



Vera Grace Snyder Cogan O'Neill

January 7, 1920 - July 16, 2017

Vera Grace Snyder Cogan O'Neill died July 16, 2017 at Sarasota Memorial Hospital, Sarasota, Florida. She had been a resident of Sarasota since 2002. Vera was born January 7, 1920 in Springfield Township, Ohio the first of Harvey and Esther Snyder's seven children. Their growing family resided many years by Springfield Lake on Lakeside Drive in the Village of Lakemore, where Harvey served on the Village Council. Esther was a President of the Lakemore Elementary School PTA. Harvey and Esther championed higher education for their children. Having not graduated from high school, but inspired by his mentor and neighbor, Elmer Acker, Harvey served on the Springfield Township School Board. Vera attended the new 1931 Springfield High School constructed on Sanitarium Road.

After graduation from Kent State University during the Great Depression with a two-year Teacher's Certificate, Vera's first teaching assignments were in Springfield Township at Milroy Elementary, then Lakemore Elementary. After her marriage in Lakemore Methodist Church to Jack Cogan, also raised in Lakemore Village, he was assigned to a World War II bomb-loading plant in Texarkana, Texas, where their son, Jack Jr. was born. After the war, they lived in GI housing Hillwood Homes west of the Akron Airport, as she began travelling by bus to University of Akron to complete a Bachelor's degree conferred in June, 1950. She began what became a remarkable career in the Akron Public School System. She started at Harris Elementary, teaching fifth

and sixth grades and moved on to Betty Jane Elementary where she taught 6th grade from 1958 – 1965.

She served the following schools as principal: Howe Elementary (September 1965 through June 1968); Stewart Elementary (September 1968 through June 1971); Rankin Elementary (August 1971 through June 1974); Perkins Junior High School (August 1974 – November, 1977); Director, Urban Demonstration Program (November, 1977 – June, 1979); Kenmore High School (July 1979 – April, 1983); Innes Junior High School (April, 1983 – February, 1984).

As Vera became Director of the Akron Urban Center Demonstration Project, the Beacon Journal ran (Sunday, October 30, 1977, F5) an illustrated six-column biographical feature by Richard McBane, entitled "Vera Loves a Challenge." Beacon Journal Education Writer McBane traced her childhood, her determination over decades to earn degrees in Education, the loss of her only son and husband and inspirations which led her to tackle tough leadership positions in troubled schools. McBane quoted her at length, "If I've been successful, it's because I believe all children should have a good education Most of the things I discovered about the inner city were contradictions; that is, people were telling me things that I found just weren't true. . . . For example, they said the children were unruly, violent, aggressive but I found the kids were no different from kids anywhere. They respond to good teachers and they don't respond to poor teachers The parents do support good school programs and good teaching. . . They won't support poor programs. Why should they? They aren't fools."

After the death of Vera's husband following years of illness battling nephritis, McBane noted that she served on the Kidney Foundation of Summit County. A soprano soloist and director of a celebrated children's choir for Dr. Withrow at Oak Hill Presbyterian Church in Ellet, she served on the board of the Children's Concert Society and the Women's Committee of the Akron

Symphony.

When she was appointed Principal of Kenmore High School, the Akron Beacon Journal ran a three column 1979 article headlined "City gets first woman high school principal." (Charlene Nevada, staff writer. photo by Ted Walls) The article ran with a photo of a very attractive smiling educator captioned, "Vera Cogan waits with hard hat," in the foreground of Kenmore High School under construction, where she would serve for four years before named Principal of Innes Junior High.

The same year the new Kenmore High school year began, Vera married Jim O'Neill whose wife, Mary Harp, had also died after many years battling nephritis. Vera and Jim were married on a Friday afternoon in September by Akron Mayor John Ballard in his office and moved into a new townhouse in Hampton Ridge where Vera's "green thumb" encouraged beautiful rose beds and flowering shrubs visited by songbirds.

The couple enjoyed international travel associated with Jim's Flood Company responsibilities and with Vera's summer "People to People International - - Student Educational Travel" with high school student exchanges throughout Europe over numerous years.

After completion of 32 years of teaching, in retirement, Vera ran for and was elected to the Akron Public School Board, serving from 1988 through 1991. When Jim retired in 1989 from the Flood Company in Hudson, they began wintering in LaBelle, Florida on the Caloosahatchee River and continued their residency at Hampton Ridge. Visits to Florida were a long tradition for Vera during decades of her career. Harvey and Esther's children and grandchildren routinely celebrated Christmases in the Florida Keys in Marathon, fishing often within sight of the historic Seven Mile Bridge.

The couple enjoyed many friends in Sarasota while continuing long relationships with former teachers, family and friends in Akron. Vera marked her 97th birthday this past January -- a birth date she traditionally celebrates with her niece, Lyn. This year's birthday brunch was shared with 33 friends and neighbors.

In her words recently regarding her successes as Kenmore High Principal, "I ran it like a grade school. Most high school principals worked in their offices. I did the opposite-- if kids were going up and down the stairs, I did the same. So I learned from being with them. I hardly ever was in my office. I loved to talk to somebody who was teaching. Mary Pullekens, who remained a life-long friend and frequently corresponded with Vera was one of those teachers. Pullekens says, "She had high expectations and never demanded anything from her staff that she would not do herself. I had the most wonderful 38-year career because Vera taught me how to teach." When Vera chatted in Sarasota with friends, relatives and neighbors about her remarkable career, she routinely concluded, "I loved it. I would love to do it all over again tomorrow!"

In recent years Vera and Jim were active in the University Park community. Jim served as an unofficial "welcoming committee" to many newcomers starting new lives coming from communities where they were comfortably established. Vera enjoyed intellectual pursuits – contract bridge, the New York Times crossword puzzle, exploring Sarasota and visiting the Newtown Library where she met new friends and regularly checked out study books.

Vera was preceded in death by her son, Jack L. Cogan, Jr., her husband, Jack L. Cogan, Sr.; her sister, Maryan Esther Snyder Ginter, also an Akron teacher; her brother, Dr. James R. Snyder of McLean, Virginia; and her parents, Harvey and Esther Snyder.

She is survived in Sarasota by her husband, James P. O'Neill of University Park; her sister and brother in law, Dr. Janet Snyder Matthews and A. Lamar Matthews Jr.; her niece and namesake, Vera Kathleen Matthews; her niece and nephew-in-law, Dr. Lynn Turner Matthews and Dr. Matthew Ehrlich and their daughters, Jane Matthews Ehrlich and Lucy Esther Matthews Ehrlich of Cambridge, Massachusetts and Durban, South Africa; her niece, Lyn Ginter Phelps of Towson, Maryland; her brother, Donald E. Snyder of Greenville, South Carolina; her sister-in-law Margaret Lou Browning Snyder of Ashburn, Virginia and many nieces and nephews.

Toale Brothers Funeral Home is responsible for arrangements, private services and interment at Hillside Memorial Park in Akron.

Contributions may be made to ASN (American Soc

Tribute Wall

MD

“ I had Mrs. Cigna as my Sixth grade teacher at Berry Jane elementary. I always thought so much of her. She was very special to me. A beautiful and very good teacher. I ran into her in 1970 in the West side of Akron. Wish that I could have seen her once more. I am not surprised by her illustrious career. She so enjoyed being an educator .

Marianne Hartelust Davies

Marianne Hartelust Davies - February 14, 2021 at 08:30 PM

JD

“ Vera was a beautiful, intelligent, kind lady. She will be missed by everyone in our community. Our deepest condolences.

Jan and Tom Doench - July 31, 2017 at 12:00 AM