



## Mary M. Kless

January 10, 1915 - April 18, 2017

### The Life Story Of Mary Kless

Mary Magdalene Remlinger was born on Jan. 10, 1915 in the city of Lebanon, PA. Her

mother, Maria Moritz, was born in Drenovci, Yugoslavia, as was her father Andrew Remlinger.

The couple were married in 1908 and emigrated to the United States in 1912, just before World

War I began in Europe in 1914, with their two small children Anton (Tony) and Catherine. After

a month long voyage aboard the Martha Washington they arrived in New York and went straight

to Lebanon, where Maria's brother was their sponsor. There young Katie died in 1913 but another

brother, John, was born that year, followed by Mary in 1915. The family lived in a small frame

home on N. 4th street near the Quittapahilla Creek. They had no electricity, only kerosene lamps,

and their only heat source was a large woodstove in the kitchen on which they not only cooked

meals, but heated water for their weekly baths. She was only a toddler when the United States

entered the war in December of 1917, which ended a year later in 1918.

Mary attended the local elementary school through sixth grade and the family eventually

moved up the block to #410, a larger home with electricity as well as more space for the family.

The family also eventually got their first automobile with Tony as the driver.

When she was

about 11, her father died of tuberculosis. Since her mother worked full time in a factory and

brother Tony also had quit school and was working, she and her brother John nursed their father

in his final days. When the public school told them that they would have to play basketball in 7th

grade, John quit altogether to work and Mary went on her own initiative to St. Gertrude's

Catholic School and asked to be admitted. The school only offered 8 grades and upon completion

of 8th grade Mary stopped her schooling and went to work in a sewing factory where her mother

was employed, at 14 years of age. From her earnings, she helped support the family as well as

buying her own clothing. About that same time her widowed mother married Casper Fisher and a

daughter, Theresa, was born in 1930. He died in turn in 1933 and Maria married a third time in

1935 to John Stefan, with whom she lived until 1952.

In her early teens Mary met her brother Tony's friend, John Kless, also the son of

immigrant parents from the same region of Europe, who lived a few blocks away. At the time

John had his own small business delivering coal in a dump truck. He had only completed 10th

grade but eventually went to trade school and learned to be a machinist. When Mary was 18 and John was 22, they decided to marry and on Dec. 23, 1933 they, along with her brother John and John's sister Laura as witnesses, drove to Hagerstown, Maryland, a popular destination for being married without a waiting period, where they were wed in the home of a Protestant minister. In the beginning they lived with Mary's mother on 4th St. for a few months and then moved to their own house in the Hebron section of Lebanon. Their son Robert was born in December of 1936 and in July of 1941 they adopted a daughter, Brenda. During these years they had managed to purchase 3 1/2 acres of land with a cottage on the banks of the Quittapahilla Creek, just off of S. White Oak St. on the outskirts of the small town of Annville, PA, a few miles away from Lebanon. In early fall of 1941 they moved to this property, just before the destruction of Pearl Harbor by the Japanese and the US entering World War II. By this time John was not only working to enlarge their own house, but working as a machinist in a hosiery mill, traveling to Reading, PA daily, and was not drafted because his job was considered vital to the war effort. Mary was a housewife caring for her two small children and tending the family's growing menagerie of goats, chickens, dogs and eventually ponies and a mule. She never learned to drive and always walked into town to order

groceries at Miller's Grocery Store and have them delivered. Sometime after the dropping of the atomic bombs and the ending of the war, John went to work more locally for the Annville Stone Quarry. About 1948 Mary went to work in town at Keystone Mills, a Tee Shirt factory near the school and John eventually went to work for Fink's Bakery. It was always John's dream to own a real farm and in 1950 they managed to purchase 92 acres of farmland near the town of Wellsboro in Tioga County PA for \$5,000. They were later able to purchase a war surplus barracks for another \$5,000 and assemble it as the shell of a house on the property. They began making frequent weekend trips there during the warm portions of the year to work on and enjoy the property. When Mary was 40, in 1954, several things happened. Bob graduated from High School in June and enlisted in the Air Force in July and a second son, John Jr. was born in October. By this time Mary had quit her factory job to be home with her son, plus they added a milk cow to the family menagerie and a huge garden to add to the family larder. In 1958 John quit his job and was unable to find work for nearly a year, so Mary went to work at the Dress Factory on N. White Oak St. in Annville to help the family through this time. In the process of helping his family maintain real estate properties which they owned, John acquired an apartment house on 7th St. in Lebanon and became a

landlord. Of course, Mary was involved in the process of cleaning apartments and helping with the work. In January of 1958 Bob was discharged from the Air Force, moved home for several months, and eventually moved to California to attend Northrup Institute to be trained in airplane maintenance. In 1959 Brenda graduated from High School in June and began studies at Millersville State College in the fall. John finally found work in Lancaster. In early 1963 Brenda graduated from college and enlisted in the Air Force. Bob was married in 1963 in Chicago and Mary made the biggest trip of her life to be at the wedding, traveling by train with a neighbor who was the best man. The following year, 1964, her first grandchild, Stephen, was born, followed by granddaughter Alison in 1965. Bob and his family moved back to the home area in 1966 and Christopher was born. In December of that year, Brenda was married in Texas and another grandson, Charlie, was born the following year. Life continued pretty much "small town normal" until late 1969 when John had a heart attack that landed him in the hospital. By this time he had been working for Gill Enterprises in Myerstown PA and after recuperating was able to return to work on a limited basis. On April 26 of 1970, John suddenly had a another heart attack which claimed his life, leaving Mary and 15

old John Jr. to manage on their own. Between Social Security benefits and income from the

apartments they were able to survive and she eventually sold both the apartment house and the farm, piece by piece, and invested the money to provide needed income.

Meanwhile, another

granddaughter, Cheryl, was born to Brenda. Immediately after John Jr.

graduated from High

School in June of 1972, another disaster struck. Hurricane Agnes dropped 12 inches of rain in a

day and a half causing the creek to rise 17 feet above normal and flood the basement level of the

house and the upper living floor to countertop height. Mary and John spent the night at the

shelter in the High School up the hill and upon their return discovered that although the house

stood, the flood left behind an inch of mud and debris everywhere, ruined the drywall and

damaged many of their possessions. Eventually through a grant from Housing and Urban

Development, Mary was able to have the house repaired and remodeled.

About the time John

began studies at Lebanon Valley College (located in Annville) that fall, Mary also began to work

there in the cafeteria and continued until she was of age to collect Social Security for herself.

After John's graduation and marriage in 1976, he moved to Ohio to attend seminary and

Mary was left to enjoy her rural home on her own. She enjoyed going places

with a couple of local senior citizens groups and was a member of the local hiking club for several years. She even had a boyfriend for awhile, the brother of a friend who would come when he was in town and take her on outings. In 1979 she flew to Georgia by herself to visit Brenda and her family and made the trip a second time in 1985 with John to attend grandson Charlie's graduation. For a few years in the early '80's Bob and his children lived with her and received her loving care, but mostly she enjoyed 17 years of simple, quiet country life, occasionally going to town with a friend or talking on the phone, taking long walks and reading her books and newspapers. Over the years John and his wife had 5 children (Andrea, Ben, Amy, Jennifer and Dan) and they came to visit multiple times each year from Philadelphia while Brenda would also come from her home in Georgia, often bringing her children. At last in 1996 at the age of 80 Mary could no longer manage to live on her own in the little house by the Quitty. She was finally convinced of this after a routine illness that led to a brief stint in the hospital. She could no longer go down the steps to get out of the house and an examination showed that she was already blind in one eye and rapidly losing sight in the other from glaucoma. Her beloved home of 55 years was sold to a young couple and in June she moved into an independent living apartment at Wyncote Church Home (now Phoebe

Wyncote) in

Wyncote PA to be near John and his family. She was very happy there and often testified to the

good care that she received and how she loved it. She, in turn, was loved by the staff and always

gave them hugs and kisses. In 2011 her son Robert passed away. Despite the best of treatment on

her remaining eye, including laser surgery and cataract removal, in 2010 she became completely

blind. As her mobility deteriorated, she was forced to move into a room in Assisted Living and at

last in 2014 upstairs into the skilled nursing section. On January 10, 2015 she celebrated her

100th birthday, having lived through a century of the most incredible changes the world has ever

known. She passed away peacefully in her bed on April 18, 2017 at the age of 102. The funeral

service is Friday, April 28 at 10:30 AM and she will be interred afterward at Grandview

Memorial Park alongside her husband. She is survived by 2 children, 11 grandchildren, 15 great

grandchildren and 2 great great grandchildren.

# Previous Events

## Funeral Service

APR **28**. 10:30 AM (ET)

Kreamer Funeral Home & Crematory, Inc.  
618 E. Main Street  
Annville, PA 17003  
(717) 867-4811

# Tribute Wall



“ *Offering our deepest condolences during this difficult time.* ”

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**The Staff of Kreamer Funeral Home** - April 23, 2017 at 12:00 AM