

Memorial Service:
11:00 a.m., Monday, June 26, 2023
First Presbyterian Church
Miller, South Dakota

Minister:
Pastor Robert Brooks

Usher:
Rich Waldrop

Musical Selections:
"Amazing Grace"
"Grandma's Garden"
"How Great Thou Art"



Following the service,
everyone is invited to join the family
for lunch and fellowship in the church hall.



Darlene Marie Johnson
September 24, 1930 - June 21, 2023

*Her coffee was black as her hair. Her beautifully painted
nails hid remnants of garden dirt, and her heart was as
gracious as her opinion was strong. Darlene Marie Johnson
knew hardship, and she held high standards because of it.
But, at her core, Darlene was a humble woman driven by
her love for family.*

Born September 24, 1930 to Mamie (Palmer) and Earl Jack Johnson, Darlene called South Hand County home for all of her 92 years. Even moving to assisted living in 2021 and the nursing home in May 2023 couldn't take the South Hand out of Darlene.

Though she would tell you that sums it up, her family knows better because the details of growing a family and building a life are where Darlene shined.

Darlene attended the Blacks Hills Teaching School after graduating Miller High School in 1948. She taught country school in South Hand, but quickly knew her hands weren't meant for tending classrooms. Instead, Darlene's hands and heart were meant for tending her own family.

Of course, if you told her then that finding her best life would include that wild Johnson boy from up the road, she'd have politely but certainly told you exactly where you could have gone with that notion!

Wallace Johnson and Darlene were born 23 days apart and grew up within miles of each other in South Hand County. They graduated as Miller High School classmates. That's all Darlene cared to know about that neighbor Johnson boy, too; until her car broke down one day, and Wallace was the one sent to fix it.

The short of their story included their wedding on December 27, 1949. They spent the next 72 years married and loving their four children, 10 grandchildren, and 22 great-grandchildren. There was not one without the other until Wally died on August 22, 2021.

Darlene was a faithful companion and work partner. She set an especially strong example for her nine granddaughters and lone grandson. Darlene's door—be it to the house or the camper—was always open, and if a pitcher of iced tea or pot of coffee wasn't already waiting, it'd be on shortly.

Though Darlene preferred farm work of any kind over cattle, she respected the cow herd because Wally and her son Neal loved everything about it. Anyone caught complaining about the smell from a sale barn or a cattle yard was quickly educated on the smell of money and the importance of ranch work. For not loving that side of their life, she could routinely be found sitting in the high seats at local auction barns with Wally.

When not working, Darlene often rallied Wally to gather the grandkids and head to a fishing dam. Special bamboo poles were a treat from Grandma. As the grands grew older, Darlene and Wally looked forward to local fishing trips with her sisters and their husbands.

In their golden years, you could also find Wally and Darlene at the Golden Buffalo or the Lode Star most Friday nights. After dinner, he took to a blackjack table while she had a knack for slot machines. Darlene didn't much care for anyone else's opinion on gambling, but she did take care to make sure her family knew one rule: Never walk in a casino with more than you're willing to leave there.

Darlene loved by example.

She tended a large garden and taught her family that hard work resulted in tasty rewards. She canned countless vegetables, baked delicious treats, cooked hearty meals, and welcomed everyone to her table. Darlene sewed as many doll clothes for her granddaughters as she did clothes for her own children, and though it didn't stick for most, she tried her best to teach them to do the same. Each of her great-grandchildren even received his or her first doll from Gramma Darlene.

Storms frightened Darlene, and mice disgusted her, but family was absolutely everything.

Left loving Darlene is her cherished son, Craig of Sioux Falls; faithful daughters: Brenda (Neil) Duxbury of Wessington and Kim (Jim) Petik of Keldron; devoted daughter-in-law, Janet Johnson of Miller; brothers-in-law, Mark (Bernadine) Johnson of San Diego and Carroll Morford of Highmore; 10 grandchildren; 22 great-grandchildren; and a host of nieces and nephews.

Those greeting her in heaven included her parents; her husband, Wallace; beloved son, Neal; sisters and their spouses: Vivian (Clemmet) Johnson and Donna (Lowell) Droz; brother, Earl (Margaret Morford); daughter-in-law, Louise Johnson; and special nieces: Laura Graham-Eskandarion and Mary Johnson.