



## Audrey Nichols

November 26, 1921 - December 6, 2020

A Memorial Service for Audrey will be held on Friday, May 21, 2021 at 10:30 a.m. at the United Methodist Church in Geneva, Nebraska. Kim Dunker will officiate the Memorial Service.

A Graveside Committal of Ashes will take place in the Geneva Public Cemetery following the Memorial Service.

Memorials may be directed to The Geneva Rescue Squad, The Geneva Arts Council, or The Lincoln Public Schools Foundation (note Audrey Nichols) to assist Lincoln High School musicians in need of lessons, equipment or camp.

Audrey's Memorial Service will be live-streamed to Farmer & Son Funeral Home's facebook page. You can find our public facebook page by the following ways: searching 'farmer and son funeral home facebook,' searching @friendlyfuneraldirectors, or by clicking on the 'photos and videos' tab on Audrey's page on our website and then clicking on the livestream tab.

Audrey Bell Nichols was born November 26, 1921, to Lucretia Randolph Bures and Samuel Harper Cowan, M.D. in Deweese, Nebraska, the last of five children. She passed at Heritage Crossings in Geneva on December 6, 2020, ten days after her 99th birthday.

Audrey attended Deweese Public School, winning spelling honors and a trip to the state contest. She graduated in 1938 in a class of six, and went on to Peru State College, completing a teaching certification in 1940. But around this time, she met a handsome charismatic man working on a road crew for Nichols Construction: Maurice Allen Nichols. He lived in a boarding house down the street from her home in Deweese. They got acquainted. His crew came and went, but the two stayed in touch while she taught country school. But when Maury left to train in telecommunications in Washington D.C., Audrey followed him, finding a job at the Pentagon, a building she said "was built to get lost in". After completing his communications training, Maury was hired by Baltimore Telephone, and moved to Maryland. By this time, the two were engaged.

Audrey and Maury married August 6, 1942, in Relay, Maryland in a simple ceremony. By this time, the U.S. had entered World War II, and Maury volunteered for the U.S. Army. While training in Monmouth, New Jersey in spring 1943, their first daughter, Linda Gail, was born. He was able to see the new baby on weekends but was soon deployed by the Signal Corps to North Africa, serving in Egypt, Turkey and the African Gold Coast. Grandmother Cowan moved east to help care for Linda while Audrey worked at General Electric until the war ended in 1945.

Returned from service to a job and young family, as the story goes, M.A. said, "I can work for this company for 50 years, and at the end I'll get a gold watch or a ruby stick-pin. Or I can take a risk." Audrey longed to return to Nebraska, and once back, M.A. founded a road construction company, Maury Corporation, and began to build his business. The family moved from rental houses to the Courts. During the summers, Audrey and Linda joined Maury as he worked job to job to build the company, living in a half-dozen towns throughout the state, from Venango and Curtis in the west, to Fullerton in the east. Back in Geneva, M.A. tore down an old house to build a home on North

9th, the family living in the basement while finishing the house. Having had no luck conceiving, they adopted four-year-old Gene Steven in 1957. Less than two years later, Audrey gave birth to their youngest, Julie Ann, in 1959.

As the business grew with the addition of a concrete plant, a second house went up on a 160-acre farm with pasture ground just outside of town. In 1963, the family moved to the country after their oldest graduated high school and left for college. There, Audrey pursued an ambitious garden, planted fruit trees and each year canned and pickled and preserved, and put fresh food on the table. Julie spent many hours alongside her mother, tending plants and harvesting the garden's bounty, helping kill and dress chickens, which turned into an anatomy lesson.

Son Gene left as a sophomore for Kemper Military School in Boonville, Missouri where Maury had spent a year in high school. Gene graduated from high school at Kemper in 1971, and junior college in 1973, earning top-level awards for marksmanship. Still in junior high, Julie followed in her mother's footsteps, winning first place in Fillmore County's spelling contest for three years consecutively and making it to sixth in state finals. Many spelling drills showed they shared a love of words.

In 1961, her eldest left for college and married classmate Chester Neal Paul of Lincoln soon after graduation from Nebraska Wesleyan. In 1965, Audrey's first grandchild, James David Paul, was born to Linda and Chet Paul just before his entry to UNMC med school. A daughter, Cynthia Jean, was born four years later. Two more children felt the freedom of the country and the love of their grandmother which they returned in full measure. Gene's son Stephen was born in 1979, then estranged after a divorce. Granddaughter Jesse Lynn was born in Missouri in 1991, and two great-grandsons, Jack and Wyatt were born to Cynthia Paul Smith in 1995 and 1998. They too got to play on the farm

with GG, as they called their great grandmother, and despite her age, Audrey was able to attend many of their school activities and graduations, and take trips to Disney World. Audrey's last grandchild, Julie's son William Jackson Gades, was born in 2000. Audrey's last great-grandchild, Joseph Paul Bobo, was born in 2008 to Jesse Nichols. Joseph too got to know his great-grandma during visits that he--and especially his mom--enjoyed, as Jesse so cherished her grandma.

By that time, Audrey had reached 80 years of age, but she still wasn't too old to show Will how to catch snakes and toads and insects, play ball and look for rocks. She took many trips to fossil sites, museums and ranch country, Ashfall and Verdigre, or up to Valentine and Rosebud Reservation. "Let's take a little trip," she'd say. "I need to get away for a while." So the three (Will, Julie and Grandma) would head for Missouri to see the Truman Library, the Gore Psychiatric Museum and Leila's Hair Museum, eating barbecue afterward, or they'd hit the road to Hot Springs, SD to Evan's Plunge and Mammoth Site with a side trip to Reptile Gardens, or to Harrison and Bassett to visit ranch friends.

With Audrey, everything became a hands-on science lesson or practical teachings, from plant growth and pollination to anatomy and animal behavior and life cycles. Dill worms were caught and fed until pupae formed and butterflies emerged. Bugs were fed to garden spiders. Children were encouraged to look at the stars and planets, catch snakes and toads, lightning bugs and katydids, to observe and listen to wildlife, and even explore roadkill. A notorious trait of the Cowan family was to see them always looking at the ground for rocks and fossils, a vestige of hunting arrowheads on the sandbars of the Little Blue River as children.

Over the years, creatures of all kinds surrounded Audrey, from her beloved mastiffs to charming mutts. Wild things were welcome too: snakes,

salamanders, toads, and even a prairie dog Maury caught which eventually escaped and roamed the neighborhood. Neighbors reported (with some alarm) seeing a prairie dog in town—yet both Audrey and Maury somehow had not seen it, and feigned innocence. Gene kept a pet chicken in town for a while before the country house was built. Two basenjis and a guinea pig named Butterscotch lived in the house in town. Linda's husband gifted the family a pair of lab rats. Moving to the country brought banty chickens, ducks and horses, 4-H livestock, and altogether too many cats. A pet skunk expanded the menagerie. Her two youngest children had the pleasures of hunting in the fields or fishing in farm ponds, riding, and roaming the woods along Turkey Creek.

Audrey held high standards for her children's education and the need to support arts in the schools. This involvement led her to run for school board. In 1976, she became the second woman elected to the Geneva School Board and the first woman after two decades. In 1977, Audrey handed her youngest her high school diploma—with a hug. Julie left for Nebraska Wesleyan and three years later for New York.

In summers of the sixties and seventies, the house was often filled with relatives from as far as Alaska and England, sisters, nieces and nephews and their children, cousins and Maury's army buddies, school friends and distant friends. A house full of life. And sometimes, a horde to cook for. Cooking was a natural love for Audrey--she was an adventurous eater, and loved to eat. She would try literally anything. Her pies became legend. Oyster dressing at holidays filled with butter and cream was a favorite, beautiful and rich. Her fried chicken delectable, rare roast beef and lamb also. Dried beef gravy and salmon patties were comfort food for her children. She was adventuresome when cooking the meat and fish brought home by the family's hunters: venison, pheasant, wild duck and turkey, tasty pike, trout, bass and mucky bullheads. The rule was if you shot it or caught it, you cleaned it and it was

eaten. She experimented heavily, sometimes going a little too far when she roasted a raccoon and possum—but only once. Her love of regional cuisine led her to cook outside the Midwestern staples. This love of food persisted, and she cooked for herself throughout her 80s and early 90s.

Audrey and Maury loved to travel. They were part of the first American groups to visit China when it opened in 1978. Trips were made to see beloved relatives in England, and to see the wilds of Scotland, where Audrey relished the dreaded Scottish dish, haggis. With family in tow, they visited our beautiful national parks and ventured to Canada, and made trips to Mexico and Fiji. After retirement, Maury and Audrey visited Egypt where he was stationed during the war, and travelled to Greece, Japan, and Australia. The two traveled with friends to Alaska to see Audrey's many relations there, and through the northeast and along the coast of Maryland near where they had lived. Wherever she went, Audrey sought out the real people, giving her an intimate look into other cultures.

Spirited and extroverted by nature, Audrey's joyous curiosity about people meant she would strike up a conversation with anybody, no matter their station or circumstance or language. When travelling, her intrepid social skills resulted in a Christmas dinner of goat curry at a merchant's meager home in Fiji, a visit to a cab driver's tiny house in Mexico, and a night in a Lakota tipi during a violent thunderstorm. Her insatiability for new experiences never waned.

A lifelong advocate of music and the arts, she made sure her children experienced the pleasures and variety of the performing arts. She supported and attended Hastings' Community Concert series, and travelled to Lincoln or Omaha to see plays, operas or concerts, and her children, especially her youngest, benefitted from watching live performances of artists from around

the world.

Audrey was an avid reader, a habit which persisted even as she declined. She subscribed to four newspapers and many magazines focused on nature, history, fine cooking and current events. If a book absorbed her, she finished it in a day. She read voraciously, consuming novels and nonfiction. She read to her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Books were considered a necessity, not a luxury. She never stopped learning, and many of her family embraced this impulse as a result.

Audrey was widowed in 1993. Maury died at home in her care after a struggle with cancer, having celebrated fifty years of marriage the previous year. With the strength of her friendships and faith, she adjusted to the loss. Although Audrey valued her solitude, friendships with people of all ages and backgrounds bloomed around her. Her natural vivacity, dry wit, warmth and impishness drew people to her, and many of those relationships became close and ran deep. She offered a listening ear, compassion, humor, comfort and no judgements. Many considered her an 'extra mom', sister, or auntie. During her last years in assisted living, the lovely staff there adored her sense of humor and lightness and the twinkle in her eye, which remained despite her dementia. She enjoyed regular visits from her daughters, grandson Will, granddaughter Cindy and family, and was especially delighted if they brought a dog to see her.

In widowhood, most summer evenings found her outdoors on the patio tending plants and watching birds, relaxing with a visitor or talking to and playing with her pets. Winters were spent reading—also with pets. In her latter years she kept a few peacocks, an exotic addition to the once-large parade of creatures.

Small but mighty, she was known by most as Little Audrey (or after she

bagged a deer, Little Annie Oakley or Little Sure Shot). After a practical joke of some magnitude—the erecting of a large sign while the family vacationed that read “Nichols’ Sheep Shed”—the farm became known as The Sheep Shed. The pranksters (who shall remain nameless) even removed the sign to repaint it, leaving behind a cutting torch and an ancient billy goat tied to a tree. In retaliation, M.A. took the cutting torch rig and feigned innocence, as he had with the escaped prairie dog. Julie and Gene were made to walk the goat the mile and a half to the sale barn, where they received 95 cents for the goat.

To consider Audrey’s life means absorbing the whole of the 20th century. During the long, complex and full life she lived with notorious gusto, Audrey saw horse and buggies turn to automobiles, the destitution of the Dust Bowl and the Great Depression, World War II, Kennedy’s assassination, the strife of the Viet Nam war and the civil rights movement, the moon landing, the return of Halley’s Comet, and the tragedy of 9/11. After she entered Heritage, Julie brought her back to the farm to view the full solar eclipse. This vivid life was a marvel in itself. Her lively and engaging relationships with her grandchildren and great grandchildren, the pleasures they shared and the time spent with this remarkable woman are the gifts they all carry forward.

Little Audrey wasn’t afraid of much—horses maybe, and she possessed a life-long apprehension of water and heights. Her courage showed itself in her willingness to be straightforward, and in her fearlessness in acquainting herself with strangers, no matter where or when. She was a force to be reckoned with, and at just five feet tall, a powerful spirit in a small package.

Audrey was a committed member of Geneva’s United Methodist Church for over 60 years, her three children and one grandson baptized there. She was active in the Methodist Women’s group, Circle, and Sunday school. She possessed a strong faith that carried her through difficult times, and she made many close friends within her church family.

Audrey was preceded in death by her parents, husband Maurice A. Nichols, siblings Grace (Lawrence) Davis, Frances (Harold) Dinkel, Lyn (Pat) Armstrong, Ward (Jewel) Cowan; Grandson James Paul and son-in-law Dr. Chet Paul.

She is survived by her children Linda Paul (Lincoln), Gene Nichols (Springfield, Missouri), Julie Nichols (Lincoln); grandchildren Cynthia Paul (Greyson) Smith (Omaha), Stephen Nichols (Kansas), Jesse Nichols (Springfield, Missouri), and William Gades (Lincoln); great-grandsons Jack and Wyatt Smith (Omaha) and Joseph Bobo (Springfield, Missouri).

She also leaves behind a multitude of nieces, nephews, distant cousins and a host of friends both near and far.

# Tribute Wall



“ 10 files added to the album Flower Pictures



Farmer & Son Funeral Home - May 21, 2021 at 12:44 PM

LE

“ Dear Audrey Nichols family, I feel so blessed to have known Audrey. She was a bright light to me and I loved her humor that she lived her by life by. I enjoyed working on many church projects with her. My deepest sympathy to all her family. Cling tight to happy memories and your God for comfort. Love to all. Lorelei Edwards

Lorelei Edwards - May 18, 2021 at 11:14 AM

BB

“ Sorry to hear of your loss. May memories bring you comfort.



Bobbie Bock-Itzen - December 13, 2020 at 09:27 PM

LJ

“ *Lisa Jennings lit a candle in memory of Audrey Nichols*



**Lisa Jennings** - December 13, 2020 at 03:07 PM

CS

“ *My sincerest condolences to You Miss Julie, & your Family at this time of sorrow! Thinking of You today & always!* ❤️🙏🕊️



**Christopher Scarpelli** - December 13, 2020 at 10:12 AM

TW

“ *I have great memories of Audrey having been friends, and still today, friends with Julie. She was indeed, small but mighty. My sympathy.* ❤️

**Tammy Ward** - December 12, 2020 at 10:35 PM

SB

“ *Sandy And Rick Bolejack lit a candle in memory of Audrey Nichols*



**Sandy and Rick Bolejack** - December 11, 2020 at 06:26 AM

DB

“ Always loved visiting with Audrey. She had such a dry sense humor, so much like my father!

Donna Brabec - December 09, 2020 at 04:46 PM

JN

Donna, I'm sorry to hear of your loss. He was a great man.

Julie Nichols - December 12, 2020 at 10:53 AM

SB

“ Audrey was kind to our family and was a regular for Dad's garden produce. She was a kind individual.



scott bahe - December 08, 2020 at 10:13 PM

JN

Scottie I knew your dad well...and heard him swear a blue streak more than once! They passed many great hours out by the scale, chatting. She even rated getting some sauerkraut. Thank you Scott.

Julie Nichols - December 12, 2020 at 10:51 AM



“ Thoughts & Prayers was purchased for the family of Audrey Nichols.



December 08, 2020 at 07:50 PM

DW

“ *Darlene Webb lit a candle in memory of Audrey Nichols*



**Darlene Webb** - December 08, 2020 at 02:17 PM

VJ

“ *Virginia Johnson lit a candle in memory of Audrey Nichols*



**Virginia Johnson** - December 08, 2020 at 01:01 PM

NH

“ *Blessings to all of the Nichols family. - Nancy (Ward) Hansen*



**Nancy (Ward) Hansen** - December 08, 2020 at 12:34 PM

NN

“ *Aunt Audrey was my Geneva MOM! I could always count on her for sage advice. She was my support and inspiration for many years. Loved her lots!*



*Nancy Nichols*

**Nancy Nichols** - December 08, 2020 at 11:19 AM

LL

“ *Many memories with Audrey. I loved our visits, enjoyed all her animals, and all of her stories of her family and friends. She will be dearly missed.*



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**Lori Loontjer** - December 08, 2020 at 12:02 AM

CS

“ *Carole Saiser lit a candle in memory of Audrey Nichols*



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**Carole Saiser** - December 07, 2020 at 08:08 PM

KT

“ *Kent & Rose Theobald lit a candle in memory of Audrey Nichols*



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**Kent & Rose Theobald** - December 07, 2020 at 02:17 PM