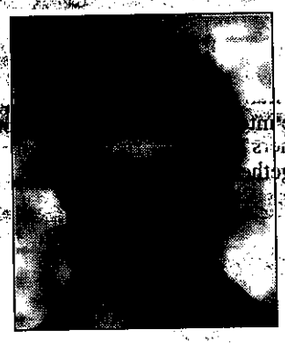
GHR
7-9-12

Rachel Ann (Staley) Obermiller



Rachel Ann (Staley) Obermiller died at her home at the Mayflower Community in Grinnell, Iowa, on June 24, 2012. She was 87.

A memorial service will be held 10:00 a.m., Wednesday, July 18, 2012, in the Carman Center of the Mayflower Community. Inurnment will be at Hazelwood Cemetery in Grinnell.

Memorials may be directed to the Mayflower Human Needs Fund.

The Smith Funeral Home of Grinnell is handling arrangements.

Rachel was born Jan. 11, 1925, in Denison, Iowa, the daughter of George Staley and Ethel (Malone). She graduated from the University of Northern Iowa with a bachelor's degree in education and taught for several years in St. Louis and Des Moines. On June 10, 1950, she married Raymond J. Obermiller. The couple settled in Sioux City, Iowa, where Ray coached several sports and was a counselor at Central High School while Rachel stayed busy raising their four children. In 1966, the family moved to Grinnell, where Ray took a job at the college, coaching swimming and cross country and serving as head of academic advising.

Fondly remembered by Ray's athletes, Rachel loyally attended every home meet and hosted parties at their home just blocks from Grinnell College campus.

From the beginning of their relationship, Rachel supported Ray in every aspect of his life. She introduced him to great literature and provided financial help while he finished college so that he could focus on his studies without the distraction of holding down two jobs.

Ray and Rachel's relationship is an inspiring story of love and devotion that extended through Rachel's struggle with Alzheimer's disease. Keeping her with him at the home they shared at the Mayflower, Ray made sure her every need was provided for, including attention from several devoted caregivers who became like family. Everyone who knew them was inspired by their love and caring for one another. Even in the advanced stages of her illness, Ray could still coax a beautiful smile from her that made each day seem brighter.

Rachel was always devoted to her family and made sure her father, mother and nearby aunts and uncles in Denison were taken care of in the later stages of their lives. As a mother, she used her remarkable teaching skills to ensure that each of her four children could read and write — so much so, they found themselves well prepared for the challenges of their later schooling. At the same time, she encouraged her children to explore their imaginations to the fullest. Pipe cleaners and Styrofoam balls became historical and literary characters. When she read Winnie the Pooh aloud to her enraptured children, she would adapt a voice for each character, turning words on a page into magical, unforgettable moments.

While her children were growing up, they would often see their mother at their schools, where she volunteered as a teacher's aid. For relaxation, Rachel loved nothing better than her backyard garden, where she coaxed her flowers and plants into glorious bloom and could nurse even the sickest houseplant back to bright-green health. She also loved family history and wrote a book on the subject — a warts-and-all search into the lives of her amazing ancestors that was both beautifully written and remarkably candid.

After their four children were grown and on their own, Rachel and Ray took many camper trips, exploring the country wherever their hearts took them. In their great love story, it was one of their favorite chapters. Along the way were many wondrous sights and adventures. But more than anything, the two relished the time alone together.

While Alzheimer's diminished Rachel's wonderful way with words, both written and spoken — she could tell stories that sounded like great literature — she learned to express herself in more direct ways. She loved to joke with and tease her caregivers. Everyone remembers best that smile, her eyes shining bright, that showed the most essential part of her — her kind, caring spirit — was still with us. It is what those who loved her will miss the most.

Rachel is survived by her husband; her four children, Gretchen Given, Max, Beth, and Tim (Karyn); and five grandchildren, David and Todd Given, and Erik, Rachel and Anna Obermiller. She is preceded in death by her parents and her two sisters, Barbara ("Bobbie") and Edith Mae.

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Rachel Obermiller

Rachel Obermiller, 87, of Grinnell, died Sunday, June 24, 2012, at her home.

Services will be held at a later date. Smith Funeral Home is handling arrangements.