

Gwendolyn Nadine Cain Perschbacher



Gwendolyn Nadine Cain Perschbacher of Salida, Colorado, died Sunday, November 29, 2020, surrounded by her family and caregiver Tammy Barnthouse. She was the daughter of Ruth Emma Catherine Reents Cain and Prentice Hartford Cain who preceded her in death. She was also preceded in death by her dearest friend and fellow nurse Ann Anderson of Montrose, CO. She is survived by her husband of seventy years, Raymond Joseph Perschbacher; her loyal pug Pepper; children Kirby Perschbacher (Margo) of Salida, CO, Mike Perschbacher (Colleen) of Cañon City, CO, Ruth Perschbacher Price of Salida, CO, and Mark Perschbacher of Salida, CO. Her sister Katheryn Faye Hessinger (Lee Roy) of Strasburg, Colorado. Grandchildren are Charis Cheeseman (Shawn) and Nicholas Perschbacher of Salida, CO, John Perschbacher of Cañon City, Maude Blaylock (Alex) of Penrose, CO, Kolton Perschbacher of Denver, CO, Kortney Perschbacher (Ted Romanetz, fiancé) of Poncha Springs and Kael Perschbacher of Keller, Texas. Great grandchildren are Cody Cheeseman and Tait Cheeseman of Salida, CO, and Silas Blaylock of Penrose, CO.

Gwen was born at home in Rice County, Kansas, on May 27, 1928. As a child she rode the train from Lyons, Kansas, to attend grade school in Mitchell, Kansas. Her fondest memory of the train rides was the conductor's gift of a pencil box one Christmas. In November of 1942, she moved with her parents and younger sister to Climax. Her father had gone ahead to start at the Crusher for the Climax Molybdenum Company. Gwen's mother, who had never driven in the mountains, started out in a 1936 V8 Ford which was packed from the front seat to the back with a bed for her two-year-old sister Katheryn on top of the piles. On the second day of the trip they found themselves in a line of soldiers who were being moved from Colorado Springs to Camp Hale.

They initially moved into a cabin between Climax and Leadville. The cabin was conveniently equipped with two coal stoves, an outhouse, and fresh mountain water from a nearby creek. They moved to a 3-room cabin in Climax a few months later. They now had a wood burning stove. Compared to the natural gas in their home in Lyons, coal and then wood heat were quite an adjustment. Ruth Cain often told her grandchildren she had to ask everyone to leave the house when she used her gas iron because there "wasn't enough oxygen in the air".

Gwen started school as a freshman at Max Schott school in Climax, riding the bus with the men who worked at the mine, arriving two hours early. She had purchased riding boots but climbing the steep incline from the road to school filled them with snow and she sat in school with cold feet all day. In Lyons, kids sat down and behaved themselves but at this school sitting down was rare as kids threw items about the room and sassed the teacher. Gwen was appalled. There was one girl who was "quite a fighter". One day she and another girl were in a skirmish and Gwen decided to put a stop to it only to get batted around by the two originators.

From a young age Gwen wanted to become a nurse. Her mother had planned to go into nursing but married instead. Two cousins became nurses and they also inspired her. To fulfill her dream and, possibly to avoid the chaos of the Climax school, she convinced her parents to let her move back to Kansas. There she could take the courses, one of which was Latin, required to be admitted into nurses' training. She lived with an Aunt and Uncle and their daughter. She graduated from Lyons High School in 1946 and went to Denver General's nursing program where she met Ann Anderson who would remain her closest friend until her death on January 5, 2017. After graduation Gwen worked on Pediatrics briefly, quit and went home to Climax for the Christmas holiday. Her father wanted her to join the service and she was thankful she didn't because she'd probably have ended up in Korea. Instead she took a job at the Glenwood Springs twenty-two bed hospital where staff worked six days a week.

She planned to go to work in California because the pay was good, and she wanted an adventure. Fate interfered. Due to a smart remark Ray Perschbacher made to Mrs. Berthod of Berthod Motors about his Chevrolet truck making better time up the mountain to Glenwood Springs than the Diamond T's they sold, Mrs. Berthod promised "I'll fix you". She marched Ray over to where Gwen was sitting in a car nearby and introduced them. They married on May 28, 1950, in Glenwood Springs.

They lived in Glenwood until Ray's father became sick and they moved to Buena Vista to assist in the Perschbacher's grocery store. Gwen was the only medically trained person living in Buena Vista at the time and she had frequent calls that involved giving shots, pulling out stickers and drawing blood.

On Labor Day weekend of 1955 they made Salida their home and Gwen began working at the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad Hospital, now the Heart of the Rockies Regional Medical Center. Over her nursing career she started Chaffee County's Public Health Services and the first Home Health agency in Salida, worked for the first mental health clinic in Salida (West Central), and was instrumental in establishing Columbine Manor with the dream of moving away from the medical model nursing home unit that existed at the hospital. She was later employed at Columbine and eventually became the Director of Nursing. She also served as the staff nurse at Starpoint. Throughout her career she stayed in touch with her fellow nursing graduates from Denver General. They often met yearly and reminisced about their school days and stayed up to date with changes in their profession. She retired from nursing several times; her final retirement was May 1991.

Gwen was known throughout the community for her dedication to nursing, care for the community on or off the job and her integrity. Once when she was to be a witness for a trial one of the potential jurors said, "I know Gwen Perschbacher and anything she says is the truth". She was also a witness for one of the first manslaughter trials resulting from drunk driving.

Gwen worked tirelessly with the League of Women Voters for many years. After retirement she became a member of the Daughters for the American Revolution. At the start of the Iraq war, she became a peace activist with Peace Works; at a protest in Colorado Springs, she and others in the group were tear gassed by police.

The Perschbacher Family extends thanks to the many members of Gwen's caregiving village which included: First and foremost Mark Perschbacher, Gwen and Ray's youngest son, Tammy Barnthouse, Johnna Baughman, Juliet Schawb, Martha Quillen, Laura Wagner, Sue Miller, Anita Ruggles and Liv Holmes; Saturday "Coffee Buddies" Bonny Spence, Cecile Young, Beverly Smith, Ruth Ann Lockhart and Marsha Edwards; Rob & Sarah Gartzman and the kind staff at Sweeties; Karen Adamson and her co-workers at Planned Parenthood; fellow Domino players Doris Dunkel, Katherine Hayden, Marie Floyd, Nora Carlson and the late Bernice Walker; the Area Agency on Aging and Meals on Wheels; and the compassionate staff of Heart of the Rockies Home Health and Hospice.

Friends who desire may make memorial contributions to the Ark-Valley Humane Society, Inc., P.O. Box 1335, Buena Vista, CO 81211.

Arrangements are with Lewis and Glenn Funeral Home. Online condolences may be made to the family at <https://www.lewisandglenn.com>

A Celebration of Gwen's Life will be announced at a later date.