



Barbara Jean (Swengel) Abel

August 2, 1935 - June 15, 2025

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Barbara Jean Abel, affectionately known as "Babs," passed away peacefully on June 15th at the age of 89. Born in Indianapolis, Indiana, to Kenneth and Dorothy Swengel, Barbara was a loving daughter and sister to her siblings, Sharon and Kent. Even as a young girl, Barbara was known for her caring nature and desire to help others. This sense of compassion continued to define her throughout her life and was demonstrated by her devotion to her family and her unwavering kindness and generosity to others.

A graduate of Howe High School (1953), Barbara was an active participant in numerous school clubs and activities and in Jobs Daughters as a Past Honored Queen. She was also a model for William H. Block, appearing in fashion shows and on the cover of the local newspaper. Barb earned her Education degree from Hanover College in 1957, where she was a member of Phi Mu Sorority, as well as many other clubs and groups on campus, and was crowned Hanover May Queen her senior year.

In September 1957, Barbara married Bill J. Abel, whom she met while her family spent summers at Lake Tippecanoe. After a quick honeymoon in Niagara Falls, they moved to Germany for Bill's first assignment as a commissioned officer in the U.S. Army. They were then stationed to Fort Riley, KS and moved there just prior to the birth of their first child, son, Mitchell, in January 1959.

By 1961, the young family had returned to Indianapolis because Barbara wanted to be closer to her mother and siblings after the premature death of her father. She began teaching at John Strange Elementary School, and their second child, daughter Michelle, was born in March 1963. Barbara continued to teach and substitute for many years while also earning her master's degree in education from Butler University in 1972.

Barbara was deeply involved in the Indianapolis community. She and Bill were dedicated members of Zion Evangelical United Church of Christ, and Barbara served in several leadership roles, including Past Worthy Matron of Millersville Eastern Star and Homemaker's Club. She also got her realtor's license and enjoyed helping many families find their new home. In addition, the couple was very involved in the Indiana National Guard where Bill transitioned from active duty as a Colonel. They also shared a love for the Indianapolis 500 Festival and chaired the 500 Festival Committee for several years. From banquets to balls and the 500 Parade to the pace car they drove for the month, Barb and Bill enjoyed every minute of the month of May!

In 1974, Barbara went to work as the Executive Assistant to the Director of Conner Prairie Pioneer Settlement, where she worked for over 35 years and became a beloved figure and integral part of the Conner Prairie family, which also became a part of her family life, with her children working there through high school, and all 5 of her grandchildren attending Cabineers Camp in summers. Family and friends regularly enjoyed touring the grounds, special holiday celebrations and especially nights at Symphony on the Prairie. Upon her retirement in 2010 and in recognition of her years of service and dedication, the entrance road to Conner Prairie was renamed "Barbara Abel Way," and the Town of Fishers declared November 9, 2010, as "Barbara Abel Day." Even after her retirement, Barbara remained actively involved at Conner Prairie while also volunteering at Second Presbyterian Church and working part time at a local law firm.

A passionate traveler all her life, Barbara explored six of the seven continents and cherished her adventures with family and friends. Her most treasured

excursions, however, were those spent with each of her grandchildren, whom she took on special trips to share her love of travel. When not traveling or volunteering, Barb could often be found gardening in her yard or walking around her neighborhood with her dog Phoebe.

Visitation will be Saturday, June 21, 2025, from 9:30AM until the time of service at 11:30AM at Shirley Brother's Fishers/Castleton Chapel. (9900 Allisonville Rd, Fishers, 46038).

She is survived by her Son Mitch Abel(Sara),Indianapolis, Daughter Michelle Abel-Shoup(Dave), Chapel Hill, NC; Grandchildren: Megan Abel Haynes(Ken), Chicago, IL, Derek Abel(Erin) Franklin, IN, Clay Shoup(Amanda), Clayton, NC, Cole Shoup(Rachel), Charlotte, NC, Brooke Shoup (Chapel Hill), Erin Arney-Abel(Indianapolis; Great-Grandchildren Maverick Abel and Oaklyn Shoup; Sister Sharon Calvert, Indianapolis; as well as a niece, 3 nephews, several great nieces and nephews, and 3 cousins. Barb also leaves behind extended family and dear friends Cheryl Collins, Jeneane Rupenthal, Edin Hall, Nancy Hill, Sheila Lockhart, John and Larry Armantrout-Moreno, Kay Dennis, Terry Mohr, Judy Cassidy, Becky Sheckel. Barbara was preceded in death by her father, Kenneth Swengel (1959), former husband Bill Abel (2003), mother, Dorothy Swengel Sawyer (2013) and brother Kent Swengel (2023)

The family wishes to sincerely thank the Assisted Living and Skilled Care nursing staff at Hamilton Trace of Fishers, as well as her private Caregivers Marcella, Day and Candace, all who helped care for Barbara for the past 3 years. Special thanks also to the Community Hospice Team for their compassionate care and support for Barbara and the family in her last days. In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions in Barbara's name are suggested to the Alzheimer's Association, Conner Prairie, or a charity of your choice.

Cemetery Details

Crown Hill Cemetery

700 W. 38th St.
Indianapolis, IN 46208

Previous Events

Visitation

JUN 21. 9:30 AM - 11:30 AM (ET)

Shirley Brothers Fishers-Castleton Chapel
9900 N. Allisonville Road
Fishers, IN 46038
(317) 841-7878
info@shirleybrothers.com
<https://www.shirleybrothers.com>

Funeral Service

JUN 21. 11:30 AM (ET)

Shirley Brothers Fishers-Castleton Chapel
9900 N. Allisonville Road
Fishers, IN 46038
(317) 841-7878
info@shirleybrothers.com
<https://www.shirleybrothers.com>

Tribute Wall

ER

“ For so many years, Barb was the face of Conner Prairie. Her warmth, generosity, and belief in the museum attracted everyone to her. Everyone was Barb's true friend, from the wealthiest donors and board members to the volunteers. Barb extended herself to others without a thought. She became a dear friend during the time I worked with her and long after. I miss you now and will for a long time.

Ellen Rosenthal - July 07, 2025 at 02:06 PM

KB

“ The Department of Maternal and Child Health would like to express our heartfelt condolences the Abel Family.

Kia Barbee - June 23, 2025 at 07:25 PM

JR

“ Barb and I loved to do lunch. We had the most fun going to the restaurant in Lazarus we would have their pecan chicken salad with tea and people watch. Another favorite spot was Perkins for coffee and desert. Barb taught me so much about life, love, and friendship. She left a little of herself in every life she touched, I will forever love and miss you.

Jeneane Rupenthal - June 21, 2025 at 07:59 PM



“ A [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) was planted in honor of Barbara Jean (Swengel) Abel.

June 20, 2025 at 03:51 PM



“ *Fairest of All* was purchased for the family of Barbara Jean (Swengel) Abel.



June 20, 2025 at 03:51 PM



“ *Beautiful in Blue* was purchased for the family of Barbara Jean (Swengel) Abel.



June 20, 2025 at 10:40 AM



“ *Conner Prairie Family* purchased the *Serene Reflections Bouquet* for the family of Barbara Jean (Swengel) Abel.



Conner Prairie Family - June 20, 2025 at 09:52 AM



“ *Barb was such an asset to Conner Prairie for many years and helped make us who we are. Many many kids of employees got to attend camp because of her generosity. I am grateful for her talents and kindness.*

Sarah Morin - June 20, 2025 at 09:30 AM

TF

“ *The Haynes Family purchased the Basket of Memories for the family of Barbara Jean (Swengel) Abel.*



The Haynes Family - June 18, 2025 at 12:02 AM

JJ

“ *John Herbst Sr and John Herbst, Jr planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Barbara Jean (Swengel) Abel.*

John Herbst Sr and John Herbst, Jr - June 17, 2025 at 12:32 PM

JJ

“ *John Herbst Sr and John Herbst, Jr purchased the Country Basket Blooms for the family of Barbara Jean (Swengel) Abel.*



John Herbst Sr and John Herbst, Jr - June 17, 2025 at 12:32 PM



“ *1 file added to the album Memories Album*



Shirley Brothers Mortuaries & Crematory - June 17, 2025 at 08:47 AM