



Philomena Bonnewitz

June 22, 1927 - February 4, 2021

Philomena (Mena) Bonnewitz of Orlando, Florida, died peacefully on February 4, 2021 at the young age of 93. She lived a long and beautiful life and meant so much to all who knew her.

Mena was born to Thomas and Margaret (Dolly) O'Brien in Limerick, Ireland on June 22, 1927.

She is survived by Van, her husband of 63 years; her seven children: Paul and Mariann (Engelkes) Bonnewitz of Leesburg, VA, Maureen and Allen Sowers, Sheila Bonnewitz, Peggy Bonnewitz, Frank and Linda (Huelsman) Bonnewitz, Kevin and Elisha (Gonzalez) Bonnewitz and John Bonnewitz-Coffey all of Orlando; eight beautiful grandchildren: Tyler Stokes, Julia Bonnewitz, Mary Sowers, David Sowers, Kate Bonnewitz, Paul Bonnewitz, Paloma Bonnewitz and Levi Bonnewitz all of Orlando; her sisters Betty and husband Dan Daly of Newark, Delaware; her sisters Breda O'Dwyer, Sheila McCloskey and Rose O'Brien and her brother Anthony O'Brien of Limerick, Ireland. She had 41 nieces and nephews in Ireland, Canada and the United States and she loved each and every one of them. She was especially close to her great niece, Susan McNamara.

She was preceded in death by her infant daughter Deirdre Marie, her sisters Missy and Rita and her brothers Brian, Michael, Frank, Joseph, Thomas,

Father Gerard, and Brian.

Mena's age may come as a surprise to most because it was a closely guarded secret. She never accepted her age or allowed it to slow her down. She left Ireland in 1955 and came to the United States and joined her sister Betty and brother-in-law Dan and their three young boys. The boys were her first love, but she was fortunate to meet Van, and after only six weeks married him and began what became a 63-year long love affair.

They traveled the world for 16 years with the US Army spending time in France, Panama, Germany, and Ireland. Mena and the kids lived in Ireland while Van served two tours in Vietnam and one in Africa. She was so fortunate to have the assistance of her siblings and their extended families during these times. She was so proud that this enabled her children to build life-long relationships with their cousins half a world away. Mena and Van concluded their Army life and settled in Orlando in 1974.

Mena was truly a giving person and always found a way to contribute to others. She was always the first one to lend a helping hand. She volunteered at Meals on Wheels for many years, and was a founding member of Beta, a longtime board member and volunteer for more than 40 years and helped many young girls and families who were in need. She was very active at St James, serving as an usher and could often be seen helping seat parishioners who were many years younger than her. She never met a stranger, or if she did, within 10 minutes she knew their life story and they had an invitation to dinner. She provided a welcoming home to everyone and there was always room at the dinner table for one more. She was well known for telling a visitor MIK for "more in kitchen" while telling family members FHB for "family hold back." She relished spending money, but not on herself; instead giving it away to others, many times when she had very little.

Although she moved to the United States when she was in her 20's, she never lost her love of her native land. Nor did she lose her Irish brogue, which became even more pronounced when she spoke with any of her family in Ireland, Delaware, or New York. She loved the traditions of dancing and singing, and if you ever had dinner at her house, you could expect to participate in a sing song when the meal was over. She was especially proud of winning the Fáinne, an award given to those who displayed exceptional proficiency in the Irish language. As she tells it, she was the youngest person ever to win the award.

She loved to read and was an expert on American history. She watched Jeopardy religiously and family members are sure that she is playing a heavenly game with Alex Trebek.

Rest in peace beloved wife, mother, sister, grandmother, aunt, mother-in-law and friend.

Mena was a supporter of many charities. Bishop Grady Villas, an organization which supports persons with disabilities to use their God-given gifts to achieve greater independence, physical and emotional well-being, and spiritual growth was very close to her heart. If you wish to honor her, they will welcome your donation.

Bishop Grady Villas
401 Bishop Grady Ct.
St. Cloud, FL 34769

<https://www.bishopgradyvillas.org/donate>

Ar dheis go raibh a h'anam dílis – May her faithful soul be at the right hand of

God.

Mass will be celebrated by The Most Reverend John Noonan, Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Orlando, formerly of Limerick, Ireland on Tuesday, February 9 at 10 AM at Saint James Cathedral followed by internment at Cape Canaveral National Cemetery, Mims, FL.

Previous Events

Public Visitation

FEB 8. 5:00 PM - 7:00 PM (ET)

DeGusipe Funeral Home & Crematory Maitland Chapel
9001 N. Orlando Ave
Maitland, FL 32751
(407) 695-2273
todd@degusipe.com
<https://www.degusipefuneralhome.com>

Funeral Mass

FEB 9. 10:00 AM (ET)

St. James Cathedral
215 N Orange Ave
Orlando, FL 32801

Graveside Service

FEB 9. 1:00 PM (ET)

Cape Canaveral National Cemetery
5525 US-1 North
Mims, FL 32754
(321) 383-2638
<http://www.cem.va.gov/cems/nchp/capecanaveral.asp>

Tribute Wall

BB

“ *I have the pleasure of working with Ms. Bonnewitz 's daughter Peggy. Her colleagues are saddened over the family's loss. We pray for peace and comfort during this difficult time.*

Bianca Brown

Bianca Brown - February 09, 2021 at 08:40 AM

RR

“ *Ronny & LaShonda Robertson purchased the Divine Peace Bouquet for the family of Philomena Bonnewitz.*



Ronny & LaShonda Robertson - February 08, 2021 at 03:46 PM

TW

“ *Tracy Winton sent a virtual gift in memory of Philomena Bonnewitz*



Tracy Winton - February 08, 2021 at 03:35 PM

SM

“ Susan Mcnamara lit a candle in memory of Philomena Bonnewitz



Susan Mcnamara - February 08, 2021 at 01:03 PM

JC

“ J&S and the Army Division of the MITRE Corporation purchased the Beautiful in Blue for the family of Philomena Bonnewitz.



J&S and the Army Division of the MITRE Corporation - February 08, 2021 at 12:50 PM

RM

“ Rose McCloskey lit a candle in memory of Philomena Bonnewitz



Rose McCloskey - February 08, 2021 at 08:20 AM

JF

Sending love and special thoughts to all The Bonnewitz Family. We loved Mena. She loved life and family and showed us all how to live life to the full. Rest in peace Mena. Codladh sámh I measc na nAingeal. Rest in peace Mena.

Jo O Brien Dan Stapleton and family. - February 09, 2021 at 11:04 AM



“ *Peaceful White Lilies Basket* was purchased for the family of *Philomena Bonnewitz*.



February 07, 2021 at 08:23 PM



“ *Magnificent Life Spray* was purchased for the family of *Philomena Bonnewitz*.



February 07, 2021 at 09:51 AM



“ *Emerald Garden Basket* was purchased for the family of *Philomena Bonnewitz*.



February 07, 2021 at 12:11 AM



“ *Sentiments of Serenity Spray* was purchased for the family of *Philomena Bonnewitz*.



February 06, 2021 at 10:05 PM

BS

“What an incredible lady Mena was. Since was a inspiration to me and to many. I only met her in her later years as we both served together on the board of Beta together. She was a bundle of energy and had a heart and smile that comforted everyone she came in contact with. I ride a motorcycle and one day she quietly pulled me aside and asked if I might give her a ride some day. I told her to come to the next board meeting dressed and ready to ride. She had never been on a motorcycle before and I wanted to give her a ride to remember. After she climbed on behind me, I asked her if the Bishop would be upset if we got arrested for speeding. She said, “Let’s find out!” And off we went.

She has touched the lives of so many people, especially the generations of young mothers and children of Beta. I’m sure she is already hard at work helping out in Heaven. Rest in Paradise my friend!!



Bob Simmonds - February 06, 2021 at 08:39 PM



“Heavenly Grace Spray was purchased for the family of Philomena Bonnewitz.



February 06, 2021 at 07:21 PM