



## Nancy I. Nilson

July 26, 1942 - April 27, 2021

“I come into the peace of wild things” ~ Wendell Berry

Nancy Nilson died on the morning of Tuesday, April 27, 2021 at St. James hospital—ten years to the day after her husband’s death and in the place of her birth seventy-eight years before.

She was born in Butte, MT on July 26, 1942 to Thornton and Julia Newlove. In her early years, her parents moved to Sheridan, where they ran a farm with over two hundred chickens and three ducks, named Huey, Dewey, and Louie, which were Nancy’s special charge. Their home was a former saloon—not a corner was square, the floor tilted, and the kids would drop a marble at one end of the house to watch it slowly roll to the other. She became something of a tomboy as a result of trying to keep up with her older brother Thornton and her cousin Harold. They spent hours hiking into the hills by the Buckeye and Toledo mines, climbing the many-branched willow tree in their yard, playing in Mill Creek, and skating on the frozen tailings pond nearby. After several years there, the family moved back to Butte, and she graduated from Butte High, where she had been active in the Rainbow Girls and chorus. Soon after, she attended the University of Puget Sound and pursued a degree in occupational therapy. But she couldn’t stay away long from her beloved hometown and returned to Butte to work at The First National Bank.

On August 29, 1965, she married Roy A. Nilson, despite the fact that he was a Swede, and she, devoutly Norwegian, and they moved into the place she would call home until her death—not more than five blocks from where she had been born. Shortly, three children followed: Julie, Mark, and Eric. As family legend has it, when she went into labor with her youngest, she insisted on going to a doctor she knew in Sheridan, and Roy drove her through a blinding snowstorm to get her there in time.

Nancy threw her life and soul into their three children and became involved in all things kids-related. Whether as an active member of the PTA, or volunteering to help with the school play or a book sale, or cheering from the stands at Little League games—she and Roy were a fixture of the community and a constant in their kids' lives.

She was first and foremost a mother, a wife, a friend—this was the pivotal point upon which her world turned. She loved people and was inquisitive and accepting of everyone. She was also charismatic and could talk to virtually anyone, anywhere. Those who knew her will remember her infinite patience, her generosity, her loving nature, her beautiful brown hair, her ringing, bell-like voice. More than anything, they will remember how she approached life with pure, unlimited optimism and a natural grace. She could always, ALWAYS, find the positive.

She made a point of staying in touch with her friends, even from high school, and not just through Facebook, but by actively calling to keep up with their news. She loved shopping with friends and cruising between fabric stores. She worked for many years at Butte's Kmart, where she perfected the art of driving a forklift and made numerous lifelong friends with her coworkers and customers.

Like her mother Julia, Nancy was a woman of considerable artistic talent. In

true Nancy fashion, she put her gifts in both art and music to work by sharing them with others. She sang in the choir at her church and played the piano there, and then the organ, for many years. Her sons recall how they would often pull out sheet music and ask her to play for them. Never one to let a birthday or other milestone go by without fanfare, she sent birthday cards without fail to her sprawling family and made elaborate cakes for birthdays and weddings that were architectural feats of brilliance. No request was too challenging for her to undertake: lassoing cowboys, standing figures in cascading gowns, towering wedding cakes...

She was always busy making something for someone: Christmas ornaments, afghans for every member of the family, formal gowns and Easter dresses for her daughter. In her later years, she became a devoted member of her church's quilting guild, making quilts for disadvantaged families overseas. Not long before her passing, her son Eric and his wife Rebecca noted a Celtic design afghan they appreciated. And though it was a complicated pattern, she embraced the challenge and learned new knots to bring it into being. This was just one of her many Covid projects, and she completed it shortly before her death.

Nancy was the last of her people to remain in Butte and was the de facto family historian. She knew who had married whom, where everyone was buried, where they'd gone to school or been in the service—no detail was too small for her recall, and she was often called upon to fill in gaps in others' knowledge or take relatives on a tour of family landmarks. She was the epicenter of the family, the last of her tribe here, the keeper of the flame. She will be greatly missed.

She is survived by many who loved her: daughter Julie Headley, granddaughters Kayla and Shania; son Mark Nilson and partner Naome

Stratton, children Steel, Zephen, Xavier, Aurora, Simone, and Tasha, and Eric and Megan from Mark's first marriage; son Eric Nilson and daughter-in-law Rebecca Nilson, grandchildren Garrett, Lillian, Brynne, Brendan, and Aidan; brother Thornton Newlove (Lois, predeceased), niece Angela Keller and nephew Christopher Newlove; cousin Harold Hoem (Jan), daughter Marsha Hoem; nieces Tonia Kamensky, Kim McClafferty, nephews Bruce and Lee Nilson.

A service and celebration of her life will be held at Gloria Dei Lutheran Church on Thursday, May 6 at 3:00. For those unable to attend, the service will be live-streamed on the church's Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/gloriadeibutte>. There will be a socially-distanced reception after the service.

In lieu of flowers, please consider a donation in Nancy's name to Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, 2300 Florence Avenue, Butte, MT 59701

# Previous Events

## Service

MAY 6. 3:00 PM (MT)

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church  
2300 Florence Avenue  
Butte, MT 59701

# Tribute Wall

LA

“ *Julie and family - I went to grade school with your mom and we walked to school, home at lunch, back in the afternoon and home again at the end of the day.. She was always smiling no matter what was going on.*

*She was a bright and a kind soul. You have my deepest sympathy.*

*Linda Albright*

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**Linda Albright** - May 09, 2021 at 05:09 PM