

Louise B. Preer

November 24, 1917 - October 10, 2013

Obituary

Dr. Louise Bertha Preer, a retired research scientist who also grew orchids and wrote short stories, died at home Thursday, Oct. 10. She was 95 and had battled lymphoma since 2011.

Born in Baltimore, Md., in 1917, Dr. Preer, known as Bertie, was the youngest of four children of Harry and Caroline (Homberg) Brandau. Her father, who was an engineer, died of cancer when she was just 6, and the loss was keen for her and her family. Bertie excelled in academic pursuits from an early age with formidable talent in science, but she also won prizes for learning and speaking French, and was devoted to reading and literature throughout her life.

With the encouragement of her high school French teacher, Bertie won a scholarship to Goucher College in Baltimore, where she graduated in 1939. She continued her studies at Indiana University, where she studied botany under Dr. Ralph Cleland and earned her Ph.D. in 1947.

It was also at IU that she met a young biology student, John R. Preer Jr., and the two began a romance that lasted the rest of her life. Their education and courtship were entwined with the nation's preparations for entry into World War II, and their wedding in 1941 was low-key, at her family home in Baltimore. After her husband returned from service overseas, the young couple lived on an Army base in Texas and started a family; their son James was born in 1944 and his brother Robert in 1948.

After completing their degrees at IU, they moved to Philadelphia, where John spent 20 years as a biology professor at the University of Pennsylvania. As a young mother, Bertie successfully juggled homemaking and raising two sons with science, working in the lab where her husband's paramecium research was breaking ground.

Their scientific work took the Preers to Bloomington for a yearlong sabbatical in 1957, and to Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1967. In 1968 they moved permanently to Bloomington, where they continued to work in their lab until the early 2000s.

Trained as a botanist, Bertie became interested in orchids after their second move to Bloomington, where they bought a home on Maxwell Lane that had a large greenhouse. She loved giving her gorgeous blossoms away and provided blooms to Bloomington Hospice for many years prior to her own illness.

Throughout her years in Bloomington, Bertie also nurtured warm friendships with an array of neighbors, colleagues, and correspondents. She made bread, jewelry, and stories, polishing autobiographical vignettes that were by turns touching, engaging, and humorous.

After falling ill in 2011, at age 93, she inspired awe by successfully completing cancer treatment, and the couple celebrated their 70th wedding anniversary with a joyful party at home. That year Bertie also rediscovered the autoharp, an instrument that allowed her to play and sing along (featuring her prodigious memory for lyrics) during musical sessions with family and friends.

Bertie is survived by her devoted husband, John, her son James and his wife, Jean, and her son Robert and his wife, Adele Foy; grandchildren Genevieve (Linus Tsai) and Stephen Preer (Vis Taraz), and Lily and Sam Preer; great-grandchildren Satchel and Oscar Tsai, Audrey Preer, and Nora Taraz; and a host of loving family members, friends, and neighbors.

A memorial service will be held at 2 p.m. on Sunday, Oct. 20, at Day Funeral Home, 4150 E. Third Street, Bloomington, with a visitation hour at 1 p.m. and a reception following. Bertie's nephew, Rev. J. Elmer Medley Jr., will preside. In lieu of flowers, donations may be made in Bertie's memory to IU Health Bloomington Hospice through the Bloomington Hospital Foundation, PO Box 1149, Bloomington, IN 47402.

Condolences may be left at www.DayFuneralServices.com
(<http://www.dignitymemorial.com/day-deremiah-frye-funeral-home/en-us/index.page>)