



## Birgitta Inga Rice

June 25, 1940 - December 19, 2025

### Birgitta Rice

Birgitta passed away peacefully on December 19, 2025. She was born in Coonor, India on June 25, 1940. Her parents, Pastor Josef and Anna Olsson were serving there with the Swedish Missionary Society. She was baptized August 11, 1940. Birgitta attended boarding school in Kodikanal, South India. In 1946, after the end of World War II, the Olsson family returned to Sweden on the S/S Drottningholm, a sister ship of the Titanic. She and her parents returned to India a year later when she continued her education at Kodikanal. Upon returning to Sweden in 1952, she attended the gymnasium school in Lund, Sweden, graduating in 1959. She began studying the violin at age 12 and was invited to perform with the Malmo Symphony Orchestra and later with the University Orchestra of Minnesota and Princeton, NJ, as well as the Rochester, MN and La Crosse, WI Symphony Orchestras. Music was a wonderful avocation for Birgitta.

In 1963, she graduated as a pharmacist from the Royal Institute of Pharmacy in Stockholm, Sweden. Also, in 1963 she was chosen to become a delegate at the Lutheran World Student Conference that was held alongside the Lutheran World Federation meeting in Helsinki, Finland. There she met an American student, Vernon Rice. She was invited to do specific biochemistry research at the University in Minnesota and came to the United States in 1964. During that year, Birgitta and Vern were engaged; they were married back in Malmo, Sweden on February 13, 1965.

Birgitta then joined Vernon in his first parish in rural Roseau where she worked as a pharmacist assistant and taught piano to area students. She enjoyed homemaking and was able to practice her culinary arts which she inherited from her mother's family who had run a bakery in Sweden. In 1967, Birgitta was employed as a research assistant to a professor at Princeton University in Princeton, New Jersey, while Vernon was a student at Princeton Seminary.

Their first child, Jonathan, was born in 1969 while they served United Redeemer Lutheran Church in Zumbrota, Minnesota. After their move to St. John's Lutheran in Waukesha, Wisconsin, in 1972, Linnea, their second child was born. During this time, Birgitta was a stay-at-home mom and participated as a volunteer in church and school activities. After moving to La Crosse, Wisconsin in 1981, Birgitta went back to school and received her master's degree in health education from the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. While doing research for her master's thesis, she developed a technique which increased blood flow to the feet, important for people with diabetes. It was a temperature biofeedback assisted relaxation which was then trademarked Warmfeet. Beside further research, she successfully helped many with foot ulcers and neuropathic pain. Birgitta was invited to share her research at several national scientific conferences and was published in several national journals. The Joslin Institute at Harvard Medical School in Boston, Massachusetts, recognized the excellent way she managed her diabetes by awarding her the 50 years with Diabetes Medal and inclusion in their research.

Being raised in the Swedish mission tradition, Birgitta treasured the Lutheran expression of the Christian faith throughout her life. One of her treasured Swedish traditions, the Lucia festival, celebrating the beginning of the returning light in the darkness of December, was passed on to her grandchildren, to many of her friends and neighbors. Having grown up in the natural beauty of the jungles in India, Birgitta was a life-long student and caretaker of plants. She especially experienced God's presence in the beauty

of creation. Birgitta and Vernon wrote and published their autobiography, *The Two Shall Become One*, in 2006.

Birgitta is survived by her loving husband, Vernon and her two children, Jonathan (Heather) of Shoreview, Minnesota; and her daughter, Linnea of Galesville, Wisconsin; seven grandchildren and three great grandchildren. She is also survived by several relatives in Sweden and especially her niece Gunnel Rask and nephew Anders Rask. Preceding her in death were her parents and her sister Karin Rask.

There will be a private funeral and a Celebration of Life at a later date. In lieu of flowers, memorials can be given to the American Diabetes Association and the Lutheran World Relief. Blessed be her memory.