



Juanita Lillian Freeman Pilmer

March 22, 1931 - September 14, 2012

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Juanita Lillian Freeman Pilmer, 81, died September 14, 2012 at St. Elizabeth's Hospital, Fort Thomas, KY, after a long struggle with Alzheimer's disease. Her former husband, retired Naval officer Lieutenant Commander Edwin H. Pilmer, Jr.; her son-in-law, Edwin G. Kutscher; and her parents, Thelma R. and Cassick J. Freeman, precede her in death.

An only child, she was born March 22, 1931 to Thelma T. and Cassick J. Freeman in Berkeley, CA. During her teen years, she worked as a floral arranger in a florist shop, as a model and a seamstress. She attended the University of California, Berkeley, and then decided to pursue her true passion for fashion design at the Louise Salinger Academy of Fashion in San Francisco until she left school to marry Naval officer and fighter pilot, Edwin H. Pilmer, Jr. As a military wife, she lived in Corpus Christi, TX; San Diego, CA; Norfolk, VA, Providence, RI, and Blackwater, MS. Later, after the Blackwater family home near Meridian, MS burned down, she returned to Berkeley, California to care for her ailing mother, Thelma T. Freeman (nee Townshend).

A great granddaughter of a Montana frontier doctor, she learned early the importance of community involvement. While raising her five children, she also volunteered for many organizations, including serving in the Meridian Symphony League, as a member of the Naval Officer's Wives Club, and as a Cub Scout den mother.

As a talented Mezzo Soprano singer, Juanita served for many years as a choir director—first for the Blackwater Baptist Church outside Meridian, MS and then later, for the Meridian Naval Air Station's Protestant Chapel. At the Navel chapel, her music experience, knowledge, sensitivity, and dedication found it's best directorial expression as she took the choir there to the highest levels of musicianship, expressing theirs and her love for God. It was there that she also probably experienced her most rewarding spiritual and work satisfaction. But as strong as her love for music was, she felt even stronger about justice and love for people of all faiths and color. She attended black churches when invited to mourn or celebrate with her African-American friends during a racially tense era in Mississippi. She sang for the Temple Beth Israel's Yom Kippur and other Jewish religious observations after months of practice singing Hebrew.

Juanita's passion for music extended to her years as a radio host for a classical music show in Meridian, MS. Her in-depth knowledge of classical music and her conversational talents were evident as she spun classics accompanied by fascinating historical commentary.

Her talents seemed limitless. Other artistic pursuits included acting, drawing and painting, writing poetry, and extraordinary fashion and culinary creations.

Perhaps her most memorable theatrical role in theatre was Bloody Mary in South Pacific at the Meridian Little Theatre, MS. As with all her artistic endeavors, she was detail-oriented in creating the role of Bloody Mary, going so far as to spray her blond hair black instead of wearing an unconvincing wig, and chewing licorice buttons to simulate the effects on the teeth of the character's betel nut use.

Later in life she attended Meridian Junior College, pursuing a degree in social work. While her own life challenges interrupted her pursuit, for a time she worked for a Crisis Center Hotline, and was known by her friends to be a good listener and advisor.

Juanita is survived by her daughter, Pamela J. Kutscher, Falmouth, KY; son, Edwin H. Pilmer, III, Hattiesburg, MS; son, John F. (Diane) Pilmer, Orem, UT; son, Robert J. (Debbie) Pilmer, Nashville, TN; daughter, Suzanne Dru (Marty Hanka) Pilmer; grandchildren Amanda Pilmer, Justin R. (Camille) Pilmer, Emily Pilmer, and Mitchell J.G Buchanan (formerly Pilmer).

The family wishes to extend a special thanks to Richard M. Snow for his love

and care of Juanita for many years, and to the River Valley Nursing Home, Butler, KY, for their devoted care in recent months.

Memorial donations may be made to the Alzheimer's Association or the Lyme Disease Association, Inc.

The family would especially appreciate special memories of our mother that anyone might have to share.

Tribute Wall

CR

“ I'm so sorry to hear of the passing of your mother, Dru and family. I remember enjoying conversations with her on the few occasions I saw her. What a beauty! I remember her vivaciousness, personality and energy. Although I only met her a couple of times, once in Berkeley, I remember how warmly she welcomed me and made me feel at home. My deepest sympathies to you all.
Crystal

Crystal Robbins - September 24, 2012 at 12:00 AM

DP

“ Juanita Lillian Freeman Pilmer

Don & Elaine Palmer - September 23, 2012 at 12:00 AM

RD

“ Juanita banked with me for a few years at the 44th Ave. Branch of Citizens National Bank in Meridian, Ms. before she moved to Berkeley. We had many conversations and she called me often for advice and even continued to do so after moving to Ca. I had met her husband when I was a young sailor at NAS Meridian, he was an instructor pilot and I had helped him strap in and taxi out in my job as a plane captain. I remembered him specifically from an incident where he kept getting a wet start in firing off the jets engine. I hopped up on the plane and pointed to his control switch that he had forgotten to engage giving him control. When he came back from his flight he wanted to know who the smart-alec kid with the black hair was. He was not one to be upstaged. I related this story to Juanita and I guess that started our long time acquaintance. May she rest in the peace of Christ. Ron DiPalma

Ronald DiPalma - September 22, 2012 at 12:00 AM