



## Elnora Milliken

November 25, 1920 - January 11, 2019

Elnora Joan Toldo Milliken born November 25, Thanksgiving Day, in Chisholm Minnesota, passed away on January 11, 2019 surrounded by her loving family and caregivers.

Elnora's story begins with music. She was born into a family where music and musical instruments were part of each day. Soon she became known as "the girl with the violin" and went on to share a lifetime of joyful music with friends, family, students and communities, especially Traverse City where she was also described as a "dogmatic doer" and "quintessential community advocate".

Elnora's hometown, Chisholm, Minnesota, was part of the famous Iron Range and at the time it was bursting with international vibrancy as immigrants flocked to northern Minnesota to work in the Mesabi iron ore mines. Like many Chisholm families, Elnora's parents had emigrated from northern Italy.

Elnora started violin lessons in second grade and was lucky to inherit her father's absolute pitch. By fourth grade she was playing in the Hibbing Symphony Orchestra comprised of sixty to seventy musicians. Elnora was 11 years old and the only young child who played in the orchestra. She sat last chair in the second violin section, but was thrilled to be there. Elnora started piano lessons in fourth grade and by fifth grade she was playing the organ for weddings.

The Great Depression hit when Elnora was in grade school. Her father and all the miners were out of work, and her mother got a housecleaning job to make ends meet. Though with the family's extensive vegetable gardens and chickens, there was always plenty to eat. As Elnora said of this time, " We always had music. Music makes you happy."

Elnora graduated from Northwestern University with a music major in piano and violin. She moved to Detroit to teach string instruments in the public schools. Here, she met John Milliken of Traverse City who was in medical school at Wayne State University. They married in 1944 and lived in various cities as Dr. John completed his medical internship,

residency and service in the Army. Wherever they went, Elnora found a symphony or sometimes two or three.

In 1950 Dr. John Milliken returned to Traverse City with Elnora and their two young children. Elnora quickly discovered that there was no orchestra. So Elnora raised money, recruited other musicians and in 1952 debuted the first concert performed by the orchestra that is known today as the Traverse Symphony Orchestra (TSO).

Elnora's energy also spurred the creation of the Old Town Playhouse where she loved performing on stage. Just to surprise friends and family, Elnora was known for her impromptu scream of her opening line from the play *All Because of Agatha*: "All right, everybody out!!"

Elnora's passion for creative expression continued through her local television show for the Friendly Garden Club of Traverse City that aired for 15 years and received many state awards. Elnora was a founding member of the local chapter of Ikebana, the art of Japanese flower arranging. As Elnora said, "This art form is timeless and gives everyone a chance to be creative." Elnora won national and state awards for her arrangements. She also had a flair for fashion and often completed an elegant ensemble with a flower in her hair or bold earrings.

Elnora actively supported other endeavors for the arts or that highlighted the beauty of the Grand Traverse region. She served on the board of Interlochen Public Radio for 20 years and was involved in the early planning for the Botanic Garden in Traverse City. Elnora had a deep love of the four seasons in northern Michigan and did not hesitate to speak out on environmental issues decades before it became in vogue to do so.

In 2011, she received the Distinguished Service Award from the Traverse City Area Chamber of Commerce for her role in advancing the regional arts, including the aforementioned Traverse Symphony Orchestra and Old Town Playhouse, "having established the platform upon which other arts offerings have flourished." Elnora was a "pioneer in spirit and an artist at heart."

Married to Dr. John Milliken for 64 years until he passed away in 2008, they were partners both in love and in supporting each other's interests. With Dr. John, Elnora became an avid tennis player as well as downhill and cross-country skier. But boating was truly their common love and they would be on the water nearly every evening in the summer. They also loved to travel, and wherever Dr. John and Elnora went, if there was a piano, Elnora would play and new friends would be made.

Sherry Milliken Reum, Dr. James (MaryBeth) Milliken, Penny Milliken and Dr. JP (Darcy) Milliken as well as grandchildren Courtney, Carter and Halle (Oliver Hammond) Reum, Jennifer Rubiello, and Jay, Christine, Jack, Maggie, and Kelly Milliken, would like to thank the wonderful women who cared for Elnora during her recent years. Each of you brought joy into Elnora's life.

Elnora is now playing her music with Dr. John, their 3 year-old daughter Wendy, son-in-law Bob Reum, parents Peter and Lucia as well as with many dear friends with whom Elnora and Dr. John created so many fun memories while here on Earth.

In lieu of flowers, donations, in memory of Elnora, may be made to the Traverse Symphony Orchestra or to the Old Town Playhouse. A celebration of Elnora's life will be held at the Dennon Museum on Saturday, March 30 from 4:00pm – 6:00pm. The family is being cared for by Reynolds Jonkhoff Funeral Home.

# Cemetery

---

## Oakwood Cemetery

1325 East Eighth Street  
Traverse City, MI, 49686

# Events

---

**MAR** **Celebration of Life** 04:00PM - 06:00PM

**30**

---

Denos Museum Center

1410 College Drive, Travesre City, MI, US, 49686

# Comments

---



“ Thinking of Penny and her entire family.  
Elnora was a giant in our community.  
Her legacy touches all of us.  
Gratitude, peace and love,  
Susan Odgers and Tom Mair

**susan odgers** - January 18, 2019 at 09:57 PM