



## MARY ELLEN LAPHAM

January 19, 1933 - April 7, 2020

Mary Ellen Lapham

Mary Ellen (Billhorn) Lapham, 87, passed away peacefully on Tuesday, April 7, at Gundersen Health System after suffering a heart attack two days prior. Mary Ellen was born to parents Alfred and Wilma (Anderson) Billhorn on January 19, 1933, in Manchester, Iowa. She was raised on their family farm, along with her two brothers Don and Jon.

She married Lyle Lapham of Caledonia on July 3, 1954, and they made their home on the Lapham family farm on Portland Prairie, just south of Caledonia. Together, they raised six children on the farm. Lyle and Mary Ellen later moved to Caledonia in 1983.

Mary Ellen began her teaching career in 1951, teaching for four years in Iowa before moving to the Caledonia school district, where she taught for 31 years. She received her Masters in Education from the University of Minnesota in 1989. She was a beloved kindergarten and first grade teacher to many Caledonia youth before retiring in 1997.

She was a 50-year member of Aidenn Chapter #86 Order of the Eastern Star, and an active member of the Caledonia United Methodist Church.

Mary Ellen and Lyle found great joy in traveling. Some highlights include traveling to Côte d'Ivoire, West Africa, in 1987, to visit Lyle when he was volunteering there through US AID. She also traveled to Tunisia with two good teacher friends, Laurel Rusert and Kathy Danaher, to visit her daughter Coleen in the Peace Corps. She and Lyle traveled across Europe, including visiting relatives in Sweden and Denmark. Mary Ellen and Lyle taught English in Wenzhou and Hanzhou, China, from 1998-2001. The couple enjoyed their retirement years at their winter home in McAllen, Texas.

Mary Ellen spent the last year and a half living at Claddagh Senior Living in Caledonia, and enjoyed visiting with the other residents there. The family would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to Carmel and the staff at Claddagh for taking such good care of her.

Mary Ellen is preceded in death by her husband Lyle, who passed away in 2007. She is survived by her brothers Jon (Barb) Billhorn of DeWitt, Iowa, and Don (Mary Lou) Billhorn of Readlyn, Iowa; foster son Joseph (Jane) Hayes, children Deborah (Charles) Wray, Loren (Carol) Lapham, Wesley (Carrie) Lapham, Steven Lapham, all of Caledonia, and Coleen (John) Pinkowski of Kirksville, Missouri; daughters-in-law Sharen Lapham and Lisa Lapham; 14 grandchildren and 19 great-grandchildren (with another on the way).

Due to COVID-19, the family will hold a memorial service at a later date. To share your memories of Mary Ellen with the family, please post on the McCormick Funeral Home page

# Tribute Wall

KI

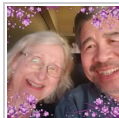
“ It has been more than 10 days, I still felt sad about the loss. Mary Ellen was an amazing teacher to thousand students here and overseas. She’s also a great mentor for me, for my education, for my career and for my spiritual life. I had such honor went with Mary Ellen and Lyle to Albee-Lapham family reunion at Colorado in 2001. I was also invited to the Billhorn’s family gathering in Iowa at summer of 2002. It was wonderful time for me in mid-west, and I always feel home there. They visited me often at my college year and saw me off to California for my first job. Mary Ellen gave my children names after and we received the gifts for each birthday, every Christmas as well. I will always cherish my time listening from her, learning from her and she will be deeply missed by all of us. Her smile and those golden memories will be remembered, forever.

Kites - April 27, 2020 at 10:20 AM



“ Mary Ellen was a very special person. You don't come across a lot of people as caring and genuine as her. A true lady. She is sadly missed and I am honored to have been able to take care of her. Rest in peace sweet lady. My deepest condolences to the family.

Barb Peters - April 11, 2020 at 02:39 PM



Mary Ellen was truly a wonderful person with a radiant smile. As a child I really appreciated her care of the little ones . As an adult whenever I saw her on my visits to Caledonia she always remembered and gave me a welcome greeting. I last saw her at the Wired Rooster Coffee I asked her if I could buy her a coffee and she said she already had one with a big smile. She was of coarse with one of her family enjoying the day. Dearly missed

Connie Quan - April 13, 2020 at 10:47 AM

SE

“ 1 file added to the album Memories Album



Seth - April 11, 2020 at 01:19 AM

SE

Mary and Lyle visited David in UK during their trip in Europe in Sep. 2004.

Seth - April 11, 2020 at 01:24 AM

SE

“ 1 file added to the album Memories Album



Seth - April 11, 2020 at 01:15 AM

SE

Mary and Lyle visited Seth in Duisburg, Germany during their trip in Europe in Sep. 2004.

Seth - April 11, 2020 at 01:25 AM

NF

“ Extending our sympathy to Mary Ellen's family.  
Vern and Naomi Fruechte

Naomi & Vernon Fruechte - April 10, 2020 at 02:00 PM

DS

“ Thinking of the Lapham family during this time...Mary Ellen was a kind soul who left a great legacy. Amber loved her as her 1st grade teacher❤️. Cherish the wonderful memories!!

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**Dave & Wilma Schoh** - April 10, 2020 at 12:19 PM

PE

“ Mary Ellen was the sweetest person, and was always concerned about others before herself. I treasure our friendship, teaching with her, and attending the Holocaust class every year with her. I will miss her presence - the world is a little less without her in it. My deepest sympathy to all of you, as I know she will be dearly missed in your lives as well.

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**Peggy Eggert** - April 09, 2020 at 02:50 PM

PH

“ I was a very shy 5 year old When I started school. I felt so lucky to have Mrs. Lapham as a teacher. She was kind, fun and a great teacher. She raised an incredible family and will be missed always  
❤️

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**Patti Schroeder Hetrick** - April 09, 2020 at 11:52 AM



“ I met Mary Ellen in Wenzhou, China in 2001, she was teaching English at the Wenzhou Medical College. She was most patient with us and always smiling, and always nobly composed, and gentle in her speech. When Sharen and Emily visited China, Mary Ellen introduced me to them, we had a wonderful time and started a lifelong friendship. Thanks to her and the Lapham family and many others, I was able to resume my education. My family will really miss her.



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**Andy Zhou** - April 09, 2020 at 12:42 AM

DA

“ My first grade teacher. Was a great friend to our family. World has a little less color in it now. Wonderful lady, condolences to family.

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**David** - April 08, 2020 at 08:24 PM

RB

“ Mary Ellen was a very special lady!  
She will be missed dearly

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**robin bichel** - April 08, 2020 at 05:22 PM

GB

Mary Ellen was a wonderful, gentlewoman, always pleasant and smiling. She was instrumental in helping me rescue Wayne after his cardiac arrest in November 2008. Thanks again, Mary Ellen. Rest in peace.

Gretchen Buege

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**Gretchen Buege** - April 08, 2020 at 06:51 PM



*Rest in peace Mary Ellen; your beautiful spirit will live on.  
Sis Stemper*

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**Saverna Stemper** - April 12, 2020 at 12:15 PM



*Our sympathy to the Lapham family, thoughts and prayers are with you  
all.*

*Jeff & Theresa Krueger*

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**Jeff & Theresa Krueger** - April 15, 2020 at 06:23 PM