



Mary E. Carlson

October 3, 2025

Mary Ellen Carlson, 83, of Fort Collins, Colorado, peacefully passed away on October 3, 2025. Born Mary Ellen Minnihan on March 17, 1942 in Jefferson, IA, she was a devoted wife, a loving mother, grandmother, great grandmother, and the perfect example of a true Irish Catholic farmgirl.

Born to parents Edward and Loretta Minnihan, Mary grew up in an Iowa farmhouse built in the late 1800s with no indoor plumbing. One of six kids, she learned the kind of family commitment and work ethic that can only come from hard work on a farm. The Minnihan farm was a true family affair, and Mary and her siblings helped her parents farm corn, soybeans, oats, and raise Hereford cattle, hogs, chickens and horses. As a child she pitched in on all the needed chores and cooking, but her favorite task was doing anything with the horses. Mary's memories of the farm were always strong, and later in life she would recall her many chores in the chicken house: always placing food, water and fresh straw for the hens; being chased by the bantams that "would stalk you like a mountain lion;" and collecting, washing and packaging eggs so the family could take the extras into town to sell them to the creamery, which would then enable them to buy groceries at the store. While life on the farm had its challenges, she would fondly reminisce of her childhood: "We had a good-sized farm with room to roam. People talk about free range chickens, but we were free range children. It was amazing. I used to feel sorry for my cousins in town...we'd go in and play with them and I could never understand

why you weren't allowed to just run wherever you wanted to."

Mary's great-grandfather Patrick Minnihan was an immigrant from Ireland who donated land and built a country school on their family farm where Mary would attend. The one-room schoolhouse held the teacher's desk, student desks, and a wood-burning stove. She recalled how early every morning her dad, and sometimes older brothers, would take drinking water down to the school and get the fire started before class.

Mary's experience growing up on a farm and as a part of a hard-working Midwest family informed many of the challenging but valuable life-lessons that she passed on to her children. Mary shared many such stories before her passing:

- "My brother Denny and sister Sharon got polio. Sharon was only three months old and it caused some paralysis. After medical consultation, my folks put wooden blocks onto her tricycle for her to practice riding. As we got older, they would tie her good hand against her body to make her use her weaker arm. My folks stuck to their guns since it was important to help her. I can't imagine how hard that would have been to watch her struggle. But when she grew up, my sister had a long career as a nurse, raised five kids and had a good life. We knew another family from church in Jefferson in the same situation; they also had a little girl, but they pampered her and she could hardly walk."

- "One time, my dad was making hay and was up on the hay mower. He slipped and fell and broke his heel bone and needed a cast. It was July though, which was hot and it made his cast itchy. So he got a hammer and chisel and broke the cast off. He never went back. He was really tough. One time we were eating Thanksgiving dinner, and he broke a tooth. He went out to the shop and got a pair of pliers. He pulled that molar out and went right back to finish dinner."

- "We always had BB guns growing up. One of the BB guns had to be cocked

and the other was pump action. One day my older sister and I were out playing cowboys and Indians with the gun that needed to be cocked. It was hard though and we were pretty little. She held the barrel next to her stomach and I was on the other side and we worked together to cock it. Well, I hit the trigger and she ended up with a BB in her stomach. And I have one in my leg from another time when we were all shooting at each other.”

- “Eventually we graduated from a BB gun to a .22. I loved to hunt...squirrels, rabbits, and anything else. There was a culvert down at the end of our lane. I thought I saw a rabbit go in there, but it wasn't a rabbit. I shot a skunk and it stunk up the area. Mom got out the soap and water and tomato juice, but (sister) Sharon still wouldn't let me sleep with her for several days.”

Mary would then move on from country school to the city high school, which was quite an adjustment. She still excelled in her studies while enjoying extracurriculars like basketball. After high school, she caught the admiring eye of a young man who was dating her older sister Sharon at the time. Mary's young courtship and marriage ended far too soon as her husband passed shortly after the birth of their son Paul.

In 1963, Mary attended a lab and x-ray school in downtown Minneapolis, where, on the first day of registration, she met Brian Carlson, a strapping young man who just completed his military service in the U.S. Navy. They would become lab partners, taking each other's pulse, drawing blood, and practicing various medical procedures on one another. After a short three-month courtship, Mary and Brian became engaged and started their 61 years of marriage on June 27, 1964. Brian's exceptional love extended to Mary's young son Paul and he adopted Paul to start their family together.

Mary and Brian lived and worked in Red Oak, IA and Clarion, IA where they would round out their brood of four children. The couple later moved back to

Minneapolis where Mary worked at the St. Louis Park Medical Center while Brian completed his Chiropractic degree.

Mary and Brian moved from MN to Fort Collins, CO in 1979. Brian set up his practice while Mary worked at various companies including Teledyne WaterPik and NCR Microelectronics. Mary established herself quickly in the semiconductor business and would eventually become Senior Manager of the wafer fabrication facility in Ft. Collins. Her kindness, combined with her strong work ethic and practical nature, made her a gifted leader with a servant's heart. Her final career stop with the NCR/Symbios Logic/LSI Logic chain of companies was in supply chain and purchasing where she once again established many life-long friendships. After retirement, Mary and Brian enjoyed many wonderful years together alongside their friends and family; they've always had a special place in their hearts for every family member including their four children, seven grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren. Together Mary and Brian would explore the world both near and far. They dearly loved the mountains and enjoyed living near Red Feather Lakes for several years. They also shared a love for traveling to Ireland, building homes through Habitat for Humanity, and extended RV resort camping in Texas.

Mary lived one of those rare lives where one would be hard-pressed to find a single person that had anything but positive thoughts of her. She was able to strike an amazing balance between being a Christ-centered wife and mother, and being a hard-working, forward-thinking woman in an age that often relegated women to subservience. She served her husband and family with grace and humility, while exemplifying the best traits of leadership and love. She leaves behind an indelible mark on all those who had the privilege to know her; and while her savior Jesus happily calls her home, she will be sorely missed by the rest of us.

Mary is survived by her husband Brian; by her children Paul Carlson (Sherry) of Chanhassen, MN; Cathy Harms (George) of Fort Collins; Kara Carlson-Hill (Bill Hill) of Severance; and Steve Carlson (Renee) of Loveland; and by her many adoring grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to Habitat for Humanity (<https://www.habitat.org>).

Mass of Christian Burial will begin at 10:30 a.m. October 14, 2025 at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic Parish.

Guests are asked to come dressed in color or white.

Previous Events

Mass of Christian Burial

OCT **14**. 10:30 AM (MT)

Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic Parish Church
5450 S Lemay Avenue
Fort Collins , CO 80525

Tribute Wall

JA

“ I’m very blessed to have got to meet and get to know Brian and Mary and their family, they are the kindest and loving people I’ve ever met. They loved each other to the end .

janetbuckendorf - October 09, 2025 at 11:24 PM

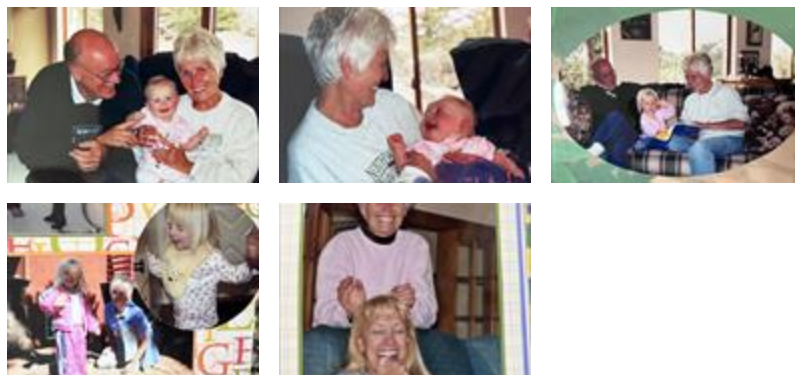
PC

“ Our deepest condolences to the Carlson family. Brian and Mary were very dear neighbors to us in Red Feather Highlands. They would drop everything to help anyone in need. They were so much fun at our community BBQ's and parties. It was clear they loved life and Christ. I will miss Mary's infectious smile and Brians humor. Rest in peace friends.

Pattie and Dave Chapman - October 09, 2025 at 10:20 AM

RT

“ Mary was the most joyful person I've ever known. She brought fun and laughter to every one of our times together. We will greatly miss her and Brian and are so thankful that we had the privilege of knowing them and being loved by them for so many years. We look forward to seeing them again some day.



Robyn Tinkle - October 06, 2025 at 06:18 PM

DM

“ *I worked with Mary at the plant in Fort Collins for 20 years. What a great friend and mentor. My thoughts and prayers for her family.*

debi Metheny - October 06, 2025 at 05:47 PM

VI

“ *Thinking of the family blessing to all. we care and love you*

virgie - October 04, 2025 at 09:26 PM