



Phyllis Wills Wagener

October 8, 1922 - March 29, 2021

Phyllis Wills Wagener was born to Matrice Meyers and Buren Wills on October 8, 1922 in Anderson, Indiana. Her mother and father divorced at an early age and because of this her father took her older brother Max to live with him. Phyllis grew up with her mom and learned at an early age to be a strong independent young girl growing up in the depression.

Matrice (Mammo) was a beautician and owned her own beauty shop – a woman ahead of her times. Phyllis shared many stories of the ladies coming to her mother to get their hair done. Matrice was a steadfast example of a strong career woman in the years when this was not always popular, and she set an example that would continue with Phyllis until her last breath.

From an early age Phyllis loved dogs and was known to take stray dogs in on a regular basis. Her childhood dog, “big Joe” who was a very large dog who followed mom everywhere including school in a very small and close-knit town in Indiana.

Phyllis began dancing at a young age and had dreams of becoming a professional dancer. She set out for the “big city” of Chicago at age 18 in the hopes of landing a professional dancing job only to realize that she was not “up to snuff” for the big city. She then met Gladys Height of Gladys Height Dancing School who took her under her wing. Miss Height helped trained her

to be the high-level ballet instructor that she eventually became. Phyllis was a member of the Imperial Society of Ballet Instructors and a Cecchetti Rated Ballet Instructor as well as a ballet examiner for the Cecchetti Method and a frequent seminar presenter and speaker.

Phyllis traveled around the world many times with her friends and was never afraid of anything. She loved to travel, and she loved adventure. She rode a donkey down the Grand Canyon. She was afraid of nothing.

Phyllis became a ballet teacher in Chicago training many beautiful dancers. It was in a ballet class that my mother met my father, an artist, who wanted to draw the dancers. She told Dad that if he wanted to draw the dancers then he needed to learn something about ballet...and the rest as they say is history.

They were married on April 3, 1948 for 72 years until Dads passing at 102 on May 14, 2020. Phyllis was a Methodist and needed to convert to Catholicism which she did to marry Dad. They married in the Rectory (as that was all that was permitted in those days) by Monsignor John Wagener, my Dads Uncle.

Mom and Dad were married for 10 years before I was born, and mom was 35 years old. They were living in a tiny apartment in Rogers Park at the time and after my birth moved out of the city into their first home in Glenview, Illinois which I still remember to this day.

Phyllis taught at the Gus Giordano Dance Center in Evanston, Illinois. She opened the Evanston School of Ballet with her dear friend and partner Kerry Hubata who still has the school today. The ballet school has become an institution in Evanston and has trained many beautiful ballet dancers. It was with the financial help of Joe and Nell Hubata that Mom and Kerry were able to achieve this dream. They began the Evanston Concert Ballet Company, and she directed a regional ballet company for many years.

Mom and Dad retired and moved to Madison, Wisconsin and then to the Atlanta, Georgia Area. In Atlanta Mom was diagnosed with Stage 4 Ovarian Cancer and was given approximately 1 year to live. She survived 24 additional years. Mom always said it was the power of prayer that saved her and that she was not ready to leave me.

Many wonderful friends and family members helped mom through this time and my Dad was by her side every step of the process. It was these wonderful friends that mom and dad met at church, the McDermotts, the Welch's and the Cains that helped mom and dad pack up their home in Dallas Georgia to move to Kennesaw, Georgia and again from Kennesaw to Deland, Florida.

In 2012 my husband and I suggested that Mom and Dad relocate to Florida to be closer to us and they moved to Deland, Florida where they really enjoyed their neighbors and their home on the water with their dog Barney.

Mom began to develop cardiac and pulmonary problems several years ago but pushed through them valiantly. Recently time just caught up with her. She took care of Dad until his passing in 2020 and they both loved living out their final years at the Atria of Lake Forest in Sanford, Florida. Her beloved dog Barney lost his battle to cancer in January of 2021.

Mom will be remembered by so many people for so many different reasons, but I will always remember mom as my best friend, confident and the person who knew me better than anyone. She will always be my precious mother.

Mom was preceded in death by her husband artist Paul Wagener, her brother Dr. Max Wills and her son-in-law Dr. Jeffrey Blonder. She is survived by her daughter Paula Wagener Blonder and her many beloved nieces, nephews,

and friends.

In lieu of flowers donations may be made to "Mostly Mutts Animal Rescue in Kennesaw, Georgia. www.mostlymutts.org.

A Funeral Mass will be held at All Souls Church in Sanford, Florida - date to be determined.

The family of Phyllis Wills Wagener invites you to leave a message of condolence on the Tribute Wall created in her loving memory.