

IN LOVING MEMORY OF

JEAN M. GEE

APRIL 18, 1922 - JANUARY 17, 2018



Jean Woodworth McCullagh Gee's birth was registered as April 18, 1922, in Custer, South Dakota. She was actually born at "Sanator," site of the 250-bed South Dakota State Tuberculosis Sanatorium established by her maternal grandfather who was its medical director and who delivered her.

Jean's 46-year-old civil engineer father, Robert Henry "Mac" McCullagh, was superintendent of buildings and grounds at Sanator. Her blue-eyed mother, Margaret Deane Woodworth McCullagh, was 16 years Mac's junior. She had a gentle, but commanding presence that served her well as a teacher of English and Latin in Custer.

Jean came from a loving family who placed a high value on education. Mac and Margaret instilled a love of literature and poetry in Jean and her younger brother Bob. The two youngsters had an adventuresome childhood in the scenic Black Hills, including Jean's fall into a barrel of cold briny pickles at the Custer general store and Mac-refereed "fights" in which the siblings wore little purple boxing gloves.

She had a life-long love of books and was an excellent writer like her father. Jean wrote an autobiography at age 12 describing the family's move to Portland, Oregon, and, ultimately, southern California. There, she met movie stars during Hollywood's greatest era, as well as writers and artists whose paintings later decorated the house in Shenandoah. The McCullagh's finally settled in Sierra Madre in a home her children remember as a magical place of lush plants and rock-lined pools filled with goldfish.

While attending Rockford College in Rockford, Illinois, Jean met the love of her life --

handsome Captain Kenneth J. Gee, US Army Medical Corps. On a ski trip chaperoned by men stationed at nearby Camp Grant, Jean fell on the ski slopes and Ken helped her up. Jean never revealed whether her fall was on purpose. They were married September 6, 1942, in the garden of Jean's favorite uncle and aunt in Lombard, Illinois.

Jean graduated with a degree in history and a minor in social psychology on June 6, 1944 -- D-Day, attended by her in-laws, Art and Lulu Gee of rural Farragut, and baby Natalie. Three months earlier, Ken and the 54th General Hospital had left for New Guinea, the Philippines, and eventually, Japan.

Following Ken's military service, they chose to return to Ken's hometown to raise a family and establish his medical practice. With his parents' help, they moved a farm house onto a lot in the south part of town and enlarged it. One summer, they surprised their children with a large treehouse that still stands.

Jean wrote in Ken's autobiography, *Dear Ones Away*, "I consider my husband to be my dearest friend." So often did they work together as a couple that a list of their activities that impacted Shenandoah in positive ways fits Jean as much as it does Ken.

Over the decades of their long lives they helped organize and participate in virtually every community activity of their day. Among them were the Shenandoah Music Association, Arts Guild, and the Southwest Iowa Theatre Group. Jean was cast in the first SWITG play, *Kind Lady*, in the old Mayfair auditorium in 1957 and both worked on sets and backstage and to secure the Rose Garden location ten years later. They were life members of the Shenandoah Historical Society and charter members of the Friends of the Shenandoah Public Library.

Jean served on the Shenandoah Board of Education as its first woman president, helped organize the local Meals on Wheels program, volunteered with the hospital Auxiliary, and belonged to several clubs, including PEO Chapter DN starting in 1950.

How they managed all their civic activities, a busy medical practice, and raising five children is a testament to Jean and Ken's energy and devotion to their hometown throughout their 70½ years of marriage.

It may have been their second daughter Leslie and her SHS friends who came up with a nickname: Jean, the Culture Queen. We teased her about it, but knew it represented passions that continue to illuminate her family's interests and vocations.

In 1948, they purchased a cottage on West Lake Okoboji that remains in the family. Vacations all over the US and parts of Canada by car included every other year Christmas trips to visit Jean's father in southern California, including Disneyland's very first season. On a trip to Florida in 1952, they loaded up the car with sketch pads and water colors, plus their then three children -- and actually found time to paint. Jean and Ken returned to the ski slopes as a family in the mid-1950s and were part of the original Shenandoah group who traveled each winter for a week of snow skiing at Winter Park, Colorado. Their Farm 10 cabin north of town, built in 1973, became a gathering place for family and friends. The arrival of grandchildren meant more happy times and trips. Ken and Jean also traveled the world to Europe, Africa, the Middle East, the Pacific, and Asia. They were among the first Americans to visit China after the two countries established embassies in 1979.

Jean left for her family an incredibly well-organized collection of photo albums, letters, and reports of their travels and lives. Despite illness, her basic personality never changed: Jean was gracious and social, kept her sense of humor, never complained, loved books, and enjoyed her family to the fullest. Most importantly, she never stopped loving Ken and wanting to be with him.

Jean passed away peacefully at Elm Heights Care Center in Shenandoah on January 17, 2018. A private family burial service was conducted by Pastor Rick Sleyster at Rose Hill Cemetery in Shenandoah on January 20.

Jean was preceded in her death by her parents, husband Dr. Kenneth J. Gee, her second daughter Leslie Gee Jennings, and Jean's brother Robert Lannin McCullagh. She is survived by four children: Natalie and Michael Hall of Arlington VA, Margot Gee and Jeff Subko of Shenandoah, Kelly Carey of Coin, and Christopher Gee and Claire Townend of Pacific Palisades CA. Grandchildren: Sarah Hall of Washington DC, Kate Hall (Mike) McKenney of Yuma AZ, Matt Hall (Francesca Ricciardone) of Amman, Jordan, Helen Carey (Brenton Gregory-Morley) of New York NY, Maeve Carey (Diego) Gonzalez of West Des Moines IA, Andrew (Tatiana) Carey of Iowa City IA, Fionnuala Carey (Derick) Hutchins of Clive IA, and Kenneth Ellis Gee and Eleanor Jean Gee of Pacific Palisades

CA. Great grandchildren: Teagan, Sophie, and Ruby McKenney of Yuma AZ, Isla Gonzalez of West Des Moines IA, Arthur Hall of Amman, Jordan, and Luca Carey of Iowa City IA. Niece Lu-Cindy McCullagh Schiller and nephew Robert Henry McCullagh of Lynden WA.

Private family graveside service was held at Rose Hill Cemetery in Shenandoah.

Memorials may be directed to the Shenandoah Public Library, Southwest Iowa Theater Group, Greater Shenandoah Historical Society or AseraCare Hospice of Council Bluffs.