



Norma Jean Bilyeu-Hilst

January 15, 1930 - May 23, 2026

Norma Jean Bilyeu-Hilst, 96, of Effingham, Illinois, formerly of Manito, passed away peacefully at Willowbrook Memory Care Residences on Saturday, May 23, 2026 with the love of family around her. She was born on January 15, 1930, in Pekin, Illinois to Dillard and Mabel (Knuppel) Worner. Norma Jean graduated from Manito High School and entered nursing school in Peoria, Il. at St. Francis Hospital. On November 14, 1948, Norma Jean married George Bilyeu and they were married over 51 years. He was a Manager at Caterpillar and engaged in farming. They were charter members of the Forest City Community Church. Both had many friends and built a beautiful life together living on their Centennial farm. They loved to travel and were in pinochle club for many years. He preceded her in death on August 11, 2000. They had 3 daughters, Cynthia (Craig) Wise of Effingham, Illinois, Cathy (Ken) Cotter, of Altamonte Springs, Fla. and Carolyn (Dale) Hansen, of Canyon, Texas. She is survived by

her daughters and grandchildren: Anna (Ben) Westhoff, Cassandra Selby, Kendra (Charles)

Nassar, Kyle Cotter and step-grandchildren: Thomas (Katie) Wise and Ann (Alex) Cruz,

Brandi (Tyler) Roy, Steven (Autumn) Hansen and 11 great-grandchildren.

In 2002, she married Wayne Hilst of Manito and they enjoyed 15 years together, gardening,

traveling and even zip-lining in their 80's. He preceded her in death on November 30, 2017.

Among her survivors are: stepchildren, Kirk (Penny) Hilst, Leanne (Dave) Lucas and Trudy

Hufford, as well as step-grandchildren: Kyle (Uyen) Hilst, Jesse Hilst, Blake (Emily) Hilst,

Josh Lucas, Christy Hufford and 5 great-grandchildren.

She loved music and began singing with her father in church at the age of 6.

As an adult,

she served over 20 years as the Music Director of the Adult choir, Junior choir and,

intermittently, the Bell Choir. Norma Jean loved the Lord and had a deep passion to teach

Children's Sunday School and share her faith about Jesus.

She was very active in the community and served as Chairman of the American Cancer

Society of Mason County for over 15 years, providing educational programs.

Because her

mother died of cancer at a young age, Norma Jean was committed to this cause. She was

an active member of the Manito Historical Society and was on the Board of the Salvation

Army. Norma Jean was honored by the Manito-Forest City Rotary Club when they

designated her as a Paul Harris Fellow. It is the highest honor bestowed by Rotary International.

Norma Jean enjoyed being in nature and loved animals, flower gardening, traveling and attending musicals and theater. She rode horses from a very young age. She was exemplary as a mother, grandmother and great-grandmother, traveling far and wide to keep up with their activities. She had a smile for everyone and was very intuitive sensing others' sorrows. Hospitality was one of her gifts and she hosted many family reunions, Court Whist, Pinochle Club, and numerous gatherings for her daughters' friends. She made her home a welcome place for all. Red Velvet cakes were her specialty, which she gave as gifts at Christmas.

Funeral services will be held at the Forest City Community Church on Monday, June 1, 2026. Visitation will begin at 9:00 a.m. followed by the funeral at 10:00 a.m., officiated by Rev. Frank Brozenak. There will be a luncheon after the funeral service at the church, followed by the graveside service at Meadowlawn Cemetery in Manito. The family invites anyone that would like to join them.

Memorial contributions may be made to the Forest City Community Church, American Cancer Society, Mason County Pets Without Parents, or donor's choice.

Friends and family

are invited to share a story or leave messages online for the family at www.hurleyfh.com.

Maas-Hurley Funeral Home, in Manito, is in charge of arrangements.

The family would like to sincerely thank the staff at Willowbrook 1 in Effingham for their

compassionate care and the love they showed our mother during these years.

We also

thank her hospice nurse, Karen Kreke, with Transitions Hospice, for being so kind,

competent and sensitive during this journey.

Cemetery Details

Meadow Lawn Cemetery

801 E. Meadow Lawn St.
Manito, IL 61546

Previous Events

Visitation

JUN 1. 9:00 AM - 10:00 AM (CT)

Forest City Community Church
203 W. Market
Forest City, IL 61532
(309) 597-2111

Funeral Service

JUN 1. 10:00 AM (CT)

Forest City Community Church
203 W. Market
Forest City, IL 61532
(309) 597-2111

Tribute Wall

AT

“ To: Cynthia, Cathy and Carolyn:

I was sorry to learn of your Morher"s passing. I was out of the country so I missed the services. As I read the obituary and the part about the red velvet cakes it brought back many memories, especially the homemade, hand cranked vanilla ice cream. What a treat on a hot summer evening! Norma Jean was a gracious, sweet and welcoming person and I am sure she will be sorely missed. The world is a lesser place without her in it. My deepest condolences.
Alan Tucker

ALAN TUCKER - June 08 at 08:59 AM

SS

“ Steve and Kim Singley lit a candle in memory of Norma Bilyeu-Hilst



Steve and Kim Singley - June 01 at 09:14 PM

LC

“ Norma Jean was such a gift to me as a second Mom to me while I was in college . She and George treated me like family ; so many beautiful memories filled with laughter and joy -I am so thankful for that . She embodied Grace and used all of her gifts and talents to bless others . Sincere appreciation for a life well lived for Jesus . Prayers of comfort and strength for her entire family and friends during this time . With love , Lori and Jim Clifford

Lori Clifford - May 31 at 09:23 AM

LH

“ Larry And Mary Hundt sent a virtual gift in memory of Norma Jean Bilyeu-Hilst



Larry and Mary Hundt - May 30 at 09:36 PM

LK

“ Love, Tom, Katie, Ann, Alex and kids purchased the Country Basket Blooms for the family of Norma Jean Bilyeu-Hilst.



Love, Tom, Katie, Ann, Alex and kids - May 28 at 01:39 PM



“ Gracious Lavender Basket was purchased for the family of Norma Jean Bilyeu-Hilst.



May 27 at 07:26 PM



“ A [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) was planted in honor of Norma Jean Bilyeu-Hilst.

May 27 at 07:26 PM

LO

“ I did not know Norma, but do know her daughter, Cathy. So sending sympathies to Cathy and the rest of the family. Norma sounds like a wonderful lady. Zip lining in her 80's, I am impressed.

Lynne Onken - May 27 at 01:44 PM

LO

“ Lynne Onken lit a candle in memory of Norma Bilyeu-Hilst



Lynne Onken - May 27 at 01:41 PM

DL

“ Our thoughts and prayers are with you during this difficult time. Your mom was a special lady.
Dale and Donna Lawson

Donna Lawson - May 27 at 09:28 AM



“ 2 files added to the album Memories Album



Hurley Funeral Home - May 27 at 08:59 AM

CD

Cynth, I was not blessed to know your mother but she sounds like a wonderful person who accomplish much with her long life. I send my 🙏 for all your family at this time. Cherish your special memories and share them with those you love. Hugs! Cathy Douglass

Cathy Douglass - May 27 at 12:05 PM