



## Stella Dean Kirn

September 18, 1935 - January 4, 2021

Stella Dean Kirn was born Sept. 18, 1935, in Sedalia, MO, to Louis Lynn Gentry and Muriel Frost Gentry.

Her first home was on a rented farm in Warsaw, MO, where she lived with her year older brother, Robert, and parents. It was the height of the Great Depression and the farm lacked electricity and running water. Her father, Red Gentry, when he could, obtained construction work at Fort Leonard Wood and at a munitions factory prior to the start of World War II. Mrs. Gentry stayed home on the farm raising her two children, caring for farm animals plus raising chickens. She and Dean sold eggs and dressed fryers to the market in town on Saturdays. This was her mother's cash "egg money."

At the start of World War II, in early 1942, the Gentry family moved to Portland, OR, where both parents found jobs as welders at Gunderson Bros. shipbuilding yard. Their home was in public housing experiencing their first electricity and running water. After the war, the parents took their savings, returned to Warsaw and bought a different farm, also without electricity and running water.

The family soon returned to the west coast and city life with modern conveniences. Dean attended and graduated from R.A. Long High School in Longview, WA. After graduation Dean attended the local business college

where she honed her typing skills, learned shorthand and basic bookkeeping. She and a classmate, Barbara Root, took their office talent to Seattle where Dean found a job at Seattle-First National Bank. The girls lived at the downtown YWCA with scores of other young, single women. It was there they met another girl, Marene "Bunnie" Doyle. She too became a lifelong friend, who had returned from a glamorous job in Beverly Hills, CA, and was planning to go back.

Soon Dean and her school girl friend, Barbara, moved to Los Angeles, found an apartment and jobs. Dean took pride in her position, going to work wearing nylons and heels, business attire including a fashionable hat with veil and clean white gloves. Dean's office job was with a produce distributor in the warehouse district. The job required her to be at work at 7:30 a.m. when the farm trucks arrived to deliver fruit and vegetables. The owners and managers of Hall, Haas and Vessey treated Dean like a daughter.

The girls shared an apartment in the Wilshire district near Bullock's Wilshire. It was there that Dean met her future husband, Ken, a neighbor. They enjoyed single life dating in the immense city but when they decided to marry, their home would be in the northwest. In 1959, they were married in the Community Church in Longview. Their first home in Seattle was an apartment overlooking Lake Union and the erection of Seattle's iconic Space Needle for the Century 21 World's Fair.

Ken's job transfer and promotion to management resulted in a move to the bucolic Village of Lakewood, NY, situated on beautiful Chautauqua Lake. Their daughter, Karen Lynn Kirn, was born there and it is where they made new friends who remain close to this day. After three years, the family returned to Seattle and a year later to Lake Oswego, OR, for 25 years. Their son, Steven Kenneth Kirn, arrived soon after. Dean became the quintessential homemaker and devoted, loving mom for the rest of her life.

In 1972, with Dean's full support and encouragement, Ken started his own successful business, Columbia Cascade Company. The family moved to Vancouver, WA, and a new home in 1992. The same year the family bought a new second home on the north Oregon coast at Gearhart. Dean immersed herself in the arduous task of decorating two entirely different homes in one year.

Over the past 60 years, Dean and Ken traveled worldwide for pleasure and business. Their first and most memorable travel was to Europe in 1975 where the two of them, 39 and 40, spent all of May experiencing western European culture. Since then they have been to Europe numerous times including the former Soviet Union, but also the middle east, Alaska, Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, Antarctica, Japan, China, Hong Kong, Singapore, New Zealand and Australia.

Dean traveled separately with a landscape architect friend to England, Wales and Scotland on a gardens tour and with Bunnie to Hong Kong and China for shopping and to see The Great Wall. When Karen and Steve were old enough, the family took delivery of a new car in New York where the family began a happy two-week drive home across America pausing in Missouri and Illinois en route, the parents' birth places.

While Dean enjoyed all aspects of motherhood and homemaking she had other interests. As a member of the Lake Oswego Garden Club she enjoyed the camaraderie of her fellow members. Dean entered district competitions at every opportunity and received numerous award ribbons for her flower arranging prowess.

Dean became a volunteer teacher's aide at Forest Hills School, where her

children attended. There she took special interest in dyslexic students, who were being ignored, teaching them to read one-on-one while sitting eye-level on her special learning carpet.

Later Dean discovered the Albertina Kerr Center on Portland's eastside, a residential institution that provides homes for profoundly handicapped youth and adults. Dean was an outstanding volunteer salesperson in Kerr's Economy Jar gift shop until 2015. "The Jar" sold gently used fine jewelry, China and furniture. It was there that "Dean's Posse" was formed; five women friends Dean introduced to each other who met thereafter twice yearly for lunch and a fun-filled good time naturally including shopping.

In winter Dean was always eager and ready for a warm weather holiday. A condo at Elua Village, Wailea, Maui was her very favorite destination but not always. Sometimes Palm Desert, Key West, the Caribbean or southern hemisphere travel would beckon.

Even as a child born during the Great Depression, despite growing up on a humble farm, with flour sack dresses Dean never felt poor. She was always positive, felt blessed to be an American, ever grateful for the opportunities that special status provided to her. She is survived by her husband of almost 62 years, S. Kenneth Kirn; son, Steven Kenneth Kirn (Katrina); and four grandchildren. Her daughter, Karen Lynn Robinson; parents, and brother, Robert preceded her.

A small funeral service was held the morning of Jan. 9 in the chapel at Evergreen Memorial Gardens, Vancouver, where Dean was laid to rest. Pastor Ted Buck of Columbia Presbyterian Church gave the eulogy for Dean and the 25 family and friends who were permitted to attend.

# Tribute Wall



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**Evergreen Memorial Gardens** - July 03, 2025 at 06:46 PM

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“ *Stella Dean Kirn*

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**Funeral Home Owner** - February 10, 2021 at 12:00 AM

SB

“ *I was so sorry to learn of Dean's passing. She was such a gracious hostess and I always enjoyed time spent in her company. I will make her delicious chocolate pot de cream recipe that she shared and celebrate her memory. Much love to Ken, Steve, Katrina and the kids at this sad time. Warmly, Sharon and Wes*

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**Sharon Bishop** - February 07, 2021 at 12:00 AM