



## 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](http://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

# Upcoming 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

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

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**Donna Lawson** - 1 hour ago



“ *2 files added to the album Memories Album*



**Hurley Funeral Home** - 2 hours ago