



Constance S. Kurth

Constance S. Kurth died peacefully on March 26 at the age of 92. Born in St. Augustine, Florida, on Feb. 5, 1926, she was the daughter of John B. Schindler and Myrtle (Speicher) Schindler and the twin sister of Claire (Schindler) Collier, who predeceased her in 2013. An elder sister, Barbara, died of scarlatina in 1924.

Connie was educated in New York and New Jersey and graduated from the Katharine Gibbs School, famous “institution for executive amanuenses,” where she formed her strong advice to women that if

they wanted real careers they should never learn how to type. In 1946 she married W. F. Kurth and moved with him and their growing family to Texas, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, England, and finally to Burlington, in 1960, when she realized that she had never lived anywhere more than two years in her life and refused to move again. She never did.

In 1965 Connie returned to school, studying history and graduating Phi Beta Kappa and summa cum laude from the University of Vermont. She worked at different times for the Burlington School Department, the Vermont Ecumenical Council, the Democratic Party, the law offices of Richard H. Thomas and the Fleming Museum at UVM, where she was administrative assistant and factotum, managing publicity, tours, and the museum gift shop. “I also answered the phone and listened to faculty complain,” she remembered. On the matter of work she described herself as “a great self-stopper,” quoting a favorite poem by A. A. Milne:

There was once an old sailor my grandfather knew
Who had so many things which he wanted to do
That, whenever he thought it was time to begin,
He couldn't because of the state he was in.

The descendant of ministers and niece of a 19th-century Universalist faith healer, Connie was a “birthright” Unitarian, not a convert, active throughout her life in the Unitarian Church and, after their merger in 1962, the Unitarian Universalist Society. She was a former president of the Burlington congregation and the Women’s Alliance and a director of the church school, where she organized and strengthened the children’s library. She kept her spiritual cards close to her chest, despising “emotionalism” and all forms of “showing off.” She could be prickly and was easily exasperated. But she knew the need for connection and community and did a lot to bring them about, for herself and others. She spent many summers at UU conferences on Star Island, volunteered at the Fletcher Free Library, delivered Meals on Wheels and, until age overtook her, never missed the UU Holiday Bazaar.

An important job for Connie in her later years was as a companion to the residents of the Converse Home in Burlington. She was kind to strangers and generous to friends, a constant reader, a clever cook and an avid Liverpool player, unsentimental and fearless of authority. To say she was a feminist is redundant: Connie’s maternal grandmother had been a suffragette, and she relished the giant advancement of women in her lifetime. She was never bored. She said she could sit by herself looking at walls and not be bored and saw that talent as a gift. It got in the way of vacuuming, but it gave her the epitaph she suggested for a tombstone she didn’t want: “From dust ... to dust ... to dust.” She was a loving mother, sister, grandmother, great-grandmother, cousin, aunt and friend, and she will be deeply missed.

Connie is survived by her five children Gillian Randall, Dr. Barbara Kurth, Richard Kurth, Peter Kurth and Robert Kurth and their families. A celebration of her life will take place at the UU Society in Burlington on Sunday, May 13, at 3:00 p.m. We want to thank the community at Our Lady of Providence in Winooski, who welcomed our mother with compassion and respect. Contributions in her memory can be made to Meals on Wheels.