



Annie Mary Russell Diehl

June 9, 1925 - November 17, 2024

On a Sunday afternoon in November, with the family who loved and adored her gathered around, Annie Mary Russell Diehl's beautiful life on this earth came to an end. Her journey began nearly a hundred years earlier when she was born in a farmhouse that sat at the foot of Tussey Mountain, in a tiny burg called Cherrytown, in south central Pennsylvania.

Cherrytown in 1925 was as rural a place as you could find in America. The Russells had deep roots there; the farmhouse in which Annie was born had been in the family for more than a century by the time she arrived in the world. She was the second child of Charles and Mary Alice Russell. Annie's sister Edna (Dutch), was a year older; next came her brothers Fred (Millie) and Bob (Pearl), followed by Nancy Jane. Another brother, little Earl, died in infancy. Nancy Jane is Annie's last surviving sibling.

Annie and her siblings grew up in a time and place that is unrecognizable to

twenty-first century

Americans. Her father farmed with horse-drawn plows. Her mother made meals on a wood-fired cookstove and hauled in water from the outside pump because the house had no indoor plumbing. The house was heated with a coal stove, and they didn't get electricity or a telephone until Annie was in high school. Air conditioning was unheard of, but they had a springhouse that acted as a refrigerator, with the cold, clear water flowing through it from the underground spring that ran off of Tussey Mountain. There was a root cellar where they kept the fruits and vegetables that they canned. And they had a smokehouse, where Annie's father hung the sides of beef and pork that he butchered.

She and her siblings attended a one-room schoolhouse that sat on their farm property just over a hill from their house. A few dozen kids from neighboring farms, ranging from first to seventh grade, attended the school, where their teacher, "Dopey" Baker - as the kids affectionately called him - tried his best to keep order.

Annie grew up during the Great Depression, but she never felt as though her family was poor because everyone around them was in the same boat. And because they lived on a farm, they always had enough to eat.

When it came time for the harvest each year, the men from all over the valley would gather to help each other bring in the crops. The women would fix meals for the men, and Annie often talked about how, as a kid, she would help her mom prepare massive lunches and dinners, enough to “feed the threshers.”

Growing up during the Depression without modern conveniences might sound like a life of deprivation. But Annie only ever saw it as an idyllic childhood, and always spoke of her early life lovingly. Although she eventually left the farm and the valley where she grew up, it always remained a part of her. That was home, and she was a farm girl until the end.

After the one room schoolhouse, Annie attended Saxton Liberty High School. It was an adjustment, riding the bus (that her dad drove), going to a “big” school with kids from different towns. But Annie soon fit right in. A look back at her high school years show a girl who was happy, well-liked and involved in the things school had to offer. She played saxophone in the band, had a role in her senior class play, and was on the yearbook staff. She fondly recalled wearing a pretty, long white dress and a beautiful corsage to her senior prom.

Annie graduated in 1943, in the middle of World War II. Many of the boys in her class, and

many that she grew up with, joined the military and headed overseas. Some would never return.

Annie and Edna moved from the farm to Cumberland, Maryland. Like a lot of the girls in their generation, they got jobs in a factory that manufactured materiel for the war effort. The sisters worked at the Celanese Corporation, where Annie operated a machine that produced components for the parachutes used by our paratroopers.

The war years weren't all drudgery and hard work. Annie and her friends visited local dance halls, like the Crystal Ballroom, where they danced to the sounds of big band swing music, and they took hikes in the nearby mountains. Although she dated a few boys during those years, there was nothing serious. Most of the young men were off at war.

But when the war ended, the boys finally came home. During that early post-war time, Annie was out one night at a bowling alley with a group of girls when a young soldier - just back from serving in Europe - walked in with his friends. That night, Annie met Harry Diehl, the man she would marry and spend the rest of her life with. Their marriage lasted for nearly seventy-eight years, 'til death did part them, with Harry sitting by her bed, holding her hand until the end.

Their life together, while not without its pitfalls, was a happy one, filled with joy,

laughter and the warmth of family. Annie always yearned to be a mother. Her greatest joy was holding little babies in her arms; she lit up with delight when she cradled infants, and they loved her too. Happily, she and Harry had four children - Nancy (Tom, deceased), Don (who died in infancy), Russ (Connie), and Kevin.

When someone answers their calling in life, it's a beautiful thing to behold. Annie poured her heart and soul, her many talents and her wisdom, into raising her family. With her whole being, she provided her kids a loving, inviting home, a refuge from the world. And with that, she gave them a solid foundation on which to build their lives.

Harry and Annie began their life together in Pennsylvania, close to home for them both. But Harry's job as a truck driver eventually took them from Pennsylvania to upstate New York and then later to central Ohio. Annie made the best of each upheaval, never complaining. It simply wasn't in her nature.

No matter where they lived, everyone felt the welcoming warmth of her home, the heart of which was her kitchen. The aroma of Annie's kitchen - when she was making her vegetable soup or chicken and waffles or her beloved cream of wheat or any of a thousand other things - will linger

forever in the memories for all who were lucky enough to take it in. When Annie cooked or baked she was patient, she never rushed the process, and always had some extra touch that her family knew made her version the best version of that particular dish.

Annie saved her best for holidays. She made them special and memorable in so many ways with the decorations and the traditions. The meal, of course, was the central part of the festivities. She created delicious and aesthetic feasts for the ages, main courses surrounded by a dozen magnificent side dishes. There was always enough to feed the threshers. There were Thanksgiving pies, homemade birthday cakes, and plenty of Christmas cookies for the family and for the neighbors. And of course there was the essential meal on New Year's Day: her pork and sauerkraut extravaganza. It was tradition: that had to be the first meal of the year. Even the backyard summer cookouts received her special touch, with perfectly grilled burgers and bratwursts and delicious beyond description macaroni salad or potato salad, and a thirst-quenching lemon-limeade slush concoction for backyard wiffleball games. Any and all of these meals were a treat for the senses.

Her kitchen was the gathering place where generations sat and listened to her stories of

growing up and received her quiet wisdom. She almost always slipped in unforgettable lessons that would last a lifetime for her kids, grandkids, and their friends. For a girl who had a sheltered upbringing and didn't venture far beyond the valley until she got older, Annie had a surprisingly worldly ability to detect deception. She had the country equivalent of street smarts - call it farm smarts - and an unerring eye for truth and authenticity. Her kids quickly learned you couldn't pull the wool over Mom's eyes.

When she welcomed her five grandchildren into the world - Nancy and Tom's kids - Kara (Corey), Kyle (Lani), and Jill (Ben) - and Russ and Connie's kids - Jason (Leslie), and Lindsay (Brad) - she went from being "Mom" to being "Nannie." She was blessed to see each of her grandchildren graduate high school and college, and they were thrilled that she was there to be a part of their weddings.

Happily, more family blessings awaited her. She lived long enough to welcome nine great-grandsons into the world, and they got to know her: Lindsay's sons, Logan and Ethan; Kara's son, Leo; Jason's sons, Isaac and Ezra; Kyle's sons, Jack and Gus; and Jill's sons, Hayden and Gavin. And this farm girl, who grew up without a telephone, loved interacting with her out-of-town great-grandsons through FaceTime.

In addition to Annie's children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, she is survived by more than a dozen nieces and nephews who adored their Aunt Annie, the fun aunt, who could make them laugh with her good-natured teasing and practical jokes. She had a special bond with her oldest niece Judy, who faithfully called her beloved Aunt Annie every evening for the last several years of Annie's life.

Annie was a prolific writer of cards and letters throughout her life. The lucky recipients of her thoughtful communications knew as they opened those envelopes that there would be something inside to make them feel better about the world. Some of the recipients have saved all of the cards, notes, and letters that Annie sent them, and they number in the hundreds. The overriding influence in Annie's life was her deeply held Christian faith. She didn't preach or impose her faith on anyone; rather, she lived it through countless acts of kindness and service, and in her unfailingly pleasant demeanor.

In her early fifties, Annie began volunteering at Children's Hospital in Columbus, something she would continue to do well into her eighties, ending up on the hospital's Volunteer Wall of Fame. She earned the admiration of the hospital staff when they discovered the calming affect her

gentle touch and loving care had on colicky and fussy babies. In her more than thirty-five years of volunteering, she cradled several thousand babies in her arms and gave those little one's tender comfort on their worst days.

In addition to her hospital work, Annie never missed an opportunity to donate blood. Over the course of her life, she donated more than twenty precious, life-saving gallons of her blood. It's impossible to calculate how many lives she touched in that way. Annie was also active at the Reynoldsburg United Methodist Church for decades, helping with meal preparations for funerals and other services, doing office work, and organizing special events.

Along the way, she and Harry had an opportunity for some travel adventures. In 1982, she boarded an airplane for the first time ever (it was the first time Harry had flown since his days in the Army Air Corps during the war) and they flew to Israel, Jordan, and Greece with their church group. They visited numerous Biblical sites, including the Dead Sea, Jerusalem, and the Sea of Galilee. They rode horses down to Petra - the ancient city built into the cliffs of Jordan - and they explored the famous sights of Athens.

She and Harry also got to make several trips out west to visit family and take in some of

America's magnificent National Parks - Yellowstone, Yosemite, Glacier, Redwoods, and the Grand Canyon among others. Annie had only previously seen pictures of these natural wonders in magazines, and she marveled at the majesty of the nation that she loved dearly.

Having been raised in a loving and stable home during the Depression, and coming of age during the War, Annie was tempered like steel and met most challenges with calm. Her cheerful nature was not a facade; it was genuine. As she began losing her eyesight to macular degeneration in her later years, she often said that she was just grateful for each day that she could see at all. She never wasted time wishing for what she didn't have.

Hers was, by any objective standard, a blessed and wonderful life extraordinarily well lived.

Annie was a truly content and happy person, and she greeted each day saying, "This is a day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it." She lived by those words. Simply put, Annie was a delight to be with, and everyone felt better about themselves in her presence.

There will be no fanfare to mark her passing, only a simple service and the quiet grief of those who loved her best. Her remains will be laid to rest under a modest stone next to the baby she lost seventy-four years ago, in an out-of-the way cemetery in Bedford County, Pennsylvania, back home in

the lush and lovely mountains that she so adored and never really left. Very few people will ever visit her grave. And yet this humble farm girl whose life spanned a remarkable century leaves a legacy of decency, kindness, and selfless love that cannot be forgotten. She didn't set out to conquer the world; she simply wanted to make it a better place because she was in it. And in that, she was spectacularly successful.

A memorial service for Annie will be held on January 18, 2025, at 2:00pm. The service will be at Pickerington Nazarene Church, 11775 Pickerington Road NW, Pickerington, Ohio 43147.

In lieu of flowers, please send donations to:
Macular Degeneration Research
22512 Gateway Center Drive, Clarksburg, MD 20871
Or at brightfocus.org/stopAMD
Or call 855-345-6637

Day Funeral Service is honored to serve the family of Annie Diehl.

Previous Events

Memorial Service

JAN 18. 2:00 PM (ET)

Pickerington Nazarene Church
11775 Pickerington Road NW
Pickerington, OH 43147

Tribute Wall

BM

“ It was a true privilege to spend time with Annie and Harry in their warm, inviting kitchen, where each moment felt deeply sacred and significant. Sharing Communion and praying together was a powerful experience, filled with love and genuine connection that I will forever hold close to my heart. Their conversations were always accompanied by shared smiles, creating lasting memories that I will cherish. Annie's faith radiated through her every action, reflecting a life profoundly rich in love and surrounded by family and friends who adored her. Her simple yet deeply meaningful existence left an indelible mark on my heart, one that I will carry with me always. Pastor Bob Mathias, Reynoldsburg Community Church. In loss, we find the reminder of what true richness in life means.

Bob Mathias - January 14, 2025 at 04:13 PM

DG

“ Devin and Cassie Groves planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Annie Mary Russell Diehl.

Devin and Cassie Groves - January 04, 2025 at 09:35 PM

DG

“ Devin and Cassie Groves purchased the Arrive in Style for the family of Annie Mary Russell Diehl.



Devin and Cassie Groves - January 04, 2025 at 09:35 PM