



## Donna Belle Desler-Ulep

December 30, 1930 - June 5, 2023

Donna B. Desler-Ulep

December 31, 1930 – June 5, 2023

Donna was born on the family farm near Otis, CO to Mary Louise (Newcomb) and William Gielenz on New Years Eve, 1930. She was the youngest of six children (four sisters, one brother). The family worked the farm through the depression, and the Gielenz sisters were a highly sought after wheat harvest crew during WWII, when the men were gone. Donna graduated as salutatorian from Lone Star High School in 1948. She was active in basketball, 4-H and Farmers Union, a youth group of lively farm kids. Her young adult years were spent in eastern Colorado, where she worked in Akron and had a brief marriage. She moved to California with her 3-year-old daughter, Debi, married and had her second daughter, Diane. The years following were spent in southwest Colorado, followed by a brief stint in California. In 1965, the family purchased a 150-acre ranch near Sweet Home, Oregon. Her husband was gone much of the time, and Donna flourished while running the ranch (beef, sheep, milk cows, chickens, horses, huge gardens) with her girls. She was a 4-H leader, elementary school room mother, active in Home Extension, sewed her daughters' clothes, delivered hundreds of lambs and calves, and cooked robust meals for farm hands. Their home doubled as a guest ranch during those years, hosting visitors from around the world. She drove school bus during this time, becoming the first woman to drive sports

teams around the state to competitions.

In 1972, Donna befriended a woman in Washington DC who coordinated activities for diplomats from around the world and their families. That friendship culminated in twenty-four foreign service members and their families visiting Sweet Home while on a motorhome tour of the United States. The time they spent with host families formed bonds that remain to this day. After her divorce, Donna sold much of the ranch property and became the first woman truck driver for Willamette Industries and later, Morse Brothers. She also worked as a flagger on highway projects around the state.

In 1984, she met the love of her life at a community dance in Salem. Donna and Juan Ulep were married in May 1986. Juan was a 25-year US Army veteran and Rotarian and their lives revolved around serving veterans, Rotary service projects, grandchildren, tending their garden and rental properties in Holley, and hosting legendary BBQs and parties. Donna and Juan spent several years in the Oregon State Defense Force. Juan enjoyed telling people that Donna outranked him. They traveled the world together and hosted many international guests from as far away as Russia. Donna and Juan made several trips to his native Philippines, visiting family and building community water wells as part of Rotary service projects.

Donna often said that the happiest years of her life were spent on the ranch with her girls, driving trucks and dancing with Juan.

After 50-plus years living in the Sweet Home area, Donna moved to Corvallis in 2016 to be closer to her daughter, Diane. There she enjoyed frequent lunch dates, music and ballet performances, drives in the country and visits with friends.

Donna was pre-deceased by her husband Juan, son-in-law Roy McCain, great-grandson Oliver Seagle, her parents, siblings, and many friends. She is survived by daughters Debi McCain and Diane Desler-Davis (Jeff), stepson Dennis Desler, granddaughters Heather McCain Hulett and Kari McCain Miller, grandson Wynton Davis, nine great-grandchildren, one great-great-granddaughter, and numerous nieces and nephews.

Private interment will occur at Willamette National Cemetery. The family will host a Zoom celebration of life later this summer. Those interested in participating are encouraged to send an email to [DonnaUlepMemorial@gmail.com](mailto:DonnaUlepMemorial@gmail.com) to receive updates and log-in information. The family is profoundly grateful for the loving care provided by Willamette Springs Memory Care and Lumina Hospice.

Donna believed that kindness creates ripples outward to many and that empowerment through education transforms lives. If you wish to honor Donna's long and well-lived life with a gift, please consider Lumina Hospice <https://www.luminahospice.org> or Linn-Benton Community College Foundation at <https://tinyurl.com/GiveLBCC> . Please note on your gift that it is in honor of Donna.

Please share your thoughts and memories for the family at [www.mchenryfuneralhome.com](http://www.mchenryfuneralhome.com)