

**Verna Dorothy Carlson Knott** was born on a farm near Columbia, SD, on March 11, 1927. The youngest of three sets of twins, she and her twin sister, Vera, weighed 5 pounds each. Her parents were Frank Henrick Carlson and Anna Josephina Bloomberg who emigrated from Sweden in 1919, coming through Ellis Island. Frank had a cousin in Columbia, and was sponsored by him. He and his local sweetheart, Anna, married in Aberdeen, and had seven children, six of whom were twins!

During high school, Verna, who taught herself baton twirling, twirled all over the state, even giving lessons in Gettysburg. She won a scholarship to Berea College (KY) and then returned to attend Northern State in Aberdeen, where she earned separate degrees in teaching and art, her lifelong career and passion, respectively. At Berea, she learned to play the violin and continued to play into her later years. She loved to sing, and sang alto with a quartet, singing the old standards, and taught herself the accordion. Her first school was Daly Corners near Columbia, at the age of 19. She met the love of her life, Johnny Knott, when he came to work for his uncle Connie Hansen, near Columbia. Anna Louise Knott, and Maxine Knott, Johnny's sisters, played matchmaker as they were in the area teaching. It took seven years, because Verna was then only 16, and Johnny was helping his newly widowed Mother, Emma Mikkelson Knott, at the farm in Lebanon.

Johnny and Verna married in October 1950, and Verna moved down to Blue Blanket Valley and embraced the community and land surrounding the Knott Family Farm that had been homesteaded in 1888. She taught two years at North Canton, a one room schoolhouse, sitting on Hwy 212, near the Tolstoy road corner. One of her six first graders that year, in 1958, was Margie Lee, her only child, who had been born in 1951. Verna and Margie migrated down to the Lebanon Grade School, where Verna taught every grade of the Lebanon "Bulldogs", served as Principal, coached Girls Basketball, spoke around the state on teaching reading, and went out every recess, rain or shine, and played softball with the kids. She always said she never had a kid she didn't like. She retired in 1990, wanting to spend time with Johnny, and on her art, and poetry.

Verna began writing poetry at the age of seven, and chose the pen name, Carlee Swann, derived from her father's name, Carlson, and the original family name, Swenson, which was changed at Ellis Island. She published her first poem in the Dakota Farmer Magazine in 1934. She published and illustrated four books of verse, won the South Dakota Poet of the Year award in 1977, the Grand Prix National Poetry Award in 2001, and sponsored, judged, gave workshops, and won poetry contests at the state and national level. People have loved to read her verses illustrated with her own charming line drawings depicting the people, flora, fauna and life on her beloved prairie.

Art came naturally to her. She taught classes, and became a well-known wildlife painter, selling her work around the country. In the last years she had converted the garage to her art studio.

In 1999, her only grandson, Yuri, was hit by a car and killed on I-94 in MT, and less than three years later, in 2002, Johnny was hit and killed by a drunk driver near Cresbard, SD. She acquired a broken back, and head injuries, and never was the same person. She lived alone at the ranch for five years, and then moved to Fort Worth, TX to live with her daughter Margie, and husband John Fisher, and two granddaughters, Claire, and Grace. She lived with the family for eight years, returning in summer to her beloved "Hermitage."

In the summer of 2015 she was admitted to the Alzheimer's wing at the Oahe Manor in Gettysburg, SD where she lived for three-and-a-half years until her death. She passed away on November 23, 2018, at the age of 91, after a courageous battle with the deadly disease.

She was preceded in death by her parents, husband Johnny, grandson Yuri, and brothers, Herbert, Henry, Stanley and Edwin Carlson, and her sister, Lucille Carlson Collins. She is survived by her twin sister, Vera, 91, of Aberdeen, her daughter, Margie Knott Fisher and husband John Fisher, and two granddaughters, Claire Christina and Grace Anna.

Verna Knott was a great lady, one-of-a-kind, a humorist, humanitarian, poet, artist, teacher, and lover of nature and animals. She was beloved by all and will live on in her art, poems, and in our hearts.



