

Fern Louise (Denker) O'Connor was born to John and Ida (Spitzenberger) Denker in Haydraw, SD on October 25, 1930. She was going to be the first of her siblings to be born in a hospital, but after spending a week in Rapid City waiting, her mom decided she could be born at home like the other seven children were. Though she couldn't remember the exact details surrounding her birth, she was told two midwives were consulted regarding her entrance into the world. She also thinks the weather was fairly mild that day when horseback was the mode of travel to get the assistance needed. One of her favorite things to do when growing up was helping her dad and listening to his stories, which is something she learned from him--the gift of storytelling. She said he would have made a great history teacher, while her mom was the manager who got things done on the homestead. She said her mom was excited when she finally found pants for women on a trip, because much of the time she wore her husband's overalls to work. Family was important to Fern, and as the youngest of her family, she learned to be strong, opinionated, and straightforward as she grew up discussing many topics with her older brothers and sisters, and these traits have continued in the family line.

Fern graduated from Sturgis High School in 1948 and got a teaching certificate from Black Hills State, and enjoyed teaching country schools the most. She finished her teaching career in town after earning her BS degree in Education in 1980 from BHSC, graduating with her daughter. One of her greatest adventures in teaching was teaching during the 1949 blizzard, where she stayed with her two families of first-cousin students at Myron and Sophie Harwood's for the majority of 3 months. She was 19 years old at the time and her room served as classroom during the day and sleeping quarters at night. Her nephew, Richard Harwood, introduced her to her husband, Wayne O'Connor, when he came out to the country to do some hunting. They were married December 22, 1951 in Sturgis and shared almost 50 years together prior to his death in 2000. Fern and Wayne had 3 children, Mike, Jerry, and Peggy. As a couple, they had ups and downs, were active in AA/Al-Anon, and had many travel adventures together. She especially enjoyed the trips they had with her brother, George, and his wife. Trips continued after George and Wayne's death, when she would travel with George's widow, Vera, and niece, Beverly Fowble, to the Oregon coast. Besides being a teacher and traveler, she was a member of the United Methodist Church and Republican Women.

Before her unexpected death on November 16, 2020, she was planning and looking forward to Thanksgiving dinner with her family, since get-togethers hadn't happened this year. She enjoyed surrounding herself with family to break bread and share stories. She was a wonderful cook and baker, a disciplined and faithful woman, who eased other's burdens, and loved and cared deeply for her children and grandchildren, always praying for them and putting her concerns in God's hands.

The world is shining a little less brightly now and she will be missed by her surviving children, Jerry (Renea), and Peggy (Joe); daughter-in-law, Val; grandchildren, Teri (Tom) Eddings, Shauna (Darren) Leeds, Tara (Cory) VanWye, Aislin Svava, and Allen Svava; great-grandchildren, Jazmyn, Jace, Jake, Jett, and unknown to her, great-grandchild Leeds, to make an appearance June 2021; great-great-grandson, Jager; her sister, Lillian Denker; special niece, Dorothy Harwood Olson, who was like a sister to her; and numerous other nieces, nephews, cousins, close friends, and extended family. A thank you to nephew, Gary Denker, for always being there to help her out with whatever she needed, and thank you to son-in-law, Joe Svava, for keeping her technology running smoothly.

Heaven is smiling as she was welcomed by those who have been waiting for her: her husband, Wayne; son, Mike; granddaughter, Deanna; parents, John and Ida; sisters, Kathryn Harwood, Mary Goodrich, and Ruth Eppenbaugh; brothers, Robert, Henry, and George; and many others from her long, fulfilled life. She had lost some strength, become a little slower in movement but not in mind, and thought she should always be more productive, when just being her was her greatest gift.

A memorial has been established to the High Plains Western Heritage Center and the Sturgis United Methodist Church, or memorial donations may be made to a charity of the giver's choice.

Condolences may be sent to the family at [www.kinkadefunerals.com](http://www.kinkadefunerals.com).



*In Loving Memory Of*  
**Fern Louise O'Connor**  
*October 25, 1930 ~ November 16, 2020*





## *In Loving Memory* **Fern Louise O'Connor**

### ***Born***

October 25, 1930  
Haydraw, South Dakota

### ***Died***

November 16, 2020  
Sturgis, South Dakota

### ***Memorial Service***

Saturday, April 17, 2021, at 2:00 p.m.  
Kinkade Funeral Chapel  
Sturgis, South Dakota

### ***Officiating***

Rev. Jenene Earl

### ***Musician***

Danny Chapman

### ***Special Music***

"You Raise Me Up"  
"Just A Closer Walk With Thee"  
"I'll Fly Away"

### ***Honorary Pallbearers***

Gary Denker   Garry Denker   John P. Denker  
Duane Hayes   Dale Olson   Joe Svava

### ***Final Resting Place***

Bear Butte Cemetery  
Sturgis, South Dakota

## FOOTPRINTS

One night a man had a dream.  
He dreamed he was walking along the beach with the Lord.  
Across the sky flashed scenes from his life.  
For each scene, he noticed two sets of footprints in the sand:  
one belonging to him, and the other to the Lord.  
When the last scene of his life flashed before him,  
he looked back at the footprints in the sand.  
He noticed that many times along the path of his life  
there was only one set of footprints.  
He also noticed that it happened at the  
very lowest and saddest times in his life.  
This really bothered him and he questioned the Lord about it.  
"Lord, you said that once I decided to follow you,  
you'd walk with me all the way.  
But I have noticed that during the most troublesome  
times in my life, there is only one set of footprints.  
I don't understand why when I needed you most you would leave me."  
The Lord replied, "My son, my precious child,  
I love you, and I would never leave you.  
During your times of trial and suffering,  
when you see only one set of footprints,  
it was then that I carried you."



*Dorothy Olson*