

Barbara Heller, 82

July 16, 1931 - Sept. 7, 2013

PORTSMOUTH — Barbara Rose Heller, daughter of Joseph and Mary (Hammes) Sondag, was born on July 16, 1931 on the family farm east of Portsmouth. She was baptized and confirmed at St. Mary's Our Lady of Fatima Catholic Church in Portsmouth and attended St. Mary's Catholic School, graduating with the Class of 1949. She graduated with three of her lifelong friends and they were known as the "Four Roses". After finishing high school, Barb attended Commercial Extension School in Omaha and then found work at the Federal Land Bank Association in Harlan for the next five years.

Barb married her high school sweetheart, Rich Heller, on April 8, 1953 while he was on a leave of absence from the United States Navy. They were united in marriage by her brother Msgr. Joseph Sondag at St.



Mary's Catholic Church in Portsmouth. The newlyweds lived in Bremerton, WA and San Diego, CA over the next year and a half, while Rich finished his duties in the Navy. Barb gave birth to their first son, Gary, in January 1954 while Rich was away on active duty. In November 1954, Rich and Barb returned to Portsmouth, where they have resided and raised their family since. They celebrated their sixtieth wedding anniversary on April 8, 2013. Barb provided a loving home for their four children: Gary, Bob, Joann, and Paul. As the family grew, she spent many hours in her large garden growing and canning vegetables. She found joy in nature, watching the birds and butterflies in her beautiful flower gardens. When she wasn't busy with the children's activities, she was helping out with the family business, Heller Oil and Tire, which Rich and his two brothers owned. Barb often worked keeping the books for the station and traveling to pick up tires and supplies (she was the town expert on Omaha shortcuts).

Barb was a member of the American Legion Auxiliary and volunteered for many civic duties including election officer. She was very dedicated to St. Mary's parish as a Eucharistic Minister, Sacristan, and a member of the Altar and Rosary Society. She also enjoyed her weekly card game and wouldn't miss an opportunity to have coffee and conversation each morning downtown with her lady friends. Barb was a generous woman and took care of many of her family and friends over the years. She was always there for those in need and spent time caring for others. Barb loved to travel and visit family. Barb and Rich shared many adventures traveling together. Barb died on Saturday, September 7, 2013, at the Avoca Nursing Home having attained the age of eighty-two years, one month, and twenty-two days.

In addition to her parents, Barb was preceded in death by her siblings: Marie, Francis, Ted, Msgr. Joseph, Suzette, and Rich. She is survived by her husband of sixty years Richard Heller of Portsmouth; children: Gary Heller and wife Deb of Deerfield Beach, FL, Bob Heller and his wife Sue of Lenexa, KS, Joann Miller and her special friend Richard Fuhs of Harlan, and Paul Heller and his wife Valerie of Baltimore, MD; six grandchildren: Jason Heller and his wife Jessica, Steve Heller and his wife Angli, Stephanie and her husband Phil Wnek, Kyle Heller, Daniel Miller, and Kelsey Heller; three great-grandchildren: Will Heller, Anabelle Heller, and Cooper Heller; sisters-in-law Joan Sondag of Harlan and Leona Sondag of Portsmouth; other family members and friends.

The 10:30 a.m. Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated by Rev. Tom Dooley on Wednesday, September 11, 2013 at St. Mary's Catholic

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Church in Portsmouth. Deb Muell accompanied Ramona Kaufman, Harold Huebner, and the St. Mary's Choir. Honorary casket bearers were Jason Heller, Steve Heller, Kyle Heller, Kelsey Heller, Stephanie Wnek, and Daniel Miller. Serving as casket bearers were Bob Sondag, Jerry Sondag, John Langenfeld, Ed Sondag, John Heller, and Rog Heller. Interment was held at St. Mary's Cemetery in Portsmouth.

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