
Erna Barnickol - School Nurse



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Having squeezed every last drop out of her 94 years of an active and travel filled life, Erna Barnickol packed her bags one last time, bid her family and friends adieu, and departed for her next adventure on February 27, 2019. The angels have undoubtedly already discovered that the new arrival is a force of nature.

Born in Korb, Germany, Erna immigrated to the Yuba-Sutter area at the age of five. Growing up in Sutter, she soon met a dashing young suitor - a quiet, athletic, handsome fellow named Barney Barnickol. Like many in the "Greatest Generation", they both served their country during WWII. Barney as a Marine Corps tank commander on the islands of Tarawa and Okinawa in the Pacific, and Erna in the Cadet's Nurses Corps.

After the war Erna and Barney built a life in Yuba City, where, in addition to raising three daughters, Erna embarked on a 30 year career as the school nurse at Yuba City High School. Never one to sit still, and always one to help others, she soon became active in wide variety of passion projects and nonprofit groups.

Erna's work with high school students fueled her development as a maverick sex educator. In 1969, she launched a public lecture and workshop series intended to bridge the generation gap and explore with the community how to face sex "openly, critically and responsibly." She never tired in her efforts to support sex education, and in 1988 she was honored with a place as a delegate to the California State Governor's Conference on Health Education.

A lifelong member of the Soroptimist International, Erna was awarded the Soroptimist's "Women Helping Women" award in 1989, in recognition of her commitment to prenatal care for teenage mothers and their continuing education and job training. In 1983, she developed an innovative program on the prevention of child abuse issues with Parent's Place.

Erna served on numerous boards of directors, including the Children's Home Society, the Sutter County Mental Health Advisory Board, and the Sutter Buttes Garden Club. She was active in the American Field Service Organization, a group that facilitates travel and housing for foreign exchange students, and led the Yuba Sutter Chapter as its President in 1964. She also welcomed three foreign exchange students into the Barnickol home over the years, resulting in life long relationships around the world.

She joined the American Lung Association of California in 1973, and soon became a key spokesperson for the group on the dangers of smoking and second hand smoke. Erna spearheaded the effort that led to the passage of the first smoking control ordinances in Yuba and Sutter counties in 1987. She was elevated to the ALA's top California post in 1990, when she became its President.

In her free time, of which she surely had very little, Erna acted, dance and

sang in numerous musicals around town. Her favorite role was surely "Ernesta" in Hello Dolly. Her piano playing and singing pumped life into many a social get together, especially at Christmas, where the classic "O Tannenbaum" was a favorite she never tired of singing.

The family does not know exactly where she caught the "travel bug," we only know that at some point she was exposed to it and never recovered. In addition to traveling throughout Europe on many occasions, she spent time in more exotic places, such as China, Peru and Australia. Despite her extensive travels, her favorite destination continued to be the west side of Lake Tahoe, where she could be found most summers swimming, hiking, and exploring in and around Rubicon Bay.

Erna was loved by her three daughters, Cindy, Kris, and Liz, who each in their own way reflect the best parts of their mother. And her three sons-in-law, all young men when Erna first accepted them as her own. Known only as "Mimi" to her grandchildren Nicole, Todd, Atlee, Spence, and Mitch, and her great-grandchildren Jack, Cole, Grace, Sophia, and Carter, she will never be forgotten by them for her warm hugs and ready smile.