

Lee Anna Yates

February 22, 1934 ~ December 13, 2021

Our loving wife, mom, daughter, sister, grammy, grammy-great, and sweetheart passed away and returned to her heavenly home, surrounded by her family, on December 13, 2021.

Lee Anna Wight Birrell Yates was born February 22, 1934 to Leland Nelson Wight and Fontella Holmgren Wight. She never met her father in this earthly life. He passed away seven months before her birth. She lived the first six years of her childhood running through the fields and farms in Bear River, Utah with her Grandparents Albert and Nancy (Mammy) Holmgren. After her mother remarried, she moved with her family to Salt Lake City, Utah. At the age of eight, she was adopted by her loving, caring step-father, Lawrence Hardy Birrell. She attended Ensign Elementary and Bryant Jr. High. It was in middle school that she met her lifelong sweetheart, Robert William Yates (Buzz). And so began their “Once Upon A Time” love story. Together, hand in hand, they would walk home from school through downtown, and as they passed the Salt Lake Temple, Bob promised he would take her there some day. They continued schooling and graduated from West High School. She went on to study Art and Secretarial training at the University of Utah. She was also affiliated with the sisterhood of Kappa Kappa Gamma.

After seven years of courtship, they entered the Salt Lake Temple and were sealed for eternity. Together, they spent four years in San Francisco while Bob studied for his life’s work in dentistry. She was employed as a personal secretary to the Purchasing Agent of the American Can Co. Upon graduation, Bob accepted a one year dental internship at Madigan Army Hospital in Tacoma, Washington. Lee Anna began her lifelong work as Mother and Homemaker. They then lived at Vint Hill Farms Station, an Army security post west of Washington D.C. in the Virginia countryside. Captain Yates was the post’s Dental Surgeon and while serving on the base, received the honorable Medal of Commendation. Lee Anna also served on base as the President of the Officer’s Wive’s Club.

They returned home to Salt Lake City, where Bob established his private dental practice. Lee Anna was a member of the Salt Lake Junior League where she served as chairman of volunteers at the opening of the Natural History Museum on the University of Utah campus. She served as Hostess at the Beehive House and at the LDS Church Office Building.

Lee Anna was a devoted member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. Her testimony of the gospel and of her savior, Jesus Christ was unwavering and burned brightly throughout her life. She served in many church callings, including Relief Society President, Relief Society Instructor, and in Primary and Young Women’s Presidencies. Together, Lee Anna and Bob served a four year Church Service Mission at the Joseph Smith Memorial Building at the time of it’s opening. They served as supervisors of the weekly evening shifts and Lee Anna served on the coordinating council. They later served at The Salt Lake Temple as ordinance workers. Everyone she served was blessed by her open heart, her capacity to love, and her numerous talents.

Lee Anna loved to serve and work in her community and church, but her greatest role and calling was that of wife, mother, and homemaker. In her own words, her greatest achievements and contribution are her children: Wendy Lee Yates Spencer (Stephen), Robert Todd Yates (Dayna), Jeffrey Alden Yates (Shannon), and Troy William Yates (Darcy). Her most important title was “Grammy.” She led her family with unconditional love, grace, class, compassion, laughter and fun. She named herself the “Keeper of Family Togetherness.” Her most favorite times were when the whole family was together, especially at Lake Powell. With the red rocks and blazing sun as the backdrop, she taught her family to waterski, jump off cliffs, float down rivers, hike to waterfalls, and play games. Most importantly, she taught us that family is everything, about our loving Savior, and about our Father’s eternal plan of happiness. Each of us holds a special place in the family and we have promised that our chairs will not be empty, on earth or in heaven, a principle most precious to her.

Lee Anna lived adventurously her entire life. She surrounded herself with family and true friends. A few of her favorite things were views of a well groomed garden, trees, mountains, and Christmas Eve, Lake Powell, water skiing, bike riding, and children at play or in prayer. We know in our hearts she is flying “somewhere over the rainbow” until we meet again, with no empty chairs. “Once upon a time” will surely come again.

She is lovingly survived by her sweetheart and husband, Robert William Yates, her four children and their spouses, 16 grandchildren and their spouses, and 29 great grandchildren. She is preceded in death by her father Leland Wight, her mother Fontella Wight Birrell, her step father Laurence Birrell, and sister Abby Lou Whitney.

Funeral services will be held on Monday, December 20, 2021, 12:00 noon at Larkin Sunset Lawn, 2350 East 1300 South, Salt Lake City, Utah 84108. A viewing will be held from 10:30 am - 11:45 am prior to the funeral services. Internment at Wasatch Lawn Memorial Park.

Recording of the funeral services can be found at the above "Watch Services" button.