

Barbara (Bruckbauer) Gagnon

April 11, 1936 - December 5, 2025

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Barbara Jean Gagnon née Bruckbauer was born on April 11, 1936, the first of three daughters born to Vincent “Doc” and Martha Bruckbauer, and a member of the third generation of Bruckbauers born in Sleepy Eye. She was a baby during the summer of 1936, still the worst heat wave on record in Minnesota. She later said that she thought that was why the back of her head had a flat spot, from laying down in the oppressive heat. Her parents soon built the little brick house on what was then North 4th Street, and two more sisters came along. All three girls went to St. Mary’s Grade School and High School, where their father had also attended. In recent years, whenever her music teacher daughter Mary talked about how things were going at school, Barb would often comment how different that was from how the nuns did things back in her day. She played drums in the children’s Sleepy Eye drum and bugle corps and enjoyed singing in the school choir, telling her daughter in later years how she would follow her best friend, saying, “When Helen sang up, I sang up, and when Helen sang down, I sang down!” Barb

enjoyed her time at St. Mary's and in Sleepy Eye and spoke fondly of her classmates and friends from that time for the rest of her life. She was always interested whenever Sleepy Eye was in the news and kept track of the goings on in her hometown.

She spent her childhood with her classmates, neighbors, and friends, as well as her sisters and her cousins Sondra and Marcia. The Peterson, Zabel, and Bruckbauer families got together often for holidays and other activities, and the cousins from those three families grew up close. Barb often told stories that began, "When Marcia and I went to New York…" and would often end with going into Cartier during a rainstorm and feeling like a drowned rat and a hick from the hills.

Barb graduated from high school in 1954 and went on to a three-year program at St. Cloud Hospital School of Nursing, graduating as an RN. She worked at the hospital in Gaylord, MN for a time, then moved to the Twin Cities and took a job at Crystal Doctors' Park in Crystal. There, the doctors set her up on a blind date for the annual Christmas party with the son of some friends of theirs, and they hit it off. Barb married Frank Gagnon in September of 1968 at the Church of St. Raphael in Crystal, MN. Barb was outraged after the landlord raised the rent in her apartment when her husband moved in (to $100 a month!) and insisted they needed to purchase a home. Barb and Frank bought their house in Brooklyn Park in 1969, when it was one of only two houses on the block, on a dirt road, and with no city water hookup. They joined the Church of St. Vincent de Paul in Osseo, and Barb became active in the Council of Catholic Women, bringing bars to funerals, and later for many years serving for an hour in Perpetual Adoration.

Barb continued working as a nurse after their marriage as Frank ran his printing business, until she got frustrated one day at work and walked out the door. She did not go back to work as a nurse, but stayed home, helping Frank with business bookkeeping and taking care of their daughter, Mary, who came along shortly thereafter. Barb taught Mary to read, write, and do math early on, and was active in her education. She could always be counted on to help with the PTO and chaperone field trips. When Mary started 'cello lessons, Barb drove her downtown each week, sat in the lesson, and would help her remember what she needed to practice at home.

Her early training as a nurse came in handy whenever one of the neighbor kids got hurt and when the neighbor across the street fell off his roof. She used her training again when her mother became sick from cancer, going back to Sleepy Eye to take care of her. Barb was diagnosed with cancer herself just a few years later, but beat it with treatment, going on to live almost another 30 years.

She will be remembered for marking everyone's birthdays and made a point of sending a card with a handwritten letter. She would take notes on what she saw in the news and things that happened that she thought would interest the letter recipient so she had something to write about. She watched the news every night on multiple channels, just to see how they differed from each other. And, she listened to 'CCO Radio during the day, every day. Her doctors had her give up salty foods and coffee, but in her later years she was back to drinking several cups of coffee per day and woe betide you if you didn't make sure she got her coffee.

After Frank died in 2019, Barb moved in with her daughter back to Crystal, close to where she lived when she met Frank all those years ago. In 2021, she moved to Maranatha Care Center in Brooklyn Center, where she spent the rest of her life.

Barb is preceded in death by her parents, Doc and Martha Bruckbauer, brother-in-law Rick Pilon, cousin Marcia Schoonover, and her husband, Frank Gagnon. She is survived by her daughter Mary Gagnon, sisters Clare Pilon and Eileen (Tom) Gannon, cousins Alan (Susan DeVogel) Zabel and Sondra (Neale) Romey, nieces and nephews Ann (Barry Wadsworth) McGarry, Mike (Natalie) Pilon, Chuck (Kim) Pilon, Jeanne (Michael Hunt) Gannon, Tony Pilon, Laura (Brad) Muetzel, and Joe (Shelly) Pilon, and other relatives and friends.

Especial thanks to the staff of Maranatha Care Center in Brooklyn Center for taking such good care of Barb for the past four years.

The visitation will be Sunday, December 28, 2025, from 3:00-6:00 pm at Evans-Nordby Funeral Home, 34 Second St. NE, Osseo, MN 55369. The funeral Mass will be Monday, December 29, 2025, at 10:30 am at the Church of St. Vincent de Paul, 9100 93rd Ave N, Brooklyn Park, MN 55445. There will be a visitation at the church one hour prior to the Mass.

In lieu of flowers, please donate to the Ronald McDonald House or your favorite charity.

Visitation

Sunday, December 28th 3PM - 6PM

Evans-Nordby Funeral Home, 34 2nd Street NE, Osseo, MN

Driving Directions

Mass of Christian Burial

Monday, December 29th 10:30AM

St. Vincent de Paul Catholic Church, 9100 93rd Ave N., Brooklyn Park, MN

Driving Directions