting her grandkids, and using Facetime. Even as her mobility became limited, she made the absolute most of what she had, enjoying views of the mountains when she could no longer hike in them.

Sonja is preceded in death by her husband, David, and her parents, Ludwig and Irma. She is survived by her children, Monica, Paul (Stephani), Karin (Rob), Tina (Von), and Jim (Emily); brother, Rene (Diana); in-laws, Cecile, Dick, and Arlene; eight grandchildren; and special friends, Alice and Maria. A celebration of life service is pending.