



Ruth Emily Cook

July 25, 1927 - March 3, 2020

Ruth Emily (Peterson) Cook was born on the 25th of July 1927 in Chicago, Illinois to Edwin and Irma Peterson. Ruth passed away peacefully in Topeka, Kansas on March 3rd 2020 surrounded by family.

Ruth grew up in Chicago and attended Austin High School, graduating in 1945. She joined the Nurse Cadet Corp to do her part in the war effort. Ruth continued her nursing training and graduated from the Lutheran Deaconess Hospital Nursing School. She was employed as an RN by the Cook County Hospital after graduation. She was always proud of working with pediatric patients with infectious illness.

While working at Cook County Hospital in Chicago Ruth met the love of her life, Dr. Alva Dean Cook Jr. They were married in Chicago on the 11th of June, 1949. During their Chicago years John and Dean, their first two sons, were born. Dr. Cook was called up for military service during the Korean War and the young family was transferred to Washington D.C. and then to San Diego where their 3rd son, Robert, was born.

Ruth is survived by her two sisters Jane (Wally) and Grace (Dick), her sons John (Jelane), Robert (Sue) and grandchildren Andrew (Andrea), Sarah (Sam), Fiona, and Ian (Maddie). Ruth was preceded in death by her parents Edwin and Irma, her beloved husband of 68 years Alva Dean Cook Jr. and

their beloved son Alva Dean Cook III.

Ruth and her family moved to Dayton, Ohio and then to Topeka because of her husband's psychiatric training at the Menninger Clinic. Her first impression of Topeka after living in Chicago, D.C, San Diego, and Dayton was "what the heck what have I gotten myself into". But after the initial shock wore off, Ruth and Dean decided Topeka was a wonderful place to raise their young family.

She was a stay-at-home mother and was involved in the PTA, Scouting, and all aspects of her three sons lives during their formative years. Once the boys were grown, Ruth re-certified her nursing license and worked as a school nurse, an insurance company nurse and as a public health nurse in East Topeka. She loved working in East Topeka and made many friends during her time there.

She was young at heart and loved to be around young people. One of her favorite jobs, post nursing, was to assist in registering students at Washburn University. She loved that job since it allowed her to interact with young students who came from all around the world. She was also selected by the Washburn School of Nursing and the Baker School of Nursing to mentor young nurses and provide them a historical reference of nursing in the past and how things should be done in modern nursing based on her work experiences and observations.

Ruth and Dean lost their middle son Alva Dean III to AIDS in 1991. Ruth became a very active member of PFLAG, TAP (now Positive Connections) and the AIDS Memorial Quilt Project. Ruth and Dean provided AIDS education to professionals, parents and students throughout Topeka and Kansas. Ruth's greatest contribution to Topeka was providing priceless support to the gay community, by becoming a surrogate mother and grandmother to the members of that community who had been rejected by

their families. She was made for that job because she recognized these vulnerable people needed the loving care and support only a mother and grandmother could provide.

This love of people and her passion for providing support to people in need was also reflected in her work as a Stephan Minister. She was a perfect companion for people with terminal illnesses because she could listen to their concerns and reassure them that God loved them and would care for them. Sometimes listening and talking wasn't enough so she would take her companion to get a burger and salad at Wendy's!

Even though Ruth lived in Topeka since the 50's she always considered herself a Chicago girl and she was a lifelong supporter of the Cubs, the Bears and the Blackhawks. Ruth supported everything Chicago: it was in her soul. She learned to love the Royals and the Chiefs and the Cats and supported them unless they played her beloved Chicago teams.

Her passions in life were her faith, church and her family. She also loved horses, dog shows, girls' softball, the Topeka Blues Society, knitting and gardening. She was very proud of the rest area/shade garden she made on the Shunga Trail in memory of her son Dean. Her constant knitting resulted in everyone in her family receiving at least one item knitted with love from her. Her support for the Topeka Blues Society included running door security for the Spirit of Kansas Blues Festival at the ages of 90 and 91.

Ruth cultivated long-term relationships with the many "young women" friends she met at work or at church. She also "adopted" the daughters of her friends who passed away before her. The love, support and mentoring Ruth gave to these young women was returned in kind, as those relationships nurtured Ruth's young heart, spirit, and soul.

If you knew Ruth and can't make her celebration of life service just raise a glass of cheap chardonnay with ice (her favorite) and toast Ruth for a life well lived and in recognition of her life's work in the Topeka community.

Memorial contributions are suggested to Brewster Place or Positive Connections, sent in care of Kevin Brennan Family Funeral Home, 2801 SW Urish Rd, Topeka KS 66614.

Tribute Wall



“ *Ruth Emily Cook*

January 28, 2023 at 12:08 PM



“ *Ruth and Dean made an incomparable gift to society in general and AIDS victims in particular--an unpopular subject for a great many. I well recall their shepherding the quilt to Topeka--more than any single thing it, expressed a powerful call for tolerance and acceptance, and conveyed the love and caring of many people. It certainly affected us.*

The work they did with and on behalf of AIDS victims is an eloquent legacy that will be long remembered. May God bless them both.

Roy and Bev Menninger - March 30 at 4:30 pm

Roy & Bev Menninger - March 30, 2020 at 05:30 PM



“ *I first met Ruth and Dean through the AIDS quilt project coming to Topeka. They both made one feel special and loved. I haven't seen Ruth in many years but I'm so saddened to hear of her passing. She was a very special person and i will always remember her.*

Greg Valentine - March 16, 2020 at 02:24 PM



“ *Thank you for your military service to our great Nation. A member of the GREATEST GENERATION, you maybe gone, but you will never be FORGOTTEN. May God bless the Ruth Cook family and friends!*

Mike Simmons - March 15, 2020 at 02:42 PM

KS

“ I had the pleasure of knowing Ruth through Brewster Place where I work as the Creative Arts Coordinator. She dropped by my studio regularly to donate a stack of wonderful knitted goodies for our Bazaar— generous with her time and talent, good humor and kindness. She will surely be missed 'round these parts! Prayers for God's peace for your family.

Kris Saia - March 15, 2020 at 12:31 PM

LR

“ I was just thinking I should stop by and visit. I will miss her positive energy and unconditional love. She was a mentor to me as a nurse!
Libby Rosen

Libby Rosen - March 14, 2020 at 09:30 PM

DG

“ I adored Ruth. She was the first person to welcome me to Topeka AIDS Project back in the day and from day one she supported me. She always greeted me with a hug and a kiss on each cheek. She was a bright light in our community and she will be truly missed, but she will never be forgotten.

Debbie Guilbault - March 14, 2020 at 05:08 PM

DG

“ Debbie Guilbault lit a candle in memory of Ruth Emily Cook



Debbie Guilbault - March 14, 2020 at 05:06 PM

SF

“*Ruth was a long time member of PFLAG Topeka/Lawrence Chapter. She was active and often would encourage young persons as they were coming out to their family and friends. She gave encouragement to persons with AIDS/HIV and would help them accept themselves. I recently accompanied her to her church where we gave a presentation of accepting LGBT persons. Ruth will be missed but her memory lives on in all the persons she has accepted and helped.*

Sonja Feist - March 14, 2020 at 01:19 PM