



## Erma Jean Willey

April 3, 1930 - November 15, 2018

Jean Willey died peacefully and gracefully at Whatcom Hospice House, November 15, 2018.

Erma Jean McLean Willey was born in Indian Head, Saskatchewan, Canada to Rufus Henry McLean and Grace Ellen McLean (nee Delaney) on April 3, 1930.

The seventh of Rufus and Grace's eight surviving children, Jean spent her childhood in Kendal, Saskatchewan surrounded by a large and bustling family where her brothers had their own orchestra which provided the background music for Jean's early life. That music was quieted while Jean's beloved brothers Dean and Rufie served during World War II. As a young girl, Jean found respite from the anxieties of having loved ones in combat by putting her nose firmly and faithfully in a book. Books were forever afterward her chief sources of solace and refuge. An excellent student, she independently worked her way through the curriculum offered by the one-room school house she attended. When she was fourteen, Jean and her older sister Iris made the 78km trip from their home village to stay in Regina where Jean could continue her education at Regina Central Collegiate High School. At Central Collegiate she happened to encounter a gentle young man named Ian Willey whom she would marry after they had both graduated from the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon.

In the early years of their marriage, Jean provided the financial support by working at the Northside Branch of the Saskatoon Public Library and then at the University of Alberta library while Ian was in medical school there. After immigrating to the United States so that Ian could pursue a specialty in Pathology, Ian and Jean settled in Bellingham where Jean created a home that was her sanctuary. Jean possessed a keen love of beauty and would often be transported by the sweet melody or the soaring bel canto aria. In summer she would arrange fragrant and abundant rose bouquets from her garden. Never being one to over-romanticize things, however, Jean always pursued the heart of any matter and eschewed triviality. Known in her family for her feisty spirit, she valued honesty, individualism and the ability to see that the Emperor wasn't actually wearing any clothes.

Jean was predeceased by her parents, her husband Ian, and her siblings Murray, Dean, Viola, Rufus Jr, Mavis, Iris, and Doreen. She is survived by daughters Susan Blood (Roger) of Albany, NY and Cecily Aegerter (Paul) of Bellingham, grandsons Evan Aegerter, Ian Aegerter, and many nieces and nephews. Many thanks to Phyllis Hess, her friend and caregiver with whom she had a particularly close relationship and to the staff at Spring Creek Memory Care who provided empathy, care and sing-a-longs reminiscent of those her family enjoyed. A memorial service will be held in the summer at a date to be announced. In lieu of flowers, memorials may be made in Jean's name to Whatcom Hospice Foundation, 2800 Douglas Avenue, Bellingham, WA 98225, [whatcomhospice.org](http://whatcomhospice.org) or to the Mount Baker Theatre, 104 N. Commercial St. Bellingham, WA 98225.

# Tribute Wall

CG

“ My deepest condolences on your loss. May your family find peace and comfort at this time. “God...will wipe out every tear from their eyes, and death will be no more, neither will mourning nor outcry nor pain be anymore. The former things have passed away.”

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**Carol Gardenar** - November 15, 2018 at 12:00 AM

JH

“ Dear Cecily,  
I remember your Mother in the kitchen lingering over her home made bread and pates and salads, the living area an extension of the kitchen far more than a place to sit. I was such a timid soul, so felt intimidated often by your conversations about cuisine, chefs, authors, musicians, medical situations. Once, I broke a bowl in my clumsiness but each of your family was gracious and forgiving. I remember, too, that Jean faithfully picked you up in her yellowish orange station wagon. There was an August afternoon when you and I went blackberry picking at the beach and this worried her terribly. I think she found us up the road from your house upon our return.

Five years later, your Mother befriended my friend, Dave Abel, when he built a spacious deck for you all. Between them developed a real connection, a love for conversation, such as I had heard her show with Susan, Ian and you. I found this sweet but not surprising. Like you, Ces, she loved to chat ideas, information, stories...

From her, I took home the voice of Roger Whittaker, a great gift to my folks.

I know the mother daughter thing can be testy. But she loved you truly and you had to replace your father in your courage and steadfast care of her.

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**Janet Higbee-Robinson** - November 15, 2018 at 12:00 AM

CM

“ Although we never lived in the same city, we visited just often enough for me to get to know the Willey family: my aunt, uncle and cousins. I always enjoyed when the Willeys visited Regina when I still lived there. Later I moved to Victoria to study and eventually the Vancouver area, so visits to Bellingham were a little easier and always pleasant, whether on my own or with other relatives. I remember especially the lovely house and grounds at Briar Road, later Sudden Valley, the interesting and sometimes lively dinner conversations, the occasions when grandsons Evan and Ian provided live music for us. A special tangible edible memory is Aunt Jean’s Viennese Ribbon Cake! I loved it, and so did others who tried it after the recipe migrated to Canada. Rest in peace, dear Aunt Jean. May memories and her spirit live on happily in the hearts of the family. Love from Cousin Claude

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**Claude McLean** - November 15, 2018 at 12:00 AM