



Helen K. Gancarz

April 8, 1938 - August 30, 2018

Helen Kathryn Gancarz aged 80 of Free Soil passed away on Thursday, August 30, 2018 in Grand Rapids. Helen was born in Ludington, Michigan on the eastern shore of Lake Michigan in Mason County on April 8, 1938, the daughter of Walter and Kathryn (Savich) Gancarz, and sister of Robert and James. Her family lived on a farm near Free Soil until moving to Muskegon which enabled her parents to work in a large defense factory during WWII. Her first contact with the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters was in the first grade at St. Mary's school in Muskegon with Sr. Francis Borgia as her teacher. Her second and lasting contact with the Sisters was at Sacred Heart School in Muskegon Heights. Some of her teachers included Sisters Camillus, Nicholas, Jean Catherine, Mary Feona, Peter Verona, Marie Ida, and Agatha.

Growing up with two brothers taught Helen to be competitive in everything including baseball, basketball, and especially deer hunting. Helen spent many years playing amateur fast-pitch softball which led to her being inducted into the Mason County Softball Hall of Fame. Her school years offered her the opportunity to be a Civil Air Patrol Cadet (Auxiliary of the Air Force) and received training in search and rescue missions, military drill, navigation, and radio-telephone operation. Helen graduated from Free Soil High School as Valedictorian of the class of 1956. She furthered her education, earning Master's Degree in Education from Western Michigan University and School Social Work from Michigan State University. Helen retired following a 25 year

career working in Education, Health, and Welfare fields throughout Michigan. While attending Western Michigan, she was selected for the position of Dormitory Staff Assistant twice, and also as Assistant House Mother for 380 students at the age of 21. Taking responsibility was never a problem for Helen, attributed to the fact her mom was a working mother most of her life and was always eager to help with the household and yard work tasks.

Living in a rural area provided many opportunities to become involved with others in the community through volunteer and parish work. Some of Helen's professional activities included High School Social Worker, Certified Social Worker for State of Michigan, Counselor, Drivers Education instructor, and serving as Agency Liaison to schools, courts, hospitals, mental health services, and police. She was often a guest lecturer on Social Work and Welfare issues. At her church, she taught High School CCD, special education CCD, Eucharistic Minister, Lector, Rosary Society officer, and on the Pastoral Council. Helen also volunteered with Right to Life for over 30 years, was a Antique Car Club officer, a member and officer of the Retired School Personnel, volunteered countless hours with the Mason County Sheriff Department Victims Assistant Unit, Catholic Daughters of Americas, Diocesan Council of Catholic Women plus several professional organizations.

Helen enjoyed history and traveling having taken trips abroad to the Holy Land, Italy, Austria, Germany, and just returned from her fifth trip to Poland visiting relatives. She was currently working on family history of relatives in Poland and the United States. Many years ago, Helen began recording videotapes of the "Early Days of Free Soil: 1840-1940" and thoroughly enjoyed working on this project, assembling hundreds of photo's she gathered. She looked at those projects as a way of giving back to the community whose ancestors were the pioneer lumberman and farmers of the area. Helen also enjoyed landscaping and working in the yard of her childhood home. She felt very strongly about the influence of the Dominican

Sisters in her life. After living with them for a year in Grand Rapids, becoming an Associate, her many years of Catholic Education, and her longtime involvement with the Sisters, they helped shape her entire life and was very thankful for their presence.

Helen was preceded in death by her parents Walter and Kathryn, her brother James, and fifteen Gancarz and Savich aunts and uncles.

Helen will be remembered by her brother Robert Gancarz and wife Deanne of Fountain, her sister-in-law Bonnie (Vance) Henretty of Ludington, her niece and Godchild Jacqueline (Tom) Ameluxen of Texas, nieces Kathryn (Ken) Cerabona, Susan Niederkorn, and nephew Gabriel (Michelle) Gancarz all of Chicago, IL, and numerous cousins and great friends.

The Mass of Christian Burial will be celebrated for Helen at 11:00 am on Wednesday, September 5 at St. John Cantius Catholic Church in Free Soil. Burial will follow at St. John Cantius Cemetery. Friends may visit with her family on Tuesday evening from 6:00 – 8:00 pm at Wyman Funeral & Cremation Services – Stephens Funeral Home in Scottville. The Rosary will be prayed for Helen Tuesday evening at 7:00 pm at the funeral home. Friends may also greet her family on Wednesday morning from 10:00 am until time of Mass at the church.

Those who wish to remember Helen with a memorial donation are asked to consider Lakeshore Animal Friends, St. John Cantius Church Cemetery improvement fund, or the Multiple Sclerosis Society.

Previous Events

Visitation

SEP 4. 6:00 PM - 8:00 PM (ET)

Wyman Funeral & Cremation Services - Stephens Funeral Home
305 E. State St.
Scottville, MI 49454
(231) 757-3333
wyman-stephens@sbcglobal.net
<https://www.wymanfuneralservice.com>

Rosary Service

SEP 4. 7:00 PM (ET)

Wyman Funeral & Cremation Services - Stephens Funeral Home
305 E. State St.
Scottville, MI 49454
(231) 757-3333
wyman-stephens@sbcglobal.net
<https://www.wymanfuneralservice.com>

Visitation

SEP 5. 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM (ET)

St. John Cantius Catholic Church
2845 East Michigan Street
Free Soil, MI 49411

Celebration of Mass

SEP 5. 11:00 AM (ET)

St. John Cantius Catholic Church
2845 East Michigan Street
Free Soil, MI 49411

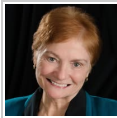
Tribute Wall



“ Wyman Funeral & Cremation Services created a Tribute Video in memory of Helen K. Gancarz



Wyman Funeral & Cremation Services - September 04, 2018 at 01:57 PM



A wonderful tribute to Helen!

Rosemary O'Donnell - September 08, 2018 at 08:50 AM

AC

I just learned of the passing of Helen and would like to express my deepest sympathy to her family. For some reason she has been on my mind and I looked her name up on the internet and this is what I found immediately. For some reason I feel she never forgot me. I was 16 and pregnant and thrown out of the house. I was never told how Helen entered my life but she did. She was my social worker and I ended up at the Evangeline Home and Hospital. She was working for Catholic Social Services. I had never planned to give my baby up but apparently that was the plan that was in place unbeknown to me. She was the only friend I had at the time. She actually made me feel she was on my side and I never forgot her. Catholic SS did take my son a week after he was born and she cried with me. I did get him back after a hard battle. I became a social worker and worked for the State of MI and carried her kindness to others who were just like me. Rest in peace Helen and thank you

Ann Clark - July 13, 2020 at 08:27 AM



“ 21 files added to the album Life Tributes



Wyman Funeral & Cremation Services - September 04, 2018 at 12:45 PM



“ Enduring Grace was purchased for the family of Helen K. Gancarz.



September 03, 2018 at 11:00 AM

BH

“Helen and I spent many hours talking on the phone and in person about the history of Free Soil. She was always there to help in any way possible. I worked with her on the Free Soil Community Schools Alumni Board and on the Free Soil Senior Center Board. She was part of putting on the Free Soil Community Schools All Class Reunion in 2013 when the Free Soil School District went with Mason County Eastern. She told the history of the Free Soil Community Schools in the brochure that was printed for the reunion. If she knew anyone that was in a nursing home or sick, she was their to visit or the least a phone call. In working on the history of Free Soil, she wanted to make sure she had the facts and exact locations of all the old buildings in Free Soil. I grew up in Free Soil, as my parents did, but I learned so much from her about the history of Free Soil. She will be dearly missed and I will miss you my friend.
Bernita and Pat Hurd



Bernita Hurd - September 02, 2018 at 11:06 PM

BH

“1 file added to the album New Album Name



Bernita Hurd - September 02, 2018 at 10:08 PM



Rebecca
Morgan

“ *Rest in peace Sis. Can't make it up , just had a hip replacement. Will have a mass said. Sincerely, Becky and Mike Morgan (Rose and Carls daughter)*

Rebecca Morgan - September 01, 2018 at 01:32 PM

BT

“ *I am sending my deepest condolences to the family. I remember the times we played softball together, to the times she visited my home, to the time she even visited at the funeral home for my mother. Farewell Helen.*

Bev Timpy - September 01, 2018 at 12:31 PM