



Irene Miele Visnich

March 9, 1924 - October 24, 2021

Irene Miele Visnich died on October 24, 2021 at the age of 97 at her home in Asheville, NC. She previously lived in Pittsburgh, PA.

Irene Miele was born in 1924 in Avella, Pennsylvania. She was the daughter of Amelia Baroni and Giovanni Miele. Her maternal grandmother Isabella Fontana emigrated from Ronco Cainari in the Trentino-Alto Adige region of Italy. Irene's mother Amelia Baroni was born in Bridgeville, Pennsylvania. Her father, Giovanni emigrated from Cassino, Italy south of Rome. Irene had one sibling, her brother Albert Miele, who died in 1988.

Irene was married to William Philip Visnich for 52 years. William "Willow" died in 2001.

Irene was born in a company house in a coal mining village near Avella, Pa. She grew up during the Great Depression and endured many hardships. She attended Avella Area Schools and was a cheerleader in high school and was also on the women's basketball team. When Irene was 15, she was attending a May Day dance at her school where she met her future husband Willow. She first danced with his brother Sam, but after dancing with Willow, she was sure that she liked him best.

Irene recalled that as a young child her father was out of work so the family

moved to Detroit so that her father could work in the Ford factory. They traveled to Detroit on Giovanni's Harley Davidson, with Albert riding behind his father and Irene and her mother in a sidecar. In Detroit, they lived in a boarding house owned by an Italian family. Later the family moved back to Avella and her father resumed his work in the coal mines.

After high school, Irene attended Duff's Business Institute in Pittsburgh. She studied office management skills and was a top student. After graduating, she worked for the Pennsylvania Railroad at the historic Union Station on Liberty Avenue in downtown Pittsburgh. She told stories of walking on her lunch break to attend mass at St. Patrick's church in the Strip District.

Irene was determined to join the Navy on her 20th birthday in 1944. She would visit the Navy recruiting office regularly and she would remind the officers that she was coming on her birthday to enlist, which she did. She was following in the footsteps of her beloved brother Albert, who was also serving in the Navy, on a submarine in the south Pacific.

True to her word, Irene enlisted in March 1944 and when asked about several places that she could serve, including nearby states, she asked to be placed in either Alaska or Hawaii. She received training in Cleveland Ohio, and at Hunter College in NYC, and then served for two years in Pearl Harbor, which was still recovering from the Japanese attack in 1941. Irene lived with the other Navy WAVES at Scofield Barracks in Honolulu.

This period was a defining moment in Irene's life. She was a determined, independent young woman who was unafraid to forge into the future and travel alone to new places. She loved serving in the Navy and made many close female friends who formed an alliance of strong young women.

Another defining moment in Irene's life came after the war, when her destiny

was tied to the destiny of William Visnich, "Willow." Willow had already returned to southwestern Pennsylvania from serving in the US Army in Europe and was at a club with some friends. Another young veteran sat next to him at the bar and asked for a cigarette. Willow opened his cigarette case which had a photo of Irene in it. The other young man exclaimed "that's my sister!" and the two spent the evening talking and laughing about the coincidence. Willow had written to Irene from his service in Europe during the war and was very taken with her since that first meeting in high school. Albert, Irene's brother, was so impressed with Willow that he encouraged Irene to get to know him better. Willow and Irene started to date seriously and the rest was history.

Irene loved being a mother and she was involved in many community and school activities. She was chair of the Ways and Means committee of the PTA and was successful in raising money and donations for school functions as her children were growing up. After her children were older, she returned to work and was employed by Universal Cyclops Steel in Bridgeville, PA as a payroll administrator. She worked there for over two decades, and in the late 1970's experienced the turmoil in the Pittsburgh area steel industry regarding the lagging economy and massive layoffs of steelworkers.

When Irene was laid off along with others in her payroll division (all women) they were not eligible for the higher benefits given to the men in the factories. Irene challenged this decision on the basis that the women in the payroll division were terminated due to declining payroll in the mill, yet were not eligible for the same higher benefits as the men. She filed a class action lawsuit against the US Department of Labor that was later dismissed when the economy improved. Irene was committed to the empowerment of women.

Irene also enjoyed shopping for a good bargain, looking for the best olive oil in the Strip shopping district in Pittsburgh and shopping at "Gabe's." She loved

walking, exercising, cooking and baking and following politics. She was very proud in 2020 when she was involved in a postcard writing campaign to help elect Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff of Georgia to the US Senate. Irene wrote hundreds of postcards and kept asking to write more. Irene was a lifelong Democrat and cherished her memories of her hero, Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

Irene loved travel and traveled widely after her retirement. Her curiosity about new places and her flexible and open travel approach was refreshing. Irene traveled to NYC, Maine, Florida, the Bahamas, the Oregon coast, Seattle, the Outer Banks, Washington DC, Beaufort SC and Hunting Island, and most memorably to Alaska with her daughter Cindy and granddaughter Millie when she was 89. Irene was thrilled to be in Alaska with her grandson Ben and his young family. While in Alaska, Irene fished and boated at Lake Aleknagik near Dillingham, visited Etlukna Lake, hiked on Flattop Mountain, took the boat tour at the Alyeska Glacier, and rode the Alaska Railroad to Seward.

Irene's wonderful sense of humor, easy laugh, positive attitude and bright smile endeared all to her. She will be deeply missed by her family and friends.

Irene will be interred in the National Cemetery of the Alleghenies in Bridgeville, Pennsylvania with her husband William Visnich-which was both of their wishes. A service will be announced at a later date.

Irene is survived by three children-Donna Visnich Enty of New York City; William Albert Visnich of Pittsburgh, PA; and Cindy Visnich Weeks, of Asheville, NC. She is also survived by four grandchildren, and eight great grandchildren. She was preceded in death by her grandson Benjamin William McDowell who passed away in February, 2021.

Tribute Wall



“ *Cindy L Weeks lit a candle in memory of Irene Miele Visnich*



Cindy I weeks - June 07, 2025 at 08:13 AM



“ *Irene Miele Visnich*

October 07, 2023 at 11:15 AM



“ *Cindy lit a candle in memory of Irene Miele Visnich*



cindy - November 24, 2021 at 09:41 AM



“ *Cindy lit a candle in memory of Irene Miele Visnich*



cindy - November 19, 2021 at 11:47 AM

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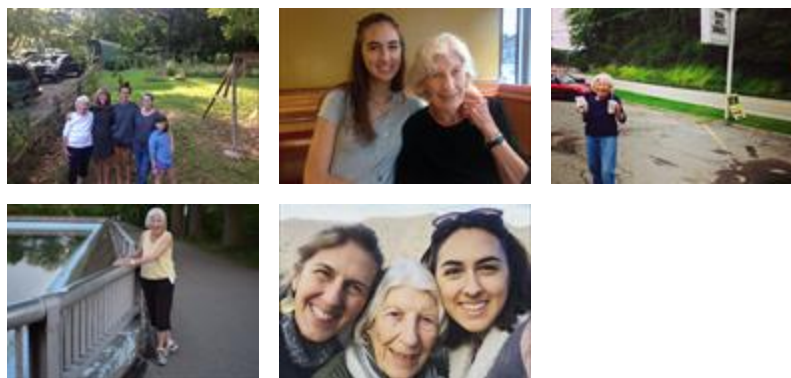
“ Cindy lit a candle in memory of Irene Miele Visnich



cindy - November 16, 2021 at 06:21 PM

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“ 87 files added to the tribute wall



cindy - November 01, 2021 at 05:11 PM

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“ 21 files added to the tribute wall



cindy - November 01, 2021 at 04:48 PM