

Ardeth Billings Fortier died the morning of October 25, 2021, in her own home, with her children nearby. She was 92.

Ardeth was born in Spokane, Washington, the youngest of three children. World War II broke out when she was a young teen and her father became an army base commander in Presque Isle, Maine. Ardeth moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts and attended Buckingham (now known as Buckingham, Brown and Nichols). Despite having to leave her parents as a teenager and the war, she always credited Buckingham for giving her the education she would not have received in Spokane or Presque Isle. Her high school diploma from Buckingham hung on the walls of her many homes until she died.

Following graduation from Buckingham, Ardeth enrolled at Pomona College, where she met her first husband, James Henry Steere, DVM. Together, they had six children over the next 13 years: Robin (Steere) Axworthy, Leslie Steere, Carrie Steere-Salazar, Melinda Steere, Thomas Steere and Robert Steere. The families' peripatetic life took them from Davis, California to GrantsPass, Oregon to Copenhagen, Denmark, to Santa Barbara, California to Watertown, Massachusetts and finally to Petaluma, California, where Ardeth started a new chapter in her life.

Divorcing in 1965, Ardeth completed her long-delayed college education at last and married for a second time. Her life with second husband Joseph Fortier, PhD, once again led her far from home. With the younger children in tow, they lived in Kilrush, Ireland and Munich, Germany before returning to the United States and settling in Mendocino County. In 1979, Joe died and Ardeth almost immediately went back to school, this time to become a registered nurse. With her husband gone and all her children grown, Ardeth joined the Peace Corps and (at 60) moved to Costa Rica, learning a new language, and using her skills in an Hogar de Ancianos, a home for frail elders.

Peace Corps adventure concluded, Ardeth returned to America, settling in San Francisco and continuing her career as a registered nurse until her retirement in 2005. She purchased a home with Carrie and Carrie's husband, Eugene Salazar, living there until her death. It was the longest she had ever stayed in one place.

Ardeth was a devoted member of the First Unitarian Universalist Society of San Francisco and a long-time member of the church choir there. One of her favorite things in life was spending Sunday morning up in the choir loft.

Ardeth is remembered as a beloved mother who gladly accepted and loved the many extra "family members" she met through her children. Her glorious smile and unique and frequent laughter drew people into her orbit. She was an inveterate reader of mystery novels, completed crossword puzzles in ink and loved every animal that ever had the good fortune to cross paths with her.

In addition to her six children, Ardeth is survived by sons-in-law Thomas Axworthy and Eugene Salazar, daughters-in-law Annie Stuart, Becky McGowan Steere and Christen Steere, grandchildren McKenna Steere, Dulcina Axworthy, Maya Stuart-Steere, Jaida Lindsay-Dudley and Shaelyn Steere.

In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to the Fortier Music Fund, which Ardeth seeded many years ago when she made donations to support the music programs at the First Unitarian Universalist Society. This special fund was later named after her in honor of her constant and fierce support of music. It will remain a legacy of her life.

A celebration of life will be held at 2 pm on April 3, 2022, at the Unitarian Church in San Francisco (address below).

She will be greatly missed.

Donations can be sent to:
The Fortier Music Fund
First Unitarian Universalist Society of San Francisco
1187 Franklin Street
San Francisco, Ca. 94109