



Sylvia Ruth Hawker

February 11, 1939 - February 23, 2026

Sylvia Hawker, of Greene, passed away, Monday, February 23, 2026, at the Waverly Health Center. Memorial service will be 10:00 am, Monday, March 2, 2026, at St. Peter Lutheran Church, 324 E. Traer in Greene. Woodley Funeral Home and Crematory of Greene is caring for Sylvia and her family. Interment will be at a later date at Rose Hill Cemetery in Greene. Visitation will be 4-6 pm Sunday, March 1, at St. Peter Lutheran Church in Greene. Memorials may be directed to St Peter Lutheran Church in Greene or to the family, who will direct them to other efforts important to Sylvia.

Sylvia Ruth was born to Clifford and Irma Johnson on February 11, 1939, in the white, wooden, two-story hospital at the edge of Akron, Iowa, on the banks of the Big Sioux River.

Sylvia was joined by her sister Ellen Kay on June 29, 1942, and the girls grew up with loving parents, near their grandparents Emil and Hulda Johnson who immigrated to this country from Sweden, and a number of aunts and uncles, all of whom loved and nurtured them.

She was Baptized on April 10, 1939, and attended Akron Elementary School. When Sylvia was going into 7th grade and Kay into 4th grade, the family moved to Sheldon, Iowa, about an hour north, where their dad had a new and better job. In the fall they began attending the Sheldon schools, from which they both graduated. When Sylvia was talking with a neighbor boy in her school, he told her a way to be popular was to wear fluorescent socks.

A key life moment occurred when Sylvia was in 8th grade. Sylvia's favorite

teacher was Mrs. Orr, who taught English. One main assignment was each class member writing her or his autobiography, which Sylvia enjoyed, especially when she received it back. On the title page Mrs. Orr had written, "Sylvia, a talent or a gift for writing is rare, and I believe you have it."

That sentence was an inspiration, and Sylvia wrote, and she loved writing all of her life, primarily for newspapers in Ida Grove, Pella, and Greene.

Sylvia was Confirmed at St. Paul Lutheran Church in Sheldon on March 29, 1952. She enjoyed attending Lutheran Bible Camps at Lake Okoboji in the summer and they helped her grow in her faith.

She graduated from Sheldon High School in 1957 and that fall began attending the University of Iowa in Iowa City, ultimately majoring in journalism. She met Fred Hawker at the Iowa Memorial Union and it wasn't long before the two had fallen in love.

Fred was majoring in journalism, and the two spent hours in the journalism building looking over weekly newspapers from throughout the state, dreaming of one day being involved with one.

The two were married on March 29, 1959, which was Easter Sunday that year, at St. Paul Lutheran Church in Sheldon. They returned to classes at the University of Iowa in their recently purchased Lloyd, a German, relatively tiny, yellow car. They lived in an apartment near the journalism building, and later in an apartment in Marion, Iowa, where Fred had a job as a printer along with attending classes.

By that summer, Fred had received a draft notice and he left for basic training in the U.S. Army at Fort Hood, Texas, that July, while Sylvia stayed with her parents in Sheldon. When he returned the couple traveled to Fort Monmouth, New Jersey, where Fred was stationed and where they lived for three very good years.

Sylvia worked in a child care establishment on the base, they made friends, attended Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Red Bank, and greatly enjoyed the Atlantic Ocean. They took frequent day trips to New York City, where for \$25 they could pay for parking, have lunch in an automat, take in one tourist

attraction, and attend a Broadway show. They did that fairly often.

They greatly enjoyed visits from both sets of parents, Sylvia's sister Kay, and her Aunt Carol. On one of Kay's visits the three took a camping trip, visiting all of the New England states.

On June 8, 1962, Fred and Sylvia's son Devin Scott was born at the Fort Monmouth Army Hospital, and this brought them great joy. The total cost was \$7.00, the price of Sylvia's meals. The Army took care of the rest.

Upon the completion of Fred's military service, in the fall of 1962, Fred, Sylvia, and Devin traveled in their tiny car (and in those days car seats were very poor) back to Iowa, and a newspaper editor's job for Fred at the Ida County Pioneer Record in Ida Grove. Sylvia wrote a weekly column she named "In My Wanderings" and people seemed to enjoy it, especially the week when she wrote about getting very lost while driving to a nearby town to attend a play in which a local man had a role.

Fred's next position was in Pella at the Pella Chronicle and Sylvia again wrote a column. They became very active in First Reformed Church in Pella and in many community activities. There was a small park with a wooden shoe shaped pond and a windmill very near their home.

On June 16, 1965, their daughter Kara Ellen was born at the Pella Community Hospital, and she was welcomed lovingly by her parents, her three year old brother, and other family members and friends.

On December 29, 1967, their family welcomed Ross Fredrick, also born at the Pella Community Hospital. His brother and sister were very excited to view him through an inside hospital window and the family loved having him join them at home.

During annual Tulip Time, Fred and Sylvia and their children donned Dutch costumes and wooden shoes, and Fred and Sylvia took part in Dutch dancing, and other activities. Fred even carried the Dutch flag in the parades.

In the fall of 1970 the family moved to Greene, after purchasing The Greene Recorder, and it was there Fred and Sylvia remained for the rest of their lives.

Their children attended school in Greene and graduated from Greene High School before heading off to college, marriage, and parenthood.

Sylvia wrote many feature stories for the newspaper throughout the years, winning awards in state competitions. Among others, she won first place for best series for her 4-part series of Sam Sneed's World War II experiences, Best Personality Feature "The Story of Jon Tumlinson" and on her 80th birthday got notice that she and Ross won 1st place in personality feature for their story "Rachelle Wheat - Inspiration in Adversity."

One of Sylvia's passions was telling the story of Greene and its people. She wrote countless features about long time Greene residents and their memories of growing up in the area. These features inspired Clayton Thomas, former Greene resident, to join her in researching the original location of the town. Clayton went on to write nearly 30 features about Greene history, many of them working alongside Sylvia.

She enjoyed continuing to write stories and working at the newspaper Mondays and Tuesdays.

It was a special joy when Ross and Sarah purchased The Greene Recorder from Fred and Sylvia, and both continued working there as long as possible. In later years, Sylvia wrote feature stories with Ross, did the Backward Glance column, and helped mail the papers.

In the community, Sylvia was active in the Woman's Club of Greene, serving as its president for many years. She was also a member of a reading group. In her church, St. Peter Lutheran in Greene, Sylvia was active in the women's organization, attending, serving as an officer, leading Bible studies, and assisting with events. She became Conference Secretary of Education for the Mason City Conference, and during those years introduced the Bible study series for the coming year to women at the conference convention. She also attended a number of national conventions.

She served two two-year terms on the church council. She was president of the council at the time the church's new addition was completed.

Sylvia belonged to a prayer group of around seven members for decades.

They met every two weeks, made lists of those for whom to pray, and then prayed together. They continued to pray the lists until they met again. Sylvia continued praying from a list the rest of her life.

Sylvia and her friend Carol Needham, also in the prayer group, helped start the Greene Food Bank, and were its coordinators for 25 years. They organized Christian women's overnight retreats for a number of years.

Following a trip with Darrell and Carol Needham to Cameroon, West Africa, Sylvia and Carol gave programs on the work of Christian women in Cameroon, in Methodist and Lutheran church women's meetings in a number of areas, wearing Cameroonian dresses. They were leaders of the Dayton Willing Workers 4-H Club for a number of years. They were active together in American Mothers, Inc. after Carol was honored as Iowa Mother of the Year. For a time they edited the national newsletter and attended meetings around the country, including several in New York City, and one in Puerto Rico.

Sylvia and Fred loved taking their family on camping vacations, often without the best of equipment. They went to the Black Hills, the Wisconsin Dells, Shepherd of the Hills country in Missouri, and spots around Iowa. Their most ambitious trip was one to the east coast, including the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia, PA; Washington D.C. where they visited landmarks; Oceanport, NJ, Devin's birthplace; New York City; and Niagara Falls.

The family visited Sylvia's sister Kay and her husband Walt in Duluth, MN, often during the years all of their children were growing up. They also appreciated visits in Greene from Kay and Walt, and were grateful for their loving relationship and encouragement through the years!

Fred and Sylvia visited California a number of times after Devin went to college there and married Wendy Van Winkle. Those were always special times. Sylvia especially enjoyed visiting when Hannah and Grace were born, and when Hannah was married to Bridger.

Sylvia was blessed with trips to Thailand with Fred; and Cameroon, Africa, with Darrell and Carol Needham. Sylvia visited Amsterdam, Holland, on her own, and Sweden a few days later with her sister Kay. In Sweden Sylvia and

Kay enjoyed visiting the girlhood home of their paternal grandmother Hulda Petterson Johnson. Sylvia and Kay also explored Stockholm, which is built on 17 islands. It was the trip of a lifetime.

Fred and Sylvia took Water Tower Tours in their retirement years, visiting every town and city in Iowa over a period of years. They took photos of water towers in each town, as well as other places of interest, and assembled them in scrapbooks. They had a large, framed map of Iowa, and after each trip placed a push-pin on each city they had visited. They created a slide show with script, which they presented at St. Peter Lutheran Church and the Greene Public Library, and in a number of other locations. Their family later gave them a book that contained their water tower program, with all photographs and script.

Maguire Iron in Sioux Falls, SD, invited them for a weekend, and gave them a tour of their water tower factory, during which they were filmed for a feature on a local TV station. They were also in a segment on a Des Moines TV station. One of the most wonderful parts of Sylvia's life was when she became a grandmother. She adored each one as he or she arrived, and was never happier than when they visited her or she visited them. She was fond of reading to them, often at bedtime. Occasionally when there were a number of grandchildren visiting at a time, she and they lay head beside head across the bed for bedtime stories. She made May baskets, including quite a nifty May-ga-zord, with a Milk Duds body, sticks of gum for legs, and a safety sucker for a head with a cute teddy bear face taped on. She was continually interested in their lives through the years.

At Christmas she and Fred had Christmas pageants, with the children as Baby Jesus, angels, shepherds and wisemen. Later all in the family were shepherds and wise men. She also enjoyed baking and decorating a birthday cake for Jesus, and there were always Christmas stockings.

Fred and Sylvia enjoyed attending their grandchildren's musical and athletic events through the years. She celebrated each addition to the family by

marriage or birth.

What a joy it was when they welcomed their first great-grandchild, Juniper Vander Wiel, in December 2018, and met her soon after her birth.

On July 23, 2019, Fred, Sylvia's husband of 60 years, passed away with his family by his side. She was moved by the out-pouring of love and support from their family and community and she loved his memorial service, which made us laugh and cry.

Her second great-grandchild, Henry, was born April 18, 2025 and they were smitten with each other from the first day.

Sylvia passed away at the age of 87, on February 23, 2026, at Waverly Health Center under Hospice care, with her loving family by her side.

Sylvia was preceded in death by her husband Fred, her parents Clifford and Irma Johnson, her infant sister Joyce Anne, her Aunt Carol (Tante), sister-in-law Margo Rogers, numerous aunts, uncles, cousins, and many beloved friends.

She is survived by her sister Ellen Kay (Walt) Gower and brother-in-law, Dwight Hawker; her children Devin (Wendy) Hawker, Kara (Kurt) Vander Wiel, Ross (Sarah) Hawker; Grandchildren, Logan (Lauren) Vander Wiel, Hannah (Bridger) Hawker, Grace Hawker, Caleb (Claire) Vander Wiel, Ethan (Delaney) Vander Wiel, Lauren Hawker, Nathan Hawker, and Kirsten Hawker; Great-Grandchildren, Juniper Vander Wiel and Henry Vander Wiel; and many friends who loved and enriched her life.

Sylvia's family is very grateful to Karen Worley, Mary Hinders and Pam Roose, who helped allow Sylvia to stay in her home, Butler County Public Health, who took such good care of her for several years, and Cedar Valley Hospice who made her last months comfortable We appreciate the many friends who visited and brought a smile to her face and a story to share.

She will always be missed and we will cherish our memories of our beloved mother, grandmother and great grandmother and all her family who loved her.

Cemetery Details

Rose Hill Cemetery - Greene

11381 Lodge Ave
Greene, IA 50636

Previous Events

Visitation

MAR 1. 4:00 PM - 6:00 PM (CT)

St. Peter Lutheran Church
324 E Traer Street
Greene, IA 50636

Memorial Service

MAR 2. 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM (CT)

St. Peter Lutheran Church
324 E Traer Street
Greene, IA 50636

Tribute Wall



“ *Beautiful in Blue was purchased for the family of Sylvia Ruth Hawker.*



February 28 at 01:42 PM



“ *I remember Sylvia when she came with her family to attend the wedding of my cousin, Dorothy, and Jim Tviet. I thought she was special and tried to sit with her in the car whenever I could.*

Keith Pearson - February 27 at 01:11 PM



“ *Doug and Deb Frisk planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Sylvia Ruth Hawker.*

Doug and Deb Frisk - February 26 at 11:30 AM



“ *Doug and Deb Frisk purchased the Sweetest Sunrise Bouquet for the family of Sylvia Ruth Hawker.*



Doug and Deb Frisk - February 26 at 11:30 AM

CF

“ Clayton Thomas family purchased the *Strength & Solace Spray* for the family of Sylvia Ruth Hawker.



Clayton Thomas family - February 24 at 08:23 PM

CF

“ Clayton Thomas family planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Sylvia Ruth Hawker.

Clayton Thomas family - February 24 at 08:23 PM

KF

“ Kurt's Van Gorp Family purchased the *Basket of Memories* for the family of Sylvia Ruth Hawker.



Kurt's Van Gorp Family - February 24 at 04:57 PM