



Joan "Heidi" H. Lewis

September 22, 1943 - May 23, 2026

Joan Hilda "Heidi" Lewis, 82, of Kearney, passed away Saturday, May 23, 2026, at her home, after a struggle with cancer. She was surrounded by her three sons and daughter-in-law.

A memorial service will take place Saturday, June 6, at 10 a.m., at Heidi's home, 2219 Ninth Avenue in Kearney. The family is arranging and officiating the service themselves. Horner Lieske McBride & Kuhl Funeral and Cremation Service is handling additional arrangements. In lieu of cut flowers, the family asks for contributions to help create a memorial garden at her home. Details can be found at <https://everloved.com/memorial/joan-h-lewis/>

She was born September 22, 1943, in Petoskey, Michigan, a town on the Lake Michigan shore. She was the third and youngest daughter of Richard and Bessie Johnson. Her family called her Hilda. They settled in Ashland, Wisconsin, a Lake Superior port town, when Hilda was young. She enjoyed Friday night family movie outings and ice skating at the outdoor ice rink. Hilda graduated from Ashland High School in 1961.

Then, she attended what is now the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, earning a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology in 1966. While in college, because she wasn't a fan of the name Hilda, she began having people call her Heidi instead, and that remained her primary name for the rest of her life. After college, she did social work.

She met Thomas Ray Lewis while both were living in Madison, Wisconsin. Heidi was attracted to Tom's quiet sincerity and stability, and he was attracted

to her beauty, passion, and spirit. He ultimately whisked her away from her rural Great Lakes roots to the even more rural Great Plains. The two were married in 1969, and they spent nearly all their 25 years together in Nebraska, raising three sons: Michael, Daniel, and Nathan. In 1979, they settled on a farm near Hendley in Furnas County, where Tom was a cattleman and Heidi was a homemaker. She was committed to her life as a wife, mother, and supporter of the farm. She planted and tended many beautiful flowers, vegetable gardens, fruit patches and trees, and ground cover.

Tom made the principled choice to end his own life in 1994 after a long cancer battle, and thus Heidi began a new life chapter. She took over ownership of the land and cattle and became an able businesswoman and landlord. Over the following decades, she moved to Kearney, Nebraska, then Rochester, Minnesota, then Sioux City, Iowa, and finally back to Kearney, buying and selling residential, business, and agricultural property along the way. She took great pleasure in remodeling the homes where she lived. In addition, she enjoyed ballroom dancing, and she studied and practiced yoga, even training to be a yoga teacher.

The main themes of Heidi's life were creating beauty, being committed to family, maintaining balance and order, and advocating for what's important: preservation of democratic norms, quality education, a healthy environment, end-of-life choice, truth and honesty, and of course, the benefits of yoga. She also made major contributions to two University of Nebraska funds having to do with agriculture, environmental stewardship, and sustainability.

Survivors include her three sons and daughter-in-law, Mike and Tracey Lewis of Sioux City, Iowa, Dan Lewis of Lubbock, Texas, and Nathan Lewis of Lubbock; two sisters, Nellie Dickenson of Ocala, Florida, and Louise Hicks of New Glarus, Wisconsin; and many nieces, nephews, in-laws, other relatives, and friends. She is also survived by three step-great-grandchildren, Tannis, Oliver, and Summer Norton of Sioux City, who gave her the gift of calling her Grandma Heidi.

She was preceded in death by her husband, Tom; and her parents.

Previous Events

Memorial Service

JUN 6. 10:00 AM (CT)

Heidi's home
2219 9th Avenue
Kearney, NE 68845

Tribute Wall

JL

“ I am saddened to learn of Heidi's death but it provides an occasion to note the significance of her life and her achievements. Because we never lived near each other, I didn't have the opportunity to know her well but her having been married to my second cousin did provide getting to know meet her and have some good conversations. Her family is a lasting measure of her and the positive life she lived. I send my sympathies and warmest regards to all of them.

John Lewis, Clive, IA (Des Moines)

John Lewis - June 08 at 10:08 PM

MB

“ Heidi is a dear friend. We were roommates in college for a time, but have always managed to stay in touch over the years in spite of the miles which separated us. It was one of those friendships which matured over time, and of course, many serious conversations. Our favorite topics were always the kids, what we'd been up to, political discussions, and spirituality. It's a blessing to share the experience of "growingup" with someone over the course of 60 years. Thanks for being such a dear friend.



mary bauer - May 29 at 01:10 PM