

Mary Brendza Hodder Memorial Endowment



Mary Antonia Brendza was born in Westfield on August 7, 1918. She was the youngest of the seven children of Anthony and Antonia Brendza. The three eldest children, Victor, Michael, and Joseph, were born in Lithuania. Anthony immigrated to the United States in 1903, and Antonia followed him here in 1910. She gave birth to Louise, Peter, Helen, and Mary in Westfield.

Mary grew up in her family's home on 13 William Street in Westfield. She attended Fort Meadow School and Westfield High School. While in tenth grade, Mary left Westfield High due to illness. When she recovered, she worked at a number of jobs. During World War II, Mary operated a drill press at American Bosch.

In late 1942, she met Sgt. Joe Hodder at a party in Springfield. They dated for the remainder of time Joe was stationed at Bradley, and then carried on their courtship by mail and brief visits. Mary traveled to Denver in 1945, and she and Joe were married on February 25, 1945. Shortly after that, Joe returned overseas.

When the war ended and Joe was released from the Air Force, they lived in Johnson City, New York. At the outset of the Korean War, Joe, a reservist, was recalled. Mary joined him in Louisiana. They agreed that Joe should transfer to the regular Air Force and remain on active duty.

In October 1957, Joe was transferred to Germany. He and Mary lived in Germany and France for 51 months. During this time, they adopted four children. The Hodder family returned to the United States in December 1961, and lived in South Carolina and Virginia. In November 1966, Joe retired from the Air Force and took a job in Silicon Valley, California. He retired from that job in 1987, and two years later, they returned to Westfield.

Mary Hodder died in February 1998. She rests in St. Mary's Cemetery alongside her parents and her sister. Mary was always called "Boo" by her family, and her marker says *Mary "Boo" Hodder*.

So far, this story seems to be almost as much about Joe as it is about Mary. That's probably because they were married 53 years and they were very much a team all that time. Mary had a lifelong series of medical problems, but none of that ever slowed her down. She happily raised her four children in spite of health problems. More than once, when Joe was elsewhere, Mary bundled the kids into a VW Minibus and went off on a visit. One time, she went from France and drove about 200 miles to visit friends in Germany! The trip included the border crossing as well as dealing with folks in languages that Mary didn't speak well.

The Hodder children attended Catholic elementary schools, and Mary volunteered regularly. She also helped out at a Head Start Program for the children of migrant workers. This program was situated in a prune orchard about 40 miles from our home, and Mary traveled there five days a week after she dropped her own kids off at school. Joe established this scholarship to honor his wife's passionate support of education.

Mary was a loving, caring, intelligent, witty woman. Wherever she lived, she was always the first to help out friends and neighbors in times of trouble. Mary kept an orderly, stable home, and encouraged among her children an abiding interest in books, serious music, and the ballet.

Mary Antonia Brendza Hodder was the sort of person anyone could benefit from knowing. Everybody that ever met her liked her and loved her—just ask Joe.

Written by: Joe Hodder
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