

Elinor Marie Yancey Nielson

July 6, 1930 ~ May 20, 2025

Elinor Marie Yancey Nielson passed away peacefully in her home on May 20, 2025, after a courageous battle with breast cancer. She was 94 and had been surrounded by all of her six children and many grandchildren in the days leading up to her passing.

Elinor was born on July 16, 1930, in Seattle, Washington, then moved to Salt Lake City, Utah, to the Yalecrest neighborhood, where she attended Uintah Elementary School. Her family moved again to Los Angeles, where she attended Marlborough, an all-girls high school.

Her parents taught her the importance of education. Elinor desired to attend Stanford University, but her father counseled her to go to the University of Utah first, where she attended for two years and joined the Chi Omega Sorority there. She then transferred to Stanford University, where she graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Art History.

Elinor toured the USA, visiting 49 of 50 states with her parents and sister, Joan. This began her passion for travel. She learned speed painting from her father and worked at many county fairs and shows to earn money for her and her sister Joan to travel to Europe. She talked often of this unique adventure in Europe in the 1950s with her beloved sister Joan. She instilled this love of travel in all of her children.

She moved to Hawaii for a short time and worked there and made new lifelong friends, also from Salt Lake City, who later became members of their “Hawaiian Club.” This group of women lunched on a regular basis for 50 years. She returned to Salt Lake City and received her teaching certificate and worked as an art teacher at Granite High School.

She was working at Temple Square as a greeter in Salt Lake City when she met a medical student, Kenneth Jay Nielson. Their first date was waterskiing. They were married 6 weeks later on September 20, 1957, in the Los Angeles Temple. That rushed timing was a fact that her children never knew until they were adults. She and Ken were married almost 63 years.

Elinor supported Ken as he completed medical school at the University of Utah, an internship at USC, and a residency at Stanford. She loved living in California, but they moved to Salt Lake City to start Ken’s career and raise their family. She often talked of missing the Northern California weather, the bougainvillea, and the great times living in Palo Alto.

With five young children at the age of 36, Elinor had to cope with the tragic loss of her beloved parents in a military transport plane that crashed in high winds off the northern coast of Alaska at Cape Lisburne. The tragedy occurred on her birthday, July 16, 1966. She never talked much about that difficult loss the rest of her life.

She loved to paint, a talent she developed while painting with her father. She shared her painting talents by teaching groups of women how to paint. When her parents died suddenly in the plane crash, she never had the same enthusiasm to paint and largely stopped painting. However, she continued to share with her children a love for art and helped them recognize their own talents, whether it be art, music, math, or science. She instilled in her children a love for lifelong learning.

She continued her love of travel, particularly to Bear Lake and annual trips to Yellowstone, where she made lasting memories with her children and grandchildren. Wonderful friends and memories were made with many KSL-sponsored worldwide trips, with Ken being the medical doctor for the group.

Her family meant everything to her, and she willingly sacrificed so much for them. Even in her later years, she never missed a birthday, and selecting just the right card and gift was very important to her. She loved to read and would often share stories that were timely and pertinent to her children’s interests.

Elinor was a gracious, selfless person who always had a positive attitude and never complained. She lived a life of total kindness and showed Christlike love for others. Elinor was a devoted lifelong member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. She had many opportunities to serve in various callings, particularly those in Primary and Young Women, and enjoyed serving as the Ward Activities Chairman with Ken. She lived in the Monument Park 11th ward for over 50 years, where she had many cherished friendships.

She was preceded in death by her parents, Hugh and Elinor Yancey; her husband, Kenneth Nielson; and her sister Joan Barlow.

Elinor is survived by her 6 children: David (Kathryn), Kris (Judith), Bob, Elinor Alder (John), Katherine Ulmer (Scott), and Stephen (Jill). She has 17 grandchildren and 13 great-grandchildren.

A memorial service to celebrate her life will be held at 11:00 am on Saturday, June 7, 2025, at the Wasatch Hills building, 2255 S. Wasatch Drive, Salt Lake City, UT. The family will receive friends and extended family members prior to the service at the Wasatch Hills building from 9:30 am to 10:45 am on Saturday, June 7th.

Services will be streamed via Zoom for those wishing to attend virtually. To watch the services, please go to Larkinmortuary.com and click the "Watch Services" link.