

HAMILTON - Doris Milner died peacefully on Friday evening, Dec. 28, 2007 - her forehead anointed with water from Indian Creek and her lips with essence of juniper - surrounded by family and friends.

Doris Lydia Hess was born to Carroll and Olive Hess in Taneytown, Md., Feb. 18, 1920. She was the middle child of three daughters. She flourished on the family dairy farm outside Taneytown, along with her two sisters, Ellen and Phyllis. Surely, her experience with dairy cows helps explain why she was such a force to be reckoned with in later life. She lived at home with her family through college graduation in 1940 from Western Maryland College with a bachelor of science degree. After graduation, adventure called and she went to New Orleans where she took a course in laboratory technology and then a job at Charity Hospital. There Doris met the love of her life, Kelsey Milner, who also worked in the lab. They married on March 21, 1942. The U.S. had just entered World War II and they tried to enlist in the Navy, but Kelsey was rejected for color blindness, so they remained at their hospital jobs during the war, living in a third floor walk-up in the French Quarter in New Orleans. Afterward, they both went to graduate school in microbiology, and Doris finished the course work for a master's degree, but the arrival of her children postponed the thesis and the degree forever. Doris and Kelsey built a small house on the edge of extensive swampland outside New Orleans. There they raised chickens, pigs, a cow, a dog, and three children, Jean, Kelsey, and Eric, while Kelsey finished his graduate work at Tulane University.

Then, in June of 1951 they moved to Hamilton. They spent their first Montana Christmas in the home where they would live for the next 56 years on the hill west of Hamilton, surrounded by packing boxes - they had only moved in the day before. In 1953, their fourth child, Scott, was born. Doris was an energetic housewife caring for her husband and four kids. She loved entertaining friends and was always cooking up some kind of gathering: multifamily barbecues, camping trips, dinners, parties.

Doris loved her new home, the valley and its people, and especially the opportunities to enjoy the natural beauty surrounding the little town of Hamilton. She loved gardening, hiking, fishing, mushrooming and camping, thus spending lots of time in the outdoors. This led to the realization that forests, streams, wildlife and wilderness had to be protected or they would be lost or their quality greatly degraded. Her accomplishments in wilderness and resource conservation were significant; as a model for citizen involvement, Doris' example will inspire future generations.

Doris was first galvanized to action in the early 1960s, when she learned that the Forest Service planned a timber sale that would include the Little Clearwater River drainage within the Magruder Corridor along the Selway River. This area was especially important to her, as it contained the favorite family camping spot. She and like-minded ex-Forest Service Supervisor G.M. "Brandy" Brandborg formed the "Save the Upper Selway Committee." They began to organize opposition to permanent development of the then-recently declassified Magruder Corridor on the Selway river in Idaho - a pristine and unique 100-mile stretch of wilderness river country. Enlisting the aid of Idaho Sen. Frank Church and Montana Sen. Lee Metcalf, among others, legislation was drafted that restored wilderness classification to this area and eventually established two of the largest wilderness areas in the United States. Doris maintained lifelong participation with the Montana Wilderness Association, and served as its president for three years (1973-1975). She and her colleagues at the Montana Wilderness Association were successful in preserving all of the Selway Wilderness. The 105,600-acre Magruder Corridor was added to the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness in 1980 (1.2 million acres total). She was active in the struggle to set aside several other areas: The Scapegoat Wilderness (almost 240,000 acres was signed into law in 1972), the Great Bear Wilderness in 1978, and the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness in Idaho in 1980 (almost 2.4 million acres).

Doris was a true citizen. She attended countless meetings, spoke publicly, wrote thousands of letters and made phone calls to motivate legislators and many others to act. Her work helped raise public consciousness of the value of wilderness and ecologically sound land use practices during an era when policy was dominated by short-term profit-taking.

Doris was courageous. She did not hesitate in the 1960s to speak out against resource exploitation and in favor of sustainable forest resource management. No wild-eyed radical, however, Doris held a firm belief in the democratic process. She worked closely with Forest Service and industry officials toward the balanced use of forest lands for the sustained benefit of all. She lived with a telephone to her ear and her hands on the typewriter, communicating with her environmental colleagues, industry and Forest Service contacts, and many legislators at all levels of government. In addition to their time, she and Kelsey dedicated 10 percent of their income to protecting wilderness. The high regard Doris earned is shown by her repeated invitations to testify before U.S. Senate committees during this process, by her appointment to an advisory committee to the secretary of agriculture during the administration of President Jimmy Carter, and by numerous awards, including being named one of 10 Citizen Conservationists of the Year in 1978 by the American Motors Corp. It is a testament to her selflessness that of the many awards and citations she received in her life, only one or two managed to appear on her office wall in the family home; the vast majority were stuffed among her many files, remaining largely unknown to her family and friends.

Doris continued to serve well into the 1990s as a voice of reason within environmental politics. In a 2004 interview, NPR's Elizabeth Arnold asked: "Why?"

Why did this woman, busy with her children and an already-full life, decide to roll up her sleeves, making it her business to save the Magruder Corridor from logging roads and clearcuts? Her response, said as though she thought the answer obvious, was a classic: "All I knew was I was mad. That's all I knew - and I was going to do something about it." In 1980, after 17 years of struggle, that land was added to the wilderness area.

Doris devoted much time and energy to local issues such as access to the rivers and planning issues in the county. She was a member of the Hamilton Women's Club for many years and was active in the League of Women Voters. She enjoyed the literature class at the library for many years.

Legions of us were affected by Doris's zest for life. Whether at the conference table or the family dinner table, she brought an infectious enthusiasm to any conversation. She was a balanced thinker; able to listen to opposing views and consider alternatives, but passionate about her core beliefs. Her irrepressible sense of humor delighted us all. We will miss her terribly.

Doris was preceded in death by her sisters and her husband. She is survived by her four children, nine grandchildren, and a great-grandson.

Friends and colleagues are invited to pay last respects between 5 and 7 p.m., Wednesday, Jan. 9 at Dowling Funeral Home, 415 S. Second St., Hamilton.

Memorials to the Doris Milner Scholarship Fund may be made payable to the University of Montana Foundation and sent to Attention: Lisa Leonard, College of Forestry & Conservation, University of Montana, Missoula, MT 59812.



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