



Rita Elfriede Heidner

June 8, 1935 - June 29, 2022

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The world has lost a beautiful and wonderful light that had shone so brightly for so many. Rita Elfriede Heidner passed away peacefully in her sleep in the early morning of June 29, 2022, after a prolonged hospital stay due to complications from a fall in April.

Rita (originally Elfriede Woellmann) was born in the small town of Tostedt, Germany on June 8th, 1935, the youngest of five siblings. She grew up in the family farmhouse, which was thankfully spared from attacks by Allied forces during World War II. Her father, Rudolf, was a very talented musician, playing violin, flute, and several other instruments, including trumpet in the Tostedt Posaunenchor (town band), which is still in existence today.

At age 16, Rita made the bold choice of leaving war-ravaged Germany and moving to Canada with her older sister Selma, who was recently engaged to a German-Canadian. While that engagement was ultimately called off, Selma and Rita stayed in Canada (first in Calgary and then later in Vancouver). Selma met another German-Canadian, William Rauch, whom she married. William, Selma, and Rita then moved to Santa Barbara, California, once they were granted residence by the U.S. government.

Rita moved into her own apartment on Arrellaga St., and took on several demanding but impressive jobs, including working in the womens' fashion department at Robinson's (now Macy's), as well as the hostess and manager positions at Kerry's Restaurant and the Blue Ox restaurant. She also helped Selma and William raise their children, William Jr. and Thomas.

In 1970, Rita married Philip Heidner, who she met through William's work, and they bought a house in Goleta. In 1972, they welcomed their only child, Eric. However, the marriage did not last, so Rita raised Eric on her own, with only a part-time job as a cafeteria employee at Dos Pueblos High School to cover the bills and her son's college tuition. But despite the lack of money on hand, Rita gave Eric incredible support, encouragement, and love that helped him land a successful career as a music educator.

Rita absolutely loved attending all of her son's concerts--both at Santa Barbara High School, and then later at Santa Barbara City College. She continued to do so until the day of her fall in April of this year.

Rita is survived by her son, Eric, her two nephews, William Jr. and Thomas, and by Thomas and his wife Jill's two children, Ehren and Daniel, as well as by Ehren's son, Lukas. A graveside service at Goleta Cemetery will be limited to family members and a small list of close friends.

Tribute Wall



“ Thank you, Rita, for coming into my life and allowing me into yours. You were the “big sister” I never had, caring and supportive. To my Jesse, you were “Auntie Rita.” Someday we’ll all be together again.

-- Kim Favors, Santa Barbara

Kim Favors - July 09, 2022 at 04:38 PM