



Erika Frieda Wells

MAY 4, 1934 - MAY 13, 2024



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FLORAL HAVEN

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Erika Frieda Wells, age 90, passed away Monday, May 13, 2024 after a life well lived. She was a life long resident of Joplin, Missouri and had moved to Broken Arrow, Oklahoma in 2022 to be closer to her daughter.

Erika was born on May 4, 1934 to Adolf and Grete Bol-Pegel in the German borough of Neukolln, Berlin. World War II would serve as a backdrop to her childhood. Very seldom did she speak about what she had seen and heard. As she grew older, she told stories of air raid sirens sounding as she, her mother, & sister ran for safety in Berlin's subway tunnels, of Russian soldiers who shared their campfire stew after finding her and a hungry friend hiding nearby, and of her father's capture and placement in a Russian work camp. She talked about the Berlin Airlift and candy being dropped to 'us kids below.' And she would laugh as she talked about pranks she and her friends pulled in the apartment building she grew up in. These included pretending to water the flowers on her balcony but actually sprinkling water on top of the little man's head who was sitting on his balcony one floor below.

In 1955, Erika was invited to a Christmas party at the Non-Commissioned Officers Club, Silverwings, at Tempelhof Airport in Berlin. There she would meet Airman First Class, James Lee Wells from Perry, Missouri. It was love at first sight. He spoke very little German. She spoke no English. They communicated with the help of a German/English Dictionary. Nine months later, they were married, in a civil ceremony, in West Berlin. When James' stint in the Air Force ended in 1957, they hopped a military transport plane back to the United States. They would live in Saint Charles, Missouri, and Quincy, Illinois before settling in Joplin, Missouri in 1958. There they raised their two daughters, Karen and Kelly.

Erika worked various jobs through the years--- at the Philips appliance factory in Berlin, newborn nursery at St. Joseph Hospital in St. Charles, Missouri, Ramsay's, Dixie Printing, Famous Barr, and at Wedding Bells Boutique, where she was a



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seamstress for more than 20 years.

Erika was a member of First Christian Church in Joplin, the Ozark China Painters Club, the United Nations Club, and a member of BETA SIGMA PHI chapter Laureate Epsilon Omicron, pledging in 1990.

Erika was a devoted wife, mother, grandmother, and friend who touched countless lives. She always had a smile on her face, a hug or compliment, and a pot of coffee waiting should a friend stop by. Everyone loved her German accent. She was always 'dressed to the nines,' her hair perfectly coiffed. Whether it was dancing at Dana's Bo Peep, Hidden Acres with Clint Harrison, Elks Lodge tea dances and Max Brown, or in the sun room on Sunday morning before church, Erika loved dancing to big band music with her leading man. She also loved to entertain, whether it was a happy hour, an intimate dinner with several couples, or celebrating a birthday with family and friends. If the house was not big enough, the party would spill over to the garage and into the back yard. Everything from a belly dancer, accordion player, barbershop quartet, DJ, or bocce ball in the backyard were part of the celebrations over the years. Erika's hobbies included china painting, gardening, and sewing. She continued to china paint for more than 50 years. Every year, her yard was filled with a variety of flowers – geraniums, begonias, petunias, clematis, roses, and more. Roses were her favorite and each year she received a dozen red roses from Jim on their anniversary. She was very proud of her German heritage. Stories, traditions, and recipes have been passed on. German dishes included bratwurst, sweet and sour red cabbage, German potato salad, and cherry soup with dumplings. Traditions included advent calendars and the Feast of Saint Nicholas (shoes were placed in the hallway in hopes of finding candy versus a lump of coal the next morning). The Tulsa Oktoberfest became a yearly event for the family. Lederhosen and dirndls were worn, singing, polka music, and the Chicken Dance; a reminder of her homeland. Erika and James would make many trips to Germany and her family would make many visits to the United States through the years.

In September 2022, Erika moved to Prairie House, an assisted living center close to her daughter's home. She made many new friends (Lilly Mae, Keith, Betty and Ray, Red, Jeanie, and Dolly to name a few) and they, along with the staff, became her



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second family. She was loved by all and they doted over her. It was not uncommon to catch a whiff of her perfume, Wings, in the hallways. When asked what she wanted to drink with her meal, she usually said, "Cognac and coke," jokingly. Erika loved watching her UFC cage wrestling. And she looked forward to praying with Karen each night before bed, saying 'Ich bin klein' (a child's prayer) and the Lord's prayer in German.

Erika is preceded in death by her husband, James Wells, daughter, Kelly Wells, parents, Adolf and Grete Pegel, and sister and brother-in-law, Eva and Ludwig Thiemann.

She is survived by daughter, Karen Redden and husband, Bill of Broken Arrow, Okla; grandsons Spencer Redden, Parker Redden and wife Alisha, two great grandchildren, Laurel Bea and Calvin, all of Broken Arrow, and a niece, Elke Thiemann of Berlin, Germany.

A grave side service will be held later this year at Lick Creek Cemetery in Perry, Missouri. Memorial contributions can be made to Joplin First Christian Church or the Alzheimer's Association.

Although this past year was difficult for her, both physically and mentally, mother's personality and love allowed moments of joy to shine through to the very end.

Mutti, Ich liebe dich und vermisse dich. Auf wiedersehen. Your Karen
(Mother, I love you and miss you so much. Until we meet again.)



Tribute Wall

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Myrna Ranney posted:

A life well-lived indeed! Love and condolences to all of you. Myrna Ranney

July 6 at 2:30 PM



Carol & Buddy Norman posted:

We loved Ricky so very much!! She was a "special sister" to me and we had a lot of good times with her and Jim. She would give you the shirt off her back. A wonderful addition to our family!! So many beautiful memories and fun times!!

June 21 at 4:33 PM



Memories only last if you share them

Join us in honoring Erika by contributing to a collection of shared memories.



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