



Shirley Joyce Sutherland

March 14, 1931 - October 29, 2025

Shirley Joyce Sutherland

On October 29, 2025, Shirley Joyce Sutherland, birth name Cooper, born in Bemidji, Minnesota, on March 14, 1931, passed away peacefully in Princeton, Minnesota, in the presence of her children Kurt and Nanette. Her life is the story of a woman who persevered and who never stopped caring for her family.

Shirley's early years were marked by the hardships of subsistence living on the Iron Range. She met her future husband, Laurence (Larry) Sutherland, on her way to a youth rally in the summer of 1949. She enrolled at Oak Hills Christian Training School that fall, where she and Larry took piano lessons and fell in love. They married on January 2, 1953, at Northern Bible Church in Bemidji. The same year, the newlyweds relocated to Seattle, Washington, where Shirley earned her RN degree at University of Washington School of Nursing and Larry received his BA and MA in Biblical Literature from Seattle Pacific College. The couple returned to Mildred, Minnesota, in 1958, where Larry pastored Mildred Chapel and their first child, Philip, was born.

In 1959, the couple felt called to become missionaries in Europe. They were able to raise the financial support needed to meet that commitment, and in May of 1960, the young family along with its oversized American kitchen appliances arrived in Bremerhaven, Germany. The first step in overcoming the culture shock was to learn the language. To that end, Shirley and Larry took German lessons. Over 26 years in Germany, Shirley raised five children and

supported her husband's ministry in various ways, for example, by helping to establish a Bible correspondence school and a Christian Women's Club in the area. In contrast to local customs, no formal invitation was required to visit the Sutherlands, and guests could keep their shoes on. This evidently appealed to German playmates because the house was often full of kids on afternoons. Throughout the chaos, Shirley prepared meals, managed the household, and kept the kitchen counter clean.

By 1986, Shirley and Larry were empty nesters. They returned to Minnesota, where Shirley worked in the accounting department of Target Corporation and Larry continued his ministry in various capacities. In 1988, they began attending Grace Evangelical Church in Fridley, Minnesota, and purchased a home in Coon Rapids, Minnesota, which, despite its modest size, became the center of family activities for forty years. Shirley always had time for her children and later for grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. She never missed a family member's birthday. She was an avid reader, letter writer, and Scrabble player. For many years, she worked at a thrift store, collecting second-hand clothes for needy families in Eastern Europe. She and Larry traveled to Germany on numerous occasions - once to lead a group attending the Passion Play in Oberammergau and several times to visit their oldest son. Shirley's biggest regret was that she felt she had not sufficiently supported her children in their transition to adulthood, a sentiment not shared by her children. Her biggest burden was her second oldest son's mental illness. Despite the family's support and countless interventions and new starts, he was often homeless. Her faith in God provided consolation.

In 2016, due to declining health, Shirley and Larry decided to retire to an assisted living facility, but Larry passed away shortly before the move. The house was sold, and Shirley spent the last nine years of her life in assisted living facilities in Andover and Princeton. Her second oldest son, Thomas, died in 2021. Shirley is survived by her children Philip (Nicole), Charlotte (Sam), Kurt (Marianella), and Nanette (Tom), and nine grandchildren and 15 great-grandchildren. Shirley is preceded in death by her parents, George and

Clara Cooper; brothers, Carl and Kenneth Cooper; sisters, Beverly Boyer, Bernice McNeely, Lorraine Harmon, and Valerie Rice.

A private service for the immediate family will be held at the Washburn McReavy Coon Rapids Chapel followed by the interment at Morningside Memorial Gardens in Coon Rapids, Minnesota, on November 14, 2025.

Cemetery Details

Morningside Memorial Gardens

11800 University Avenue NW
Coon Rapids, MN 55448

Tribute Wall



“ Washburn-McReavy Funeral Chapels created a Funeral Service for Shirley Joyce Sutherland in memory of Shirley Joyce Sutherland



Washburn-McReavy - November 13, 2025 at 04:15 PM

DH

*I loved my Aunt so very much
Sorry Nettie to hear this news. Please pass along my condolences to our families. 😞*

Dale Harmon - November 18, 2025 at 03:09 PM

TD

Dear Charlotte, Kurt and Nettie:

*We were so sorry to hear about your mom's passing, and are praying for all of you as you process this. We remember some good conversations with your folks when they would stop by BFA.
Love and prayers,
Ted and Betty Dick*

Ted and Betty Dick - November 21, 2025 at 11:44 AM

ES

“ Eric and Julie Schultz purchased the Pretty Pleas e for the family of Shirley Joyce Sutherland.



Eric and Julie Schultz - November 10, 2025 at 11:26 PM