



Ethel Laws

September 12, 1918 - November 26, 2007

Ethel Laws -- Kankakee Visitation for Ethel Laws, 89, of Kankakee, will be from 11 a.m. Thursday until the 1 p.m. services at the Clancy-Gernon Funeral Home, Bourbonnais. Rev. Steven Goodin of Asbury United Methodist Church will officiate. Burial, with military rites by the American Legion Post, will be in Kankakee Memorial Gardens, Aroma Township. In lieu of flowers, memorials may be made to the family. She died Monday (Nov. 26, 2007) at her home. Ethel Laws (Mrs. Byron Laws) was well known in Kankakee for active participation in numerous civic enterprises. She marked two firsts: first woman elected to town clerk, and first woman commander of American Legion Post 85. As a perfectionist, she always left things better than she found them, and as a wife/mother she will always be most precious. Ethel Pentek was born Sept. 12, 1918, in Pittsburgh, Pa., to John Pentek and Elizabeth Toth Pentek of Hungarian ancestry. After the family moved to a farm in Ohio, she attended Wayne elementary and high school and graduated in 1936. Ethel coined the class motto "Success Waits at Labor's Gate" by which she lived her entire life. She cherished the large family of five sisters and one brother. Her initial work experience was managing housekeeping for the prominent Rosenblum family estate and the residence of Mr. Magg and his sister, Mrs. Brown, who owned the Youngstown, Ohio, newspaper and radio. She did her patriotic duty during World War II, enlisting in January 1943, training at Daytona Beach, Fla., in business administration, and transferring to Fort Knox, Ky., in April as part of the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps. In September 1943 it became the

Women's Army Corps and she achieved staff sergeant rank, serving as chief clerk of the S-4 Supply Division, maintaining records on all armored vehicles, armaments, ammunition, as well as top-secret records and documents stateside and abroad for Lt. Col. Sanders of the Armored Replacement Training Center. It was at Fort Knox where she met Byron S. Laws and they were married on March 16, 1945. Discharged Dec. 24, 1945, they returned to his native home of Kankakee where Byron was employed by Florence Stove Corp. (later Roper) and they settled into a home and family life. Ethel and "Red," as he was known to his friends, loved Kankakee and entertained often. They were blessed by a son, Russell B. Laws, born Feb. 23, 1947; and a daughter, Janet E. Laws, born Oct. 8, 1948. Ethel strongly supported her children in their activities at home, school and community. She was active as den mother for Cub Scouts, as treasurer of Longfellow School PTA, in the Kankakee Band Boosters, and personally nurtured artistic talents in Russell and musical efforts in Janet. Family tradition included outdoor sports with archery, basketball, hunting and fishing high on the list. They often were spectators at Cubs and Sox baseball games. Early vacation spots included Wisconsin/Michigan lodges, Grand Canyon adventure, and family gatherings in California, Florida and Ohio. Ethel combined her artistic training and talents with her high standards of perfection in doing retouching with Blankenberg Photography Studio. Byron and Ethel ran a successful popcorn stand in Bird Park. In the 1950s her culinary skills and business acumen supported her venture in running a small local dairy store with soda fountain treats and rotisserie chicken offerings. The Daily Journal often featured stories of her catering work and gourmet savvy. When the Hungarian refugees immigrated to the U.S., Ethel was instrumental in helping translate and teaching them to speak the English language and adopt U.S. customs. Ethel served as a Kankakee judge of election from 1947-65, as well as a precinct committee woman for 18 years, and as a member of the Kankakee Women's Republican Federation. In spring 1965 she was the first woman to be elected as Kankakee Township official, Town Clerk. In September 1965 a life-altering event was the

death of her husband, Byron, just weeks after her son, Russell, enrolled in college at SIU. Her strong will and faith helped her face adversity with determination and grace. Already an intense and motivated woman, she became independent and pursued her political career, serving five consecutive four-year terms before retiring. During those years she was a member of the Illinois Township Officials Association and the Illinois Township Clerk's Division and served as editor of the Illinois Township Clerk's News Reporter from 1977-79. She provided both children with college educations, and more importantly a sense of right and wrong, and the values that served her so well; among these are LOVE and COURAGE. In 1971, Russell and Pam were married in Kankakee, graduated college, and moved to Boise, Idaho, in 1973. Russell became an architect and Pam a TV station director of creative services. Janet graduated from Augustana College and the University of Illinois and taught math at a community college before her career with the University of Illinois as a computer analyst. Beyond the ever-present mother, she also grew professionally and spiritually. She continued her education at Olivet Nazarene College on a part-time basis from 1957 to 1977 in fields of music and business administration. In the summer of 1970 she toured France for a month, studied French at the University of Strasburg, and traveled through Austria, Germany, Switzerland and Italy with daughter Janet, making a special visit to relatives in Hungary. She was employed at Volkmann Jewelers from 1965-78, and later for First Trust & Savings Bank Trust Department from 1979-81. Ethel was a member of the Asbury United Methodist Church and the Riverside Hospital Auxiliary, a museum volunteer at the Kankakee County Historical Society, active in Woman's Club, Elks Emblem 414 and the Moose ladies group. She was an active member of Zonta International and held many offices in the 1970s for the Kankakee Chapter from Director to President and was a delegate to their International Convention in Germany in 1979. To the end, she treasured the many friendships from this group. The American Legion Post 85 had a special place

in Ethel's heart. Serving her country was important to her, and continuing to preserve that precious freedom was a lifelong passion. After holding virtually every position possible, including senior vice-commander, post adjutant and chaplain, Ethel was the first woman to be elected Commander in that Post in 1979. She later was elected Junior Vice-Commander of the American Legion 18th District. Ethel's achievements were recognized in Who's Who of American Women in 1983-84, after scaling back to a single job and easing into retirement. She and her youngest sister, Irene, traveled to Raratonga, one of the Cook Islands in the Pacific and visited Puka-Puka where Irene's husband's raft landed during World War II after 33 days at sea. Ethel passed on her love of nature to her children and it was a mutual focus on many travels. She traveled with Russ and Pam to Raratonga in the Cook Islands in 1993. Ethel and her brother, John, journeyed to their ancestors' homeland in Hungary in 1992, and she and her son, Russ, shared a voyage on the QE2 in 1994. In 1996, Russ and Pam invited Ethel and Janet to join them in parts of Scotland and Dorset/London areas in England. Other trips took her to Australia/New Zealand and Cancun, as well as Seattle, Salt Lake City and Boise. Ethel's retirement years were spent diligently cultivating her flower garden and lawn and she was proud to see them flourish. Her sense of order prevailed in her home and she lovingly remodeled her kitchen and sunroom. She visited her children and celebrated several milestone birthdays. In 2004, she lost her son, Russell, to cancer at the age of 57. She was at his side; once again she demonstrated strength and acceptance of God's plan. She is survived by her daughter, Janet E. Laws and her fianc , Steve Mey of Urbana; daughter-in-law, Pamela Laws of Boise, Idaho; and three sisters, Mary Luteran and Julia Helscel of Youngstown, Ohio, and Irene Pastula of San Diego, Calif. She was preceded in death by her husband, Byron S. Laws (1965); son, Russell B. Laws (2004); sister, Elizabeth Szush; and brother, John Pentek. In life, "Mother Laws" was humble; in death, we are proud.

Tribute Wall



“ 1 file added to the album *Tribute Album*



Clancy-Gernon Funeral Homes - December 07, 2010 at 02:12 PM