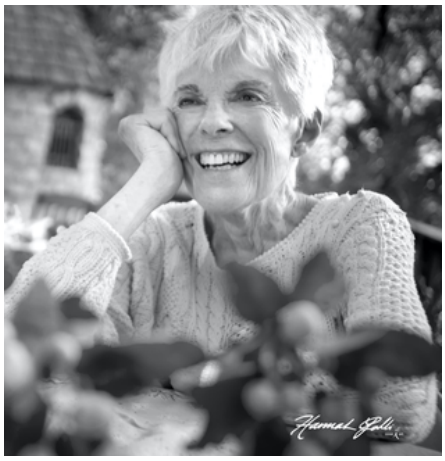


Vella Sidney Neil Evans

March 9, 1934 ~ September 14, 2021

Vella Sidney Neil Evans was born March 9, 1934 to James Wilson Neil and Rachel Vella Fowler Neil in Salt Lake City, Utah. Bereft of her mother that very day, Vella was reared by her paternal grandparents, Nell Faddies Neil and James W. Neil Sr., and great Aunt Lizzie Faddies in Idaho Falls, Idaho and Ogden, Utah.

With their support, Vella excelled in piano and academics, ultimately graduating with high honors from the University of Utah in English and education. On August 30, 1956, in the Salt Lake Temple of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, she married Wayne Cannon Evans, who had courted her for three years and boldly purchased a set of bone china from his army post in Germany for his hoped-for bride.

Vella reared her family with the same intensity and integrity with which she had pursued her education, saturating her children with books, fine art, chores and vegetables, and severely limiting their TV time.

Her soul longed for greater expression and, with Wayne's encouragement, she returned to the university for a masters and PhD in communication, followed by a distinguished teaching career at the University of Utah which spanned over 20 years. During that time, she participated in the establishment of the Womens Studies Program at the University.

Vella was fiercely independent, a quality she valued above nearly all others, except that of compassion for the underdog. She both exemplified and encouraged the development of women as individuals and as influencers in society, and involved herself in liberal political and social causes, including serving an LDS inner city mission with Wayne when she herself was not then active in the Church.

Upon her retirement, Vella turned her attention to her "labor of love;" the researching and telling of the unknown story of the Neil and Faddies families who had reared her. This culminated in a pivotal trip to Scotland and Ireland in 2007, during which she chose to return to activity in the LDS church. Her book, My Father's People, Journeys Across a Landscape of Hope published in 2016, was awarded "Best Personal History/Memoir" by the Mormon History Association in 2019. Her second book, its prequel, My Father's People, Miners and Mormons in Scotland, will be published posthumously this year.

Vella was a member of Phi Kappa Phi and executive committee member of the NAACP.
She served on the executive committee and as a docent of the St. George Art Museum. To the end of her life, she read daily, concerned and aware of current events. Among the volumes on her virtual bedside table were works by Wallace Stegner, Jacques Lusseyran, and Isabel Wilkerson.

Vella died peacefully in the early morning of September 14, 2021, in Salt Lake City. She is survived by her children; Lark (Craig) Galli, Nancy (Rob) Peterson, Pat (Allan) Thomas and Neil (Kristina) Evans; 18 grandchildren and 27 great-grandchildren. A viewing will be held in the Garden Park Ward, 1150 Yale Avenue on Friday, September 17,

from 6:00-8:00 pm and again Saturday, September 18, from 9:30 to 10:30 am. Funeral services will begin at the same location at 11:00 am Saturday, and also be available by Zoom, followed by burial in the Mt. Olivet Cemetery in Salt Lake City. Mask-wearing is encouraged at the funeral.

The family would like to especially thank those who cared so tenderly for Vella in her final years, including the staff at The Wellington, Christian, Louise Tortice, Janet Peterson, Linda Gettig, Nancy and Pat. In lieu of flowers, the family invites you to consider a donation to a humanitarian organization or service for someone in need.