



Mary Elizabeth Simonson

November 18, 1946 - August 3, 2023

Mary Elizabeth Simonson (Paulson) was born on Nov. 18, 1946, in Valley City, N.D. to Hon. William L. “Bill” Paulson and Jane E. “Betty” Paulson (Graves) the younger sister to brother Hon. John T. “Jack” Paulson. She graduated from Valley City High School and earned her bachelor’s degree from the University of California-Berkeley.

After marrying Hon. Mikal J. Simonson on May 30, 1970, she would go on to earn her master’s degree from the University of North Dakota. Following social work in Fort Yates and Valley City, Mary became the Executive Director of the Open Door Center in Valley City, a position she would hold for 41 years until her retirement on June 30, 2023.

Mary enjoyed working. Her clients, co-workers and the daily and long-term planning and interaction in providing high-quality care for those who were developmentally disabled or impacted by a traumatic brain injury were her passion. Through various avenues, Mary strived to provide for the clients of the Open Door Center and improve their lives, garnering unique and groundbreaking work opportunities and public interaction for those under the organization’s care throughout her tenure.

She is a member of the North Dakota Special Olympics Hall of Fame, president of the VCSU Foundation, past president and member of Valley City

Rotary, and an active member of All Saints' Episcopal Church.

When not at work, Mary was an avid golfer, a great cook, and enjoyed spending time at her lake cabin in Detroit Lakes, Minn., or at her condominium in Destin, Fla., especially when surrounded by family or joined by friends for extended stays at either destination. She loved the holiday season and was a huge fan of Christmas carols and decorating ahead of family gatherings during that time of year.

An early riser, she often prepared fresh caramel rolls and cinnamon buns for the rest of the family who would wake up several hours later, often working in a trip to the grocery store or a nearby Wal-Mart (her favorite shopping destination) ahead of dawn to make sure everyone had what they needed to start their day.

Mary died surrounded by family and friends on Aug.3, 2023. She is survived by her sons, Nicholas Simonson (Angela Sersha) of Bismarck, N.D. and Mikal Benjamin "Ben" Simonson (Mira McLain) of Valley City, N.D., and three grandchildren, Alexander "A.J." and Jackson Simonson of Bismarck, and Soulvie Simonson of Valley City. She was preceded in death by her parents and by her husband.

In lieu of flowers or monetary gifts, donations can be sent in her honor to Open Door Center, 129 3rd Ave. NE, Valley City, ND 58072, or the VCSU Foundation, 101 College St. SW, Valley City, ND 58072.

A prayer service will be held at the Eagles in Valley City at 4:00 pm on Aug. 9, with celebration of life and reception to follow. Episcopal funeral rites will be conducted for family and close friends at All Saints' Episcopal Church in Valley City at 10:30 am on Aug. 10, with burial at Woodbine Cemetery.

Cemetery Details

Woodbine Cemetery

Valley City, ND

Previous Events

Prayer Service

AUG 9. 4:00 PM (CT)

Eagles Club
345 12 Ave NE
Valley City, ND 58072

Celebration of Life and Reception

AUG 9. 5:00 PM (CT)

Eagles Club
345 12 Ave NE
Valley City, ND 58072

Episcopal Funeral Rites for close Family and Friends

AUG 10. 10:30 AM (CT)

All Saints Episcopal Church
516 Central Ave. N.
Valley City, ND

Tribute Wall



“ *Oliver - Nathan Funeral Chapel created a Tribute Video in memory of Mary Elizabeth Simonson*



Oliver-Nathan Funeral Chapel - August 08, 2023 at 03:30 PM

JB

What a Beautiful Memories of Mary and her family...

Julie Barth - August 09, 2023 at 12:03 AM

JG

So many memories of a loving family and neighbors from long ago. There is no doubt Mary had a beautiful soul and did great works with her time on earth. Thank you for sharing these, your personal memories, with us.

Judy Gray - August 10, 2023 at 02:41 PM

DO

“ SINCERE CONDOLENCES TO MARY'S FAMILY AND FRIENDS !
THE VIDEO OF MEMORIES IS A PRECIOUS KEEPSAKE FOR
FAMILY.
SHE MADE HER JOB LOOK EASY ALTHO WE KNOW IT WAS
MANY
TIMES DIFFICULT. THANK YOU MARY FOR KEEPING ON IN
SPITE
OF THOSE CHALLENGES. MAY THE MEMORIES YOU HOLD
DEAR
BE A COMFORT IN THE DAYS TO COME.

DURWARD, PHYLLIS, DEAN OTTERNESS - August 09, 2023 at 03:57 PM

DO

Dean takes deaths hard. phyllis Otterness

DURWARD, PHYLLIS, DEAN OTTERNESS - August 09, 2023 at 04:02 PM

JB

“ So sorry to hear of the loss of Mary... she
was such a wonderful host when we came to
Detroit Lakes for Soulevié's second birthday.
Our heart aches for the family. Sympathy to
Ben, Mira, Soulvie and all the family. She will
be missed... Paul and Julie Barth



Julie Barth - August 09, 2023 at 12:12 AM

CP

“ I have worked/known Mary Simonson for 40 years. I work in the State DD Office and enjoyed getting to know and knowing Mary. Mary and I would attend meetings and talk about our kids and then work. Mary was always so nice and so friendly to me. Mary wanted what was best for the individuals that Open Door Center served. I am proud to call her my friend and sad for your loss. God Bless you Mary and your children.

Colette Perkins - August 08, 2023 at 01:53 PM

CP

“ Colette P. planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Mary Elizabeth Simonson.

Colette P. - August 08, 2023 at 01:48 PM

RM

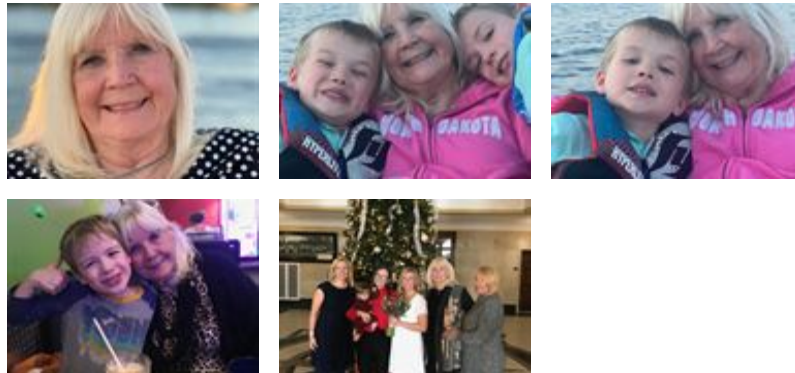
“ I have known and worked with Mary for the past 34 yrs in my role as consulting psychiatrist for Open Door and Soaring Eagle. She has accompanied her clients to my office more than a 100 times over those years. She was tremendous to work with. Her caring and concern for her clients and staff was evident at every contact. She was the heart and soul of Open Door and made it the great community treasure and resource that it is. I am very sorry for your loss.

Robert Olson MD Sanford, Fargo

Robert Olson MD - August 08, 2023 at 11:20 AM



“ 133 files added to the album LifeTributes



Oliver-Nathan Funeral Chapel - August 08, 2023 at 10:06 AM



“ I worked at the Open Door for 26 years.. Mary always made herself available to staff and individuals. She took the time to listen. She truly was a role model to many.

Jane Plecity - August 07, 2023 at 08:27 PM



“ We are deeply saddened by Mary's passing. What a loss to our community and our state! Mary was a dynamic leader in our community serving on the Board of the Development Corporation, President of the VCSU Foundation Board of Directors, and so many other positions of leadership. She was destined to making our world a better place. Her 41 years of outstanding leadership as the Executive Director of the Open Door Center is a shining example of her lasting impact, touching the lives of so many in such a special way.

To Mary, it was never a job, it was a life! We are fortunate that our paths in life have crossed. She was an inspiration to us all. She will be missed! May she rest in peace. Larry and Mary Lee Robinson, Valley City.

Larry and Mary Lee Robinson - August 07, 2023 at 03:08 PM

SM

“ *My condolences to all of Mary's family and friends. I will always remember Mary for her kindness, laughter and friendship. She was truly the best boss one could have. She will be missed.*

Sarah McGough - August 07, 2023 at 11:54 AM

TG

“ *My sympathy to all on the passing of Mary. A wonderful person. I remember her working the breakfast shift at the cafe run by the ODC.*

Thomas Goven - August 07, 2023 at 11:50 AM



“ *Peaceful White Lilies Basket was purchased for the family of Mary Elizabeth Simonson.*



August 07, 2023 at 11:25 AM



“ *A [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) was planted in honor of Mary Elizabeth Simonson.*

August 07, 2023 at 11:25 AM

GM

“ I am so sorry to hear of Mary’s passing. We were neighbors for many years on Big Detroit Lake. Ran into her last summer at the flea market in Detroit Lakes and had our picture taken with her. She was so nice and a very caring person. My heart goes out to her wonderful family. RIP Mary
Gary and Marlys Mills

Gary & Marlys Mills - August 06, 2023 at 01:58 PM

BJ

“ My deepest condolences to all of Mary’s family. She was truly a force in Valley City for all those years. She will indeed be missed.

Bill Jahn - August 06, 2023 at 11:13 AM



“ Mary you will be so missed by so many. It’s been years but I’ll never forget your high school shenanigans and that “bug” you drove. You were a rare gem who definitely earned her wings. rIP 🙏🙏🙏 Paula (Twamley) Heinze Rodriguez

Paula Heinze - August 05, 2023 at 08:56 PM

CM

“ My sincere sympathy to Mary Simonson's Family. From the very first time I met Mary I knew our friendship was real. She has helped me in so many ways, Thank You Mary for your thoughtfulness, knowledge, kindness, compassion, thank you for being YOU. God Bless You All Carrie Maresh



carrie maresh - August 05, 2023 at 08:33 PM

JD

“ I was saddened to see the passing of Mary. She was instrumental in my time as a student at VCSU while working at the Open Door Center. Coming from Fargo, my family had been very involved in Special Olympics as a volunteer in Fargo. Mary encouraged me to not only volunteer but also to be a coach. I am forever appreciative of her kindness and encouragement. Joe Deutsch

Joe Deutsch - August 05, 2023 at 03:27 PM

JB

“ We so loved being around your mom when we would come up to the lake and see Cliff and Marion. What a lady she was who gave her all to everyone around her. Our sympathy to your family❤️

Julie Becker - August 05, 2023 at 10:12 AM



“ Arrive in Style was purchased for the family of Mary Elizabeth Simonson.



August 05, 2023 at 09:37 AM



“ Blue Caribbean Bouquet was purchased for the family of Mary Elizabeth Simonson.



August 04, 2023 at 10:43 PM