



Valerie Whitcomb Valaas

January 14, 1919 - August 27, 2012

Valerie (Whitcomb) Valaas was born on January 14, 1919, in Walton-on-Thames, England, to Gertrude and Philip Whitcomb. Her parents were both native Kansans, but Philip was working as a journalist in London. When her parents separated, her mother returned to Topeka, KS, where Valerie and her two siblings grew up. She spent summers at the Whitcomb family cabin in Buffalo Creek, CO, where she made lifelong friends, acquired her love for the outdoors, and learned many campfire songs that she passed on to her own children. She graduated from Topeka High School in 1934, and from Washburn College in 1938, majoring in English.

In 1941, she moved to La Jolla, CA, despite her fears, from a Kansas perspective, that California was at the edge of the known world and in danger of breaking off into the Pacific. While working as a secretary at the Army's Camp Callan, she met John Robert Knox "Bob" Valaas from Monitor. They were married on March 6, 1943, in La Jolla. Their first son, John, was born in September of 1944 at Ft. Lewis, before Bob was transferred to France.

When Bob returned to the United States in September of 1945, the small family moved to North Central Washington. Their first orchard experience lasted a year and a half at Manson. A second son, Andrew, arrived while they lived in Manson. In 1947, they moved to Entiat, where Bob managed a warehouse for J. M. Wade. With the desire to raise the family on an orchard, they purchased one - with a sweeping view of the Wenatchee Valley for Valerie - at the end of McMullan Road in Sunnyslope. Three more children,

Joan, Lisa and Peter, joined the family in Sunnyslope. The Sunnyslope orchard was the home where they raised children, apples and pears for 41 years.

Picnics, camping at Chikamin Creek, swimming at Lake Chelan, day hikes and family backpacking trips filled summer weekends in the 1950's and 1960's. The family cabin on the Wenatchee River at Plain, built in the 1970's, replicated her childhood summers in Colorado and was a much loved retreat for Valerie and Bob, which they graciously shared with family and friends. With her own children established in school, Valerie went back to school herself, graduating from Central Washington in 1962, with a teaching degree and starting a long career teaching French, English and Latin at Orchard Jr. High and Wenatchee High School. There are many former students of hers in the Wenatchee Valley who still speak French with a slight Kansas accent. Her love of learning and of literature provided a firm foundation for her children's own education. She could - and would - correct anybody's grammar in English, French or Latin, and woe to any French-themed restaurant that opened in the Wenatchee Valley that misused a definite article in its name. She was a member of the Zetetic book club for three decades, and although relieved that she no longer had to provide reviews after age 90, she continued to run a book discussion group at Columbia Heights and to edit the Columbia Heights newsletter into her nineties.

Valerie was a very active supporter of her church, her children's schools and held strong views on politics. She was a Girl Scout troop leader for years, taking her young troop camping. The arrival of grandchildren increased her sewing output, and she focused on quilts, making a high school graduation quilt customized to the interests of each of her 15 grandchildren. She was a member of the Blockbusters quilt guild, helping with the annual quilt show for decades.

In 1988, Bob and Valerie sold the Sunnyslope orchard and moved into Wenatchee, living on Elmwood Street. In 2003, Bob suffered a severe stroke and Valerie provided loving care for him until his death in 2005.

Valerie was preceded in death by her husband of 62 years, Bob; her parents; her brother, John; sister, Phyllida "Fiddle"; half-brother, Giles; and many dear friends in the Wenatchee area. Her survivors include her children and their families, John (Joan) Valaas of Medina, Christopher, Karin, and Katie; Andrew (Nancy) Valaas of Yarrow Point, Robert (Kate), Anne (Colin), and Elizabeth (Dan); Joan (Geoffrey) Ferguson of Medina, Kelsey, Ian (Sonya), and Valerie (Ian); Lisa (Greg) Pecknold of Seattle, Aja, Sean, and Robin; Peter (Susan Westerlund) Valaas of Wenatchee, Ryan, Laura (Jay), and Kirsten; and five great-grandchildren. Also surviving are her half-sister, Gillian Whitcomb of Paris; and sister-in-law, Margaret (Wayne) Doane of Wenatchee.

Valerie died in peace and in anticipation of entering eternal life, surrounded by her family the morning of August 27, 2012, at age 93. She lived life fully up to the end, never losing her engagement with life or her interest in the people she shared this world with. She had spent the previous afternoon at her beloved cabin in Plain, visiting grandchildren and great-grandchildren, but she was fully ready to move on.

A Service of Celebration will be held at 2:00 p.m. Saturday, September 1, 2012, at St. Luke's Episcopal Church, 428 King Street, Wenatchee.

Memorials, if desired, may be made to St. James Episcopal Church, P.O. Box 351, Cashmere WA 98815, the Community Foundation of North Central Washington (Bob and Valerie Valaas Health Sciences Scholarship fund), 9 South Wenatchee Ave, Wenatchee, WA 98801 or at www.cfncw.org, or a charity of your choice.

Please express your thoughts and memories on the online guest book at jonesjonesbetts.com. Arrangements are by Jones & Jones-Betts Funeral Home.

Tribute Wall

SM

“ Valerie was a sorority sister of my mother at Washburn College. I visited the family with two high school friends the summer of 1964 on a road trip around the country celebrating our high school graduation. The Valaas family were all wonderful to us, including us in the latest adventure, and even giving us a tour of the apple orchard and the business. Delicious apples were just becoming popular and we helped Bob design the logo for them. Lots of fun and good memories of a great family.

Susan Morse (daughter of Helene Hawkins Morse)

Susan Morse - August 21, 2021 at 04:34 PM

KS

“ I met Madame Valaas on my 1st day of high school in a brand new town. She entered the classroom & spoke only in French. I was quite sure that I was in the wrong class & had somehow ended up in a class for an upper level French student!

This was not the case, she just wanted us to know that her plan was for us to learn French.

I took French all through high school. I took my "French" to France, Belgium, Luxembourg & of course, back to my homeland of Canada.

I also learned to cross-country ski with Madame on one of her many excursions for our French Club.

To this day, I still love & speak French & I love to cross-country ski. My daughter is studying French in college & I have another studying French in high school. The Middle School sister listens to French CD's at home. They have grown up hearing my stories of the "Wonderful Madame Valaas"

I cherish everything day I spent in Madame's classes. I cherish that she believed in us, I cherish that she lives on in my own children. My heartfelt condolences to all of her family. Please know how much Madame was loved.

*Kathryn Southwick-Hess
Wenatchee High School
Class of 1978*

Kathryn Southwick-Hess - September 02, 2012 at 09:02 PM

KJ

“ *My condolences to the Valaas family. I grew up in Sunnyslope and went to school with Joan. What I remember most about Valerie was her beautiful smile. Bless you Valerie, you will be missed.*

Karen Dennis Jones

Karen Jones - August 30, 2012 at 04:49 PM

DG

“ To the Valaas family, Debbie and I are truly sorry and saddened by the passing of Valerie. Valerie (Mrs. Valaas) was a great teacher and even greater friend. Her smile and kindness to both of us was a very special blessing in our lives. Our love and prayers go out to her and your family.

Don and Debbie Gurnard

Don and Debbie Gurnard - August 29, 2012 at 04:17 PM