

Hiawatha, KS

Mary Helen Koehler Lear, known as “Corky” to friends and loved ones, went to be with Our Lord on September 2, 2014 in Hiawatha surrounded by her husband of 67 years and four children.

Mary Helen was born to John and Helen Koehler on November 4, 1925 in Seneca, Kansas. She attended Catholic school in Seneca and her lifelong nickname, Corky, was chosen with her girlfriends based on a popular comic and her curly dark hair. After graduation she moved to Hiawatha where she worked at Kansas Power & Light and played in the women’s softball league. At the end of World War II, she met veteran Bill Lear of Hiawatha. The two married in 1947, and although they always have called Hiawatha “home”, they spent many years moving around the country with their four children and usually a dog. From Kansas to Texas and other states in between, Bill and Corky touched the lives of many friends and neighbors.

In the early 1970s, Bill and Corky settled in Gladstone, Missouri, where they lived, worked and created many memories for their 10 grandchildren. After 28 years in the Kansas City suburbs, Bill and Corky moved back to Hiawatha where Corky wasted no time doing what she did best -- gardening. “Corky’s yard” is known within the community for its perfectly manicured lawn in which she was often found pushing a mower and tending to her many plants even as recently as this past summer. Her garden was made locally famous by her “pumpkin in a pear tree” phenomenon. With the help of Corky’s green thumb, a wayward pumpkin dangled and thrived on a vine that had made its home wrapped around a nearby pear tree.

Gardening was not the only way in which Corky was able to make something out of nothing. She was also a gifted seamstress whose daughters, granddaughters and great-granddaughters benefited from her beautiful creations. Corky was known for her easy laughter and ability to turn everyday occurrences into a funny story. In the kitchen she was known for happily turning out baked goods and meals from scratch with great skill. Corky’s many gifts and talents, which she so gladly shared with friends and family, left behind a legacy that will keep her spirit alive for many generations.

Mary Helen is survived by her husband Bill Lear and children: Barbara (John) Tull, Deborah (Dave) Wilson, William (Patty) Lear and Mary Kay (Larry) Prior. She has 10 grandchildren: Anne Helliker, Mike Tull, Becky Moniz, Lisa (Dave) Thompson, Robin (Chris) Gilbert, Casey (Jory) Collins, Katie Lear, Amy Lear, Megan Prior, and Emily Prior. She has 12 great grandchildren and many nieces and nephews from her seven siblings. Her siblings include; Esther Proffitt, Seneca, KS, Barbie Buckley, Prairie Village, KS, Abbot Ralph Koehler, Atchison, KS, James Koehler, Seneca, KS and Ron Koehler, Independence, MO. She was preceded in death by siblings Col. Leonard Koehler and Rita Broderick. Mary Helen is also survived by sister-in-law Marie Lear of Overland Park, Kansas.

Friends may call at Chapel Oaks Funeral Home after 9 a.m. Friday where the parish rosary will be recited at 6:30 p.m. followed by the family visiting with friends.

Mass of Christian Burial will be celebrated at St. Ann’s Catholic Church of Hiawatha at 10:30

a.m. Saturday, September 6. Father Dan Gardner will be the celebrant. Cremation to follow Mass with private family inurnment at a later date at Mt. Hope Cemetery, Hiawatha.

Memorial contributions are suggested to St. Ann Church or Happy Days Preschool Playground Equipment Fund, which may be sent in care of the funeral home, 124 S 7th St., 66434.

A special message may be sent to the family at www.chapeloaksfuneralhome.com