

Wanda Isabelle Whitsitt passed away peacefully on June 4, 2023, with loving family by her side. Visitation will be at Morgan Memorial Home, 1304 Regency Dr. W, Savoy, IL 61874 on Friday, June 9th at 1:30 pm followed by a funeral service at 2:30 pm. Rev. Matt Matthews, pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Champaign, will officiate.

We honor Wanda as she lived her life based on the three Fs: Family, Faith and Flying.

Wanda was born December 13, 1931 to Elmer and Alice Bash, Champaign, Illinois. She is preceded in death by her parents and her sister, Shirley Rittenhouse. Wanda met her husband, Donald Whitsitt, as they walked the same route to Champaign High School in the late-1940's. Don would wait for her to cross Prospect Avenue and they would walk to school together. They dated through college as they both attended the University of Illinois. Wanda studied journalism at the U of I even though many told her that she was going to just get married and have kids. And then she got married and had kids, but her writing skills served her throughout her life.

Wanda married Don in 1953. They would have celebrated their 70th wedding anniversary in August. Together, they raised their four children - Steve Whitsitt (Ruby); Karen Russon (Craig); Lori Ellis (Brian); and Scott Whitsitt (Oksana) - in a home they built in Champaign, Illinois. Wanda loved her 12 grandchildren and 8 great-grandchildren. Two more, twin girls, will join the Whitsitt clan in June. (Their mother is a journalist.) As matriarch, Wanda was the ultimate family events' organizer, spearheading decades of holiday celebrations. She loved spending time with all her extended family and there are many happy memories of summer days spent at their cottage on Bayles Lake. Wanda was always eager to bake cookies with and entertain her grandchildren from her closet of game and activities, as well as the painted toy chest of dress up clothes from which many plays were formulated.

Wanda was a member of the First Presbyterian Church of Champaign. She was a woman who lived her faith by example through selfless service to others and devoted her life to volunteerism. Wanda had a 6th sense to show up with a delicious meal when it most needed. Her even-tempered, common sense, optimistic attitude was an inspiration to family, friends, and colleagues. She was a quiet leader with no harsh words in her vocabulary. In addition to church involvement, Wanda's participation extended to Girls Scouts, Junior League, the Red Cross, the Blood Bank, Kappa Alpha Theta sorority, 99s women pilot org and P.E.O Int'l - a philanthropic organization where women celebrate the advancement of women. Wanda celebrated and encouraged the advancement of others while never boasting her own achievements.

After years of sharing his dream of wanting to learn to fly, one night at the dinner table, Wanda challenged her husband to take flying lessons together. At age 48, she obtained her private pilot license followed by commercial and instrument ratings and then taught ground school. Don became her co-pilot. Wanda would pick up her out-of-state grandchildren in her Piper Archer, "Sweet Charlie", for a weekend visit and fly others to lunch at a nearby airport's restaurant.

Wanda channeled her love of flying into a way to make the world a better place. Initiated in her garage in 1980, she founded the nonprofit, Lifeline Pilots, where civilian pilots donated their time, fuel, and airplanes to transport sick passengers to receive medical treatment far from home as well as other humanitarian missions. Lifeline Pilots has become the oldest volunteer pilot organization of its kind and flown nearly 10,000 missions since it began. Because of her influence on aviation and society, Wanda was inducted into the Illinois Aviation Hall of Fame. She received the National Aeronautic Association Certificate of Honor; National Aeronautic Association/Air Care Alliance Most Distinguished Volunteer Award; AARP "Win and Do Good Award" award; and the Endeavor Award celebrating the contributions on the public benefit of flying among other local, state, and national honors.

"There are three things you can do with your life: You can waste it, you can spend it, or you can invest it. The best use of your life is to invest it in something that will last longer than your time on Earth¹." Wanda invested wisely and leaves behind a legacy of service, grace, and humility.

In lieu of flowers, please consider donating to Lifeline Pilots, 4507 N. Sterling Ave STE 402, Peoria, IL 61615 or online at <https://lifelinepilots.org/donate/>.

¹ Rick Warren