



Elizabeth Kathryn “Kate” Donnelly Hartlep

April 30, 1920 ~ September 20, 2025 (age 105)

For her 105th birthday on April 30th, 2025, Elizabeth Kathryn Donnelly Hartlep received a beautiful piecework quilt titled “Flowers for Kate,” which serves as a perfect model for her long and fruitful life, stitched from many varied pieces, yet forming a beautiful, coherent pattern of love, faith, family, work, struggle and accomplishment.

The backing to this quilt was her birth in Petoskey, Michigan, in 1920 to Leon Avery Donnelly and Agnes Kruskie. A small photograph shows Kate at age 2 standing with older sister Dorothy in front of the “tannery house” where the Donnellys lived while Leon worked at Howe’s Leather Company north of where the Bay View golf course stands today.

Kate loved to tell tales of the bootlegging that went on in that tiny house during the

Prohibition era to supplement Leon's meager wages and feed their growing family. All the children helped, with young Leon Jr., known as Bud, holding the empty beer bottles for filling, while youngest sister Eleanor, later known as Sister Malachy when she became a Catholic nun, "started the flow" by mouth on a rubber hose coming from the fermentation vat.

Kate's other brother, Edward, escaped the bootlegging curse, which put their father in Jackson Prison, divorced from Agnes, with the children quite literally "farmed out" to various relatives. For a while, Kate lived and worked on the old family farm north of Cross Village, owned by grandfather Frank Kruskie, then later on the Pickerel Lake Road farm of grandfather William Patton Donnelly, along with youngest brother Bud.

Old W. P. Donnelly worked the kids mercilessly, and kept them out of school, so Bud ran away and joined the Air Force, where he earned his GED, while Kate returned briefly to her mother's house in Petoskey, until she began working at the Arcadia restaurant on Mitchell Street to put herself through high school, paying for all her own clothes and graduation photo.

Add these significant patches to the quilt: Kate was the first person in her family to graduate from high school, and until her death on September 20, 2025, age 105 years, 4 months and 20 days, was the last remaining member of the Petoskey High School Class of 1938.

Add these as well: the names George and Stella Batsakis, Greek immigrant owners of the Arcadia, who provided Kate room and board in exchange for caring for their twin children, John and Mary. Without them, she might never have had the chance to finish high school, nor been introduced by Mr. Batsakis to Wayne and Frances Smith, and hired to care for the Smiths' young son, future Emmet County Prosecutor and District Judge, W. Richard Smith, whose career Kate followed with delight for many years.

It was also at the Arcadia that Kate met her future husband - "the handsomest man I've ever known," she often said - Woodrow F. Hartlep, a 1933 graduate of Boyne City High School. Like Kate, he was the first member of his family to finish high school. The couple married in 1942, and would have three children, all of whom they insisted finish college, and all of whom entered what are known as "the helping professions" - Patricia Ann, born in 1945, who became a psychologist for the state of Michigan; Stuart Woodrow, born in 1950, who became a high school teacher and graphic artist in Iowa; and Eric Christopher, born 1957, a medical technologist and writer for 37 years in Chicago, Milwaukee and Seattle.

But before Kate and Woody started their family, a major piece of the quilt of life needed to fill the gap between marriage and kids: the couple's service during World War II. The

army sent Woody to California for training, and Kate soon followed, the rail journey from Michigan to Long Beach taking four days and nights. Woody earned his corporal's stripes, and was sent to North Africa as a military policeman, securing vital harbors for the push into Italy. Kate remained in Hawthorne, California, constructing Norden bomb sights for the Air Force. She often wondered if sights she built were installed on the B-17 Flying Fortresses her brother Leon "Bud" Donnelly flew for 30 missions over the Netherlands, Belgium, France and Germany, out of Polebrook, England, in 1944 and 1945, destroying train yards, factories, refineries and tank marshalling yards used in Hitler's Third Reich's failed attempt at conquering the free and democratic nations of the world.

A curious patch must now be sewn in place: the strangest 25th birthday present Kate Hartlep ever received. For it was on April 30, 1945, that Adolph Hitler, Nazi dictator and author of European genocide, took his own life as Allied forces, supported by the efforts of Kate, Woody, Bud and uncounted thousands of others, converged on his bunker in Berlin, Germany.

Contrast this with the happy patch sewn on next: Kate, Bud and Woody all survived the war! Though Woody was badly wounded in May of 1944, as his patrol was advancing on the Axis bastion of Monte Casino in Italy. Four of the men with him died. He returned stateside in August of 1944, and with all wartime patches then in place, he and Kate started their family in Boyne City.

For several years, Woody worked at the Michigan Tanning & Extract Company – AKA "the Tannery" – on the shore of Lake Charlevoix, while Kate kept house and raised their three children. She cooked, grew and canned vegetables, sewed and knitted clothing, and in her "free" moments, read aloud to both her children and neighborhood kids on the front porch of the old family house on Main Street.

When the tannery closed, Woody took a job with Everett Kircher, helping construct some of the first ski lifts at the Boyne Mountain resort – now a part of the global Boyne USA empire. But as children of The Great Depression, Kate and Woody knew the uncertainty of working for others; so, in 1969, they built a small block addition on their house and opened Woody's Bait & Tackle store on Boyne Avenue, which they ran for more than 20 years, doling out fishing and hunting advice along with supplies and custom-made rods still in use today.

After closing the bait shop in 1986, Kate and Woody settled down to a life of simple pleasures: gardening; hunting and fishing; travel to Florida, Texas and Mexico – all places with fine fishing opportunities, of course. When Woody passed away, following a series of strokes in 1998, daughter Patricia, upon retiring from her last state job as

prison psychologist in Rudyard, Michigan, moved in with Kate, so that they might care for one another and keep up the old family home.

Even in “retirement,” Kate was not made for idleness. She continued to garden and cook, and to do charitable work for others. One of her proudest accomplishments, ended only by macular degeneration that dimmed her eyesight, was knitting more than 40 sweaters over several years, for a charity that provided warm clothing to malnourished children in Nepal. That patch on the quilt of life is one of her favorites,

Another was seeing her older sister, Dorothy Pollack, one last time before Dorothy passed away at age 103½. Previous to that, Eric, Pat and Kate had visited Sister Malachy at Holy Family Convent in Manitowoc, Wisconsin, before Aunt Eleanor’s death at age 91. Kate is survived by, of course, her children, but also by Leon “Bud” Donnelly’s children: Kaye Ann Donnelly of California and Carl Harmer, and his wife Dawne and their children and grandchildren, who live in Wales, UK. And by Leah Petesch, daughter of son Stuart and his wife, Karen. Also survived by nieces on Woody’s side, Joan “Joni” Hartlep Zucchiatti and Joni’s older sister, Judy Hartlep, and by cousins Gordon and Edith Kruskie of Cross Village.

Following his retirement from laboratory medicine in 2017, Kate’s youngest son, Eric, relocated to Boyne City to be close to her and sister Patricia. Soon, the trio came up with the idea of Soup & Salad Saturdays, with “the girls” coming to Eric’s house for lunch or dinner each weekend. About five years ago, one more “girl” was added to the group, Eric’s girlfriend, Roxann Morin from Gaylord. But a fourth “girl” must not be left off the list, either: Roxann’s Newfoundland dog, CeCe, who bothered and delighted Kate, mostly concerning tidbits from the table.

It was Roxann who pieced together “Flowers for Kate,” quilted by her friend Jule Sadger, thus providing the framework for this obituary, this celebration of the life of Elizabeth Kathryn “Kate” Donnelly.

> A memorial service for Kate will be held on Thursday, September 25th at Saint Matthew Catholic church in Boyne City, Michigan, with viewing at 10 a.m. and services at 11 a.m. A luncheon is to follow.