

Mary Gausman

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Mary Elizabeth Gausman was born to Eva Fern (Rodgers) and Arthur Bastian April 3, 1919, in Ft. Collins, Colo. She grew up on a ranch near Chugwater, Wyo. After high school, she earned her diploma from the state normal school in 1938 and her B.A. in education from the University of Wyoming in 1948. She taught in several small schools from 1938 to 1941 before accepting a teaching position in Torrington, Wyo., where she met Chet Gausman, the school principal. During World War II, both enlisted in the armed services, she in the Women's Army Corps, he in the Marines.

They married on Dec. 27, 1944, in Cheyenne, Wyo., shortly before Chet was shipped overseas and she was assigned to Washington, D.C., to serve with G2 at the Pentagon and the War Department Building. She was later stationed at Oglethorpe, Ga., and Princeton, N.J., where she was a basic instructor and company officer, and at Lemoore Army Air Field, Calif., where she was a squadron commander. She advanced to the rank of first lieutenant and took the oath of military confidentiality seriously, never disclosing the details of her Pentagon duties.

After the war, she and Chet lived in Garland, Neb.; Laramie, Wyo.; Lincoln, Neb.; Hastings, Neb.; and Grand Island, Neb. They retired in Custer, S.D., in 1984.

Wherever she lived, she was an active member in organizations: 4-H, Camp Fire Girls, Mothers' Club, church groups in Wyoming and Nebraska, Custer Community Church, Mary Martha Circle, League of Women Voters, P.E.O., American Legion and Custer County Historical Society. She received numerous acknowledgments and certificates of appreciation for her community service.

She was devoted to the study of history, particularly family genealogy. She conducted extensive research into the family lineage and was the keeper of family papers and memorabilia, cataloging and, later, donating many items to museums. Her WAC uniform is on display at the Custer County Courthouse Museum, and her collection of military patches is on display at the National World War II Museum in New Orleans, La. For her, a family trip wasn't complete without stopping to read the historical markers and interpretive signs along the route, regardless of timing or weather. She also documented history by writing monthly articles about the history of the Chugwater area for the Chugwater Prairie Press for several years in the early 2000s.

She enjoyed travel and made several trips with Chet in connection with his work, including a three-month stay in Amman, Jordan. They later attended dozens of Elderhostels in the U.S. and throughout Europe.

She was deeply interested in her family's pursuits, always encouraging education, travel, adventure and perseverance. As they grew up, her grandchildren, who nicknamed her Muzzy, were included in her holiday cookie-baking tradition, and she was often asked to make her dinner rolls, which were affectionately called Muzzy Bread. She always had some on hand, fresh or in the freezer.

Mary died Sunday, Dec. 12, 2010, at Custer Regional Senior Care after a long battle with cancer. She was preceded in death by her husband, Chester "Chet" Gausman; sister, Metha Blenkarn; brother, James Bastian; and foster sister, Emma Lou (Ekstrom) Moths.

Survivors include her children, John (Nancy) Gausman of Custer, Kris (Harvey) Harrington, Edgemont, S.D., and Hal (Adel) Gausman, Everett, Wash.; and grandchildren, Eric, Will and Gretchen Gosch, Ann (Gausman) VerHey and Jessica Gausman.

A celebration of her life will be held Saturday, Jan. 8, at 1 p.m. at Custer Community Church. A memorial service at Lincoln Memorial Park in Lincoln, Neb., will be at a later date.

Memorial contributions may be made to Mary's childhood church, the Iowa Center Flats Church in Chugwater, Wyo., and sent in care of John Gausman, 12611 U.S. Hwy 16A, Custer, SD 57730. Written condolences may be made at www.mccolleyschapels.com.