



## Mary B. Bruning

April 14, 1929 - October 5, 2021

Mary Beth (Reiss) Bruning was born on a farm near Belvidere, Nebraska on April 14, 1929 to Paul and Amy (Babka) Reiss. Midwife Mary Spickelmier was set to do the delivery, but since Mary was breach, Dr. Bancroft was summoned from Hebron to bring Mary into the world. Dr. Bancroft traveled on an unpaved, muddy Highway 81 arriving just in time to deliver Mary. Brother Walter Edward joined the family in 1933.

Mary was confirmed on March 25, 1945, just two days after the death of her father, Paul, because “that’s what Dad would have wanted me to do.”

Mary’s younger years were filled with joy and adventures as she, brother Walt and cousins Ed and Leonard Babka and Lucy Kerl were often up to no good...or “responsible play” as they would tell their parents. They were thick as thieves until their dying days. The closeness they shared – that of brothers and sisters – has proudly trickled down through the next few generations. Growing up on a farm in the “dirty 30s” was difficult, but really gave Mary and Walt their ability to overcome adversity, a love of the outdoors and taught them to just do what needed to be done. In her younger years, Mary discovered that gardening was one of her greatest passions.

Due to her father’s health issues, the family moved into Belvidere and in with her grandfather Frank Babka in 1939. Despite her father’s challenges, Paul

Reiss was a patient sufferer and never complained...a trait that Mary would carry with her for life. Bucking the traditional female role, her mother went to work at the Bruning elevator and then Bruning State Bank to support the family. Amy Reiss was a hard-working, can-do woman...another trait Mary learned from her parents. When she wasn't keeping track of Walt or getting him "out of little deals," Mary continued to grow her passion for gardening under the guidance of her Grandpa Babka and helped wherever and whenever she could. During these years, she discovered the importance of being a good neighbor.

The untimely death of father Paul, when Mary was just 14, forced her to grow up faster than most. Even though she was young at the time, he left an indelible mark on Mary that would mold her into the woman she became. Because her mother had to work to provide for the family, Mary was "as much of a mother [to Walt] as a little brother would allow her to be" while taking on several of the household responsibilities. To make ends meet, she and Walt would peddle vegetables from their garden and bread their mother made throughout Belvidere. Regardless of the hardships, the loss and the struggles, the Reiss home was filled with love and gratitude.

Mary graduated from Belvidere High School in 1947 and Lincoln School of Commerce in 1949. As fate would have it, Mary was emptying garbage cans at Bruning State Bank when a dashing Frank Bruning stepped off the bus as he returned from World War II. When he entered the bank to say hello to his father, Mary met the love of her life. On June 5, 1949, Frank and Mary were married at Bruning's Trinity Lutheran Church. This union would last four days short of 71 years with the passing of Frank in June 2020. They lived for a short time in Palmer, Nebraska, but eventually settled west of Bruning at the Keim place. Two children, Jane Ann in 1950 and Fred Douglas in 1952, were born to this union.

Frank and Mary started a registered Herford herd in 1950 and in 1961 created Feedlot Fencing, Inc., a unique business which grew out of the innovative use of oilfield pipe and rods. Feedlot Fencing provides steel rods and pipe, along with gates and panels that Feedlot Fencing manufactures for feedlots, ranches, dairies, bison and horse operations across the Midwest. Mary's business aptitude and dedication to running a successful business helped Feedlot Fencing grow exponentially. She was a "hard working, not-afraid-to-get-dirty woman" whose thumbprint can be found surrounding pastures, feedlots and fields in all directions from Bruning.

Throughout the years, Mary was a 4-H leader, taught sewing lessons through the Extension Office, cut down countless cedar trees and thistles in the pastures and painted miles of fence. She took pride in being a Bruning and worked endlessly to improve the area. Mary made up for every tree she cut down by planting more...just in a better place. Her enormous and prospering gardens benefitted many. Neighbors came to butcher chickens, put up corn, can, make apple pies and talk about the weather. Baby calves were often housed in the mud room until it was warm enough for them to go out and be with their mothers. She called herself "a care giver to the farm."

In 1976, Frank and Mary built a house in Bruning. It was here that she would continue to build deep friendships, entertain with delight and build her routine with Frank. Known as a classy dresser, Mary was a "grease monkey [from the oil pipe] with red lipstick on" by day, but always cleaned up in time for "party time" before supper. She valued winding down the day with family, friends or just Frank. Even though she said she didn't like to cook, everyone who has ever been to a Mary Bruning meal knows that no one went home hungry, unsatisfied or empty handed. "Whaddya have kid?" was one of her favorite questions. Sitting at the table, being present and having a good meal paired with a great conversation brought her joy.

Mary exemplified what it meant to be a wonderful neighbor and friend. She was a friend to all and really did want to know the answer to “What’s new with you?” or “Whaddya know?” Last Christmas, when she couldn’t even walk on her own, she made sure her neighbors received bread and homemade jelly. Christmas was her favorite time of the year and nothing was going to stop her from continuing that tradition. Next to Christmas, Mary most enjoyed playing hostess for the annual Babka Family Memorial Day gathering. It was a time to honor those who had gone before us, but more importantly a time for everyone to stay connected to their roots. For years, she hosted a luncheon for only those ladies who had reached their 85th birthday. For some, that was the only time of year they got to see each other, making Mary a wonderful connector.

Being outside was her favorite place to be, which is probably why she was always talking about the weather and how many tenths of an inch of rain fell. She loved the fresh air, watching the kids play, the flowers bloom and her garden grow. When confined to the indoors, Mary spent most of her time in the sunroom sewing or cross-stitching blocks for the next baby blanket or quilt she was making for someone. She was also an expert woodworker, staining miles of baseboard, door frames and doors for anyone who asked.

Travel was something Mary loved to do, but Frank’s aversion to flying kept them grounded in the US. That didn’t stop them from discovering thousands of miles of the open roads. Often their end destination included a visit with family or friends, which made those journeys even more worthwhile. Their trips to California to visit brother Walt and his family were particularly special.

Regardless of which direction Frank and Mary headed, a friend was always along the way. Frank and Mary not only loved each other deeply, but were huge supporters of and respected each other. The life they built together was successful because they weren’t only partners in love, but partners in business and in life as well. Plus, Mary liked having “a chauffeur I can boss around everywhere we go.”

She was always a strong supporter of area 4-H, the Bruning Community Foundation and served on the Village Board. She and Frank believed in strong medical services that contributed to the positive economic viability of the area and was a strong supporter of the Thayer County Health Services. Mary was a faithful member of Trinity Lutheran Church in Bruning for over 70 years. Frank and Mary were honored in 1998 with the Nebraska Bankers Association Agribusiness award for outstanding contributions to agriculture and agribusiness. However, their biggest honor was being parents to Jane and Fred and their chosen partners in life, Tom and Penni respectively.

Mary's six "above average" grandchildren admired and respected the woman they called "Grandma Mary." She allowed them to grow and learn with cautious recklessness. Each of them knew what they could and couldn't get away with...and that sleeping in wasn't really an option. She was Queen Mary: the backbone of the family, tougher than the steel she sold. She taught them the value of hard work and that you should never just work, but enjoy what work provides you. And then, put your feet up at the end of the day and enjoy a Shirley Temple. She was rough, tough and didn't put up with anybody's stuff...a Rosie the Riveter and Mary Poppins all wrapped into one. She was honest to the core, feisty, hilarious, humble, ambitious, caring, no-nonsense, resourceful, a master at ironing shirts and sometimes kept things in her cupboards a little too long. Where there was a will, she had a way and was always willing to dole out advice...even when it wasn't asked for. She held them accountable, especially when it came to thank you cards. She was so proud of the adults they had become, not realizing that they are who they are in part because of her influence and love.

Over the past few years, Mary enjoyed connecting with her family and friends whether it was over the phone, in-person or receiving letters. Due to her limited movement, Mary's home was her oasis. But she would also be seen

around town in her golf cart with clippers in hand...for someone else to trim some bushes or a tree or pull some weeds. Mary's Czech heritage was depicted through her love of color. She had special relationships with Cumberland's Style Shoppe and Beth's Beauty Shop because, despite what she looked like after a hard day's work, she would spend every evening looking fancy. Even until the end, she wasn't fully dressed until she had on her earrings and lipstick.

Health and physical challenges were faced and defeated and all without complaint. Mary's arthritis inhabited her body for decades. She also conquered bouts of breast and skin cancer, defied doctor's expectations when she was diagnosed with meningitis and most-recently recovered from a broken hip. Even with her final diagnosis of liver and pancreatic cancer, Mary kept a positive attitude telling us, "Well, it's not the way I would have chosen to go, but I guess that's not my choice to make."

Mary was preceded in death by her husband Frank; parents Paul Reiss and Amy Reiss Lapcheska; step-father Dick Lapcheska; brother Dr. Walter E. Reiss; sister-in-law Carol Reiss; and in-laws Marjorie and Buzz Dalton and Herb and Lila Bruning; son-in-law Dr. Thomas F. Tonniges; nephew Thomas Bruning and niece Susan Reiss.

She is survived by daughter Jane Tonniges of Omaha; son Fred D. (Penni) Bruning of Bruning; six grandchildren Christopher (Lindsey) Tonniges and Emily Tonniges of Omaha, Adam (Carley) Bruning of Hebron, Abby Bruning (Nick Branting) of Bend, Oregon, Elizabeth Tonniges (Jesse Bergman) of Lincoln and Reiss (Heather) Bruning of Bruning; eleven great-grandchildren who brought her joy: Alyssa, Rachel, Zachary, Hallie, Chloe, Elise, Jack, Annika, Lukas, Frankie and Charlee. She also leaves behind many loving family members, friends and a community she loved. Just like her husband, she, too, was a friend and an inspiration to all those with whom she crossed

paths.

A Funeral Service for Mary was held on Monday, October 11, 2021 at 10:30 a.m. at Trinity Lutheran Church in Bruning, Nebraska. PMA Jim Germer presided over the Funeral Service. Janice Fintel accompanied Amy Peterson in the singing of "Precious Lord, Take My Hand" and "In The Garden."

Pallbearers for the service included Chris Tonniges, Adam Bruning, Reiss Bruning, Zac Tonniges, Dr. Nick Branting, and Jesse Bergman.

Interment was held in the Trinity Lutheran Cemetery following the Funeral Service.

Farmer & Son Funeral Home was in care of the arrangements and online condolences can be left at [www.farmerandsonfuneralhome.com](http://www.farmerandsonfuneralhome.com)

Memorials are suggested to the Bruning Community Foundation.

# Cemetery Details

## Trinity Lutheran Cemetery

Bruning, NE 68322

# Previous Events

## Visitation

OCT **10**. 1:00 PM - 6:00 PM (CT)

Farmer & Son Funeral Home  
242 N 10th Street  
Geneva, NE 68361  
(402) 759-3617  
<https://farmerandsonfuneralhome.com>

## Family Present for Visitation

OCT **10**. 4:00 PM - 6:00 PM (CT)

Farmer & Son Funeral Home  
242 N 10th Street  
Geneva, NE 68361  
(402) 759-3617  
<https://farmerandsonfuneralhome.com>

## Funeral Service

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OCT **11**. 10:30 AM (CT)

Trinity Lutheran Church  
300 E Main Street  
Bruning, NE 68322

# Tribute Wall



“ 73 files added to the album Flower Pics



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**Farmer & Son Funeral Home** - October 11, 2021 at 05:00 PM

JD

“ *Jim Dalton purchased the Full Heart for the family of Mary B. Bruning.*



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**Jim Dalton** - October 10, 2021 at 07:37 PM

KD

“ *Mary always loved flowers and was very fond of her golf cart cruising around her yard. Her grandchildren loved to stay with her.*

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**Kristi Duensing** - October 10, 2021 at 05:22 PM



“ *Beautiful in Blue* was purchased for the family of Mary B. Bruning.



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October 08, 2021 at 10:51 AM



“ *Full Of Love Bouquet* was purchased for the family of Mary B. Bruning.



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October 08, 2021 at 10:47 AM



“ *Peaceful White Lilies Basket* was purchased for the family of Mary B. Bruning.



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October 08, 2021 at 09:48 AM



“ *Medium Dish Garden* was purchased for the family of Mary B. Bruning.



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October 07, 2021 at 08:58 PM

DS

“ I bought steel from her a couple of times. She shared her opinion while standing directly in front of me and poking me in the chest with her finger.

Frank and Mary were a great couple. I am fortunate to have known them.

Dan Schepers

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Dan Schepers - October 07, 2021 at 06:43 PM



“ Beautiful Heart Bouquet was purchased for the family of Mary B. Bruning.



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October 07, 2021 at 10:55 AM



“ Emerald Garden Basket was purchased for the family of Mary B. Bruning.



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October 07, 2021 at 08:21 AM



“ Arrive in Style was purchased for the family of Mary B. Bruning.



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October 06, 2021 at 05:31 PM

KT

“ *Kent & Rose Theobald lit a candle in memory of Mary B. Bruning*



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**Kent & Rose Theobald** - October 06, 2021 at 12:51 PM

VJ

“ *A beautiful lady! Inside and out! Thoughts and prayers*



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**Virginia Johnson** - October 06, 2021 at 10:57 AM

AT

“ *Joan Ackland and I had the privilege of taking Doris Wilken down to Hebron to visit Mary. After the two friends had visited a while, Joan and I went in. Mary asked me about my girls, my house and what I did with the landscaping. She kept up on everything. She was quite a lady*

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**Alice Tatro** - October 06, 2021 at 08:50 AM

JN

“ *I'm so sorry for your loss, Prayers for co.fort and strength during this difficult time. We're never ready for them to leave us. She stole a place in my heart and am forever grateful for the time spent together. She helped so many and raised an awesome family. Frank and her together again!*

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**Jean Norder** - October 05, 2021 at 06:22 PM

AB

*Jean, you are so dear to our family. Frank and Mary thought the world of you. Sending you a hug and thank you for this. Abby*

**Abby Bruning** - October 06, 2021 at 07:49 PM

MZ

*I am sorry to hear about Mary. I was trying to call her today and had no idea she was gone. I loved taking care of her flowers for her and visiting with her. I wish I would have known sooner. I would have been at the funeral.*

**Marilee Zachek** - November 14, 2021 at 05:01 PM

LD

“*Lisa Dondlinger lit a candle in memory of Mary B. Bruning*”



**Lisa Dondlinger** - October 05, 2021 at 05:42 PM