

Ella Marie (Luke) Downey

November 1, 1924 – December 27, 2016

Ella Marie Luke, 92, passed away from natural causes on December 27, 2016. She was born on a rural farm on November 1, 1924 in Avon, South Dakota. She was one of 8 children born to Homer and Jennie Luke. Out of the 8 children, she was one of 3 children who was born deaf. All of the siblings learned to fingerspell and sign with their deaf siblings. Ella had endless fond memories of playing on the farm where her older siblings played numerous pranks on each other. She even had her own pet chicken her ornery and dear brother, John, told her it was on the dinner table one evening! Ella loved reminiscing the good ole farm stories with her own children.

The Luke family was strongly religious attending the Methodist Church where George McGovern's father preached weekly and afterwards, they attended many joyous Luke family picnics. The Luke extended family pretty much dominated the farming town of Avon. Ella attended the South Dakota Residential School for the Deaf in Sioux Falls until age 9. After her father who initially took her there to receive her schooling, her older deaf brother, Clarence, accompanied her on the 100 mile train ride back/forth to school after the summer and winter vacations. She often said she was never afraid of the long train ride as a young girl.



Ella Marie and Buddy Berke during her childhood at SDSD

The dust bowl hit the Midwest in the early 30s forcing the Luke family to sell the farm and resettle in the beautiful Evergreen state of Washington where other Luke family members had already set up their new homestead. Ella had vivid memories of the month long journey out west caravanning with her parents and siblings. When she saw the beautiful endless line of pine trees, she was awestruck! She was thrilled with her new home. She attended the Washington State School for the Deaf in Vancouver where her family lived and where she made life long Deaf friends who she cherished. She also worked and helped with the war effort and was proud of her contribution.

After graduation, she received a scholarship to attend Gallaudet College in Washington D.C. for one year. She loved her college experience there. After many suitors, she met her future husband, Jack, in Los Angeles. They wrote love letters back and forth for 6 mos until they married in '49. The settled in Boise, Idaho in '52 where they proudly raised their 3 children.

Ella was a natural mother never letting her deafness be an obstacle. She was extremely proud of her three children and their accomplishments. She is preceded in death by her husband, Jack, of 60 years. She is survived by her children, Marty and his wife Janet (who was like her own daughter) and Andy, all of Boise and her daughter, Trina who lives in Italy; her brothers John and Jim and his wife Pat of Washington state; her sister Virginia of Maryland and numerous nieces, nephews and cousins. A private family service will be held in Boise and a memorial service will be held in August for family and Deaf friends in Vancouver, WA. In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to the Washington State School for the Deaf in Vancouver. Please sign Ella 's Guest Book at www.columbian.com/obits.



Ella Marie standing at second from the left by the SDSD's Main Building.