



Winifred McAbeer Phillips

March 28, 1939 - November 5, 2022

On Saturday, November 5, 2022, a great woman passed away at her home with her family caring for her and ensuring she was comfortable.

Winifred McAbeer Phillips, “Winnie” as she was called by those who were close to her, was born on March 28, 1939 in Berkeley, California to Fred and Sara McAbeer. She was an only child until later in her life when she became a half- sister to Thais and Ian McAbeer. As a young girl she moved to Mammoth at Yellowstone National Park and there, at the age of eight, contracted polio and was transported back to Kaiser Vallejo hospital for treatment. For a girl no longer able to be physically active, reading became a constant habit. She quickly became a true bookworm who loved the worlds she visited in books. Once out of the hospital, Winnie attended St. Basils and St. Vincent’s Catholic schools in Vallejo. Her family moved to Napa in 1955 where she attended Napa High School, graduating in 1957. Using her love of literature as a base, she decided to major in English at the University of California, Berkeley “CAL” and received her Bachelors of Art in English in 1961. About 10 years later she received her Masters of Arts in English from Sonoma State University.

Winnie was a life-long high school English teacher and taught at various schools through-out her career starting at Mt. Eden in Hayward and retiring from Armijo High School in Fairfield. She was an amazing teacher as she was committed to open up her students’ eyes to literature, creative writing and for

them to learn to love to read as she did. She believed that outstanding teachers share the commitment to keep learning student-centered and owe all of their students the chance to stretch and expand beyond even where they think they can go. Although she was known to teach the most challenging courses, she was well respected and the favorite teacher of many because of the way in which she taught and engaged her students. Her classroom was filled with posters of characters, or locations described in the books the students read and it brought life and energy to the classroom. She made the English assignments relevant and always had time for any need a student had. Most nights she was up grading papers during the week and although it took most of the time in the evenings, she loved to see the progress her students were making. She was honored at the Teacher of the Year by Solano County and Teacher of Northern California from the Bay Area Writing Project organization which she was amongst a select few outstanding teachers representing the State of California. At the end of her career, she changed her focus from the AP / College Prep classes to working with kids for whom English was a second language. She really enjoyed helping them grasp the complexities of the language and coached them to become fluent.

Being with family was the most fulfilling aspect of Winnie's life. She met her husband, Armond Phillips when they were both teaching at Mt. Eden High School in 1963. They were married on December 20, 1964, and anyone who has spent time with them together truly has witnessed one of the best marriages a person could hope for. They were respectful of one another, kind and generous. They both believed they were each other's equals, and they expressed their love and joy being together. Most often they would be found reading in the front room, watching a PBS mystery, dancing to their favorite music, or perhaps going for a drive up the coast. It didn't really matter what they did or where they went as long as they were together.

She is the mother of two daughters, Rachel Phillips and Megan Sherman

(Dave), who were raised in Napa. The family moved to England in 1976 to experience life living abroad for one year while Armond worked at the American School of London. Once in England the family was on the go to visit towns where favorite authors lived, or to see a cathedral, museum, village or small town. Winnie wanted the girls to have the best experience of living in another country and to appreciate the diversity they were witnessing. As a mother of daughters, it was important for her to instill in them self-respect, independence, self-advocacy, empathy and to always know their voice was important and speaking up in life was essential when advocating for one's self or another person.

The girls flipped things a bit for Winnie and Armond because they gave their parents five grandsons. The tide had turned and it was now a house of boys. Outside of being Armond's better half, her favorite role in the world was being a grandmother. She saw her five all the time and not only spent time with them, but she was involved in their lives intimately. Charlie and Michael Wyckoff lived so close they were able to see her daily and with Luke, Jack and Reed Sherman it was at least one a week in Santa Rosa. She read to all the boys when they were little, took them to museums, the Exploratorium, Academy of Science, Golden Gate Park, and of course to the Cal football games.

Winnie was bright, well read, and she embraced life's challenges with grace and courage. Surviving polio as a child molded her to have grit, guts, commitment and humility. Her children and grandsons saw a woman that had no barriers she couldn't overcome and they learned from her strength, fairness, the value of relationships and to be one's own person. She enjoyed supporting organizations and programs that promoted and advocated for women. One of the organizations close to her heart that she was a member of was PEO International. It holds a special place in her heart because of its

dedication to celebrate the advancement of women and its desire for women to achieve their highest aspirations. Women's independence, self-reliance and equality was important to her and she led her life being seen as a strong woman, who had a voice, was confident to join any conversation expressing her opinion and leading life with a questioning attitude.

Winnie treasured time with her dear friends, painted beautiful watercolors for her family, and enjoyed traveling around the country and throughout the world. One of her favorite trips was to South Africa and going on safari. Another highlight for her was the accomplishment of visiting every state in America. She embraced living her last few months to her fullest capability. She never complained in life and didn't do so during her illness. During her last days of life, the one thing that struck everyone was her will to live and be present. She was so strong and courageous.

The family will have a private graveside burial at Tulocay Cemetery in Napa. Although Winnie loved flowers, we suggest donations to the Napa PEOXM chapter scholarship in her honor. The scholarship will provide funding to women so they can continue advancing in education. Please make checks payable to PEOXM Chapter and send in care of Rachel Phillips to 1116 Hilton Avenue Napa, CA 94558.

We don't know what there is after death; however, if there is an afterlife, we sure hope Winnie has a chance to meet William Shakespeare and all the other great writers she admired.

Cemetery Details

Tulocay Cemetery

411 Coombsville Rd
Napa, CA 94558