



## Clara Pfitzner

April 7, 1937 - April 8, 2011

Clara Ann Thykeson-Pfitzner, 74, of Vero Beach, FL, passed away on April 8, 2011 of a massive stroke in Griffith, Australia at the Griffith Base Hospital. She was born in Logansport, Indiana on April 7, 1937, daughter of the late Harry and Mary (Shaver) Mullett.

Clara once said that her family was so poor that they didn't live on the other side of the tracks, they lived between the tracks. When she was a girl, a younger sister was hit and killed by a train on tracks near where she lived and later lost her father as well. When she was seven, there was a fire and the house where she lived burned down. She lost a brother to that fire. Later, she and her siblings were sent to live in the Indiana Soldiers and Sailors Children's Home. This Children's Home had a profound influence on her life. She left the home in her mid-teens and went into the foster care system with less than positive experiences

She married for the first time at age 18 to Jim Vacik, and began attending Purdue University in Lafayette, Indiana, stopping when her first two daughters, Debbie and Pam were born. She moved to Fargo, North Dakota after Jim graduated and took a teaching position there. Her first son Jim was born just across the river from Fargo in Moorhead, Minnesota. She and her family attended Elim Lutheran Church where she made a personal profession of faith at age 25 and chose to be re-baptized as a new Christian.

She began taking in foster children in North Dakota during her first marriage when her children were small. One of them has even gone on to be Mayor of a town in South Dakota. Following her divorce from Jim and her remarriage to Trig Thykeson in 1966, her daughter Becky and son Todd were born.

Several years later she moved to Minneapolis, Minnesota, and later to Rhinelander, Wisconsin, where she attended and became very active in many church programs, the church council, and teaching Sunday school at Trinity Lutheran Church. She also attended many bible studies there. She again began to take in foster children in Rhinelander. She was a foster parent, at that time, for about 11 years between 1975 and 1986; over the course of her life she cared for over 45 foster children. The experiences she had with foster children brought her closer to the Lord due to the love and compassion she shared with these children. Foster care allowed her to make changes in many children's lives.

The department of Social Services assigned Clara the most difficult teenage cases; runaways, alcohol and sexual abuse, mentally and physically challenged children, children that no other foster parents were willing to care for. She knew who her true friends were if they would accept her whole family, not just the family that included her biological children. Clara considered all of the foster children part of her family. Many of these kids later told her that they wanted to raise their own children the way that Clara had raised them. Few of them will ever forget the many ways and point systems that Clara used to establish discipline in their home—Clara's methods were truly effective. Her first son-in-law came to visit with her daughter Pam and Clara took him out to help her locate a teen, new to the house, who had run away that day. This young, rebellious girl, and another foster daughter were among those Clara visited shortly before her death.

Clara's second husband, Trig, was transferred to Iron Mountain, MI for work in 1985. After arriving in Michigan, Clara became active in the church council at the First Lutheran Church. Soon she became active in the Women of the ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church of America), taking many offices and even moving up to become district president of the women's synod.

She was interested in spiritual development for women and led many retreats and devotional groups. She had lots of fun doing these things; she even helped organize and performed in "Sister Act" on the road, touring to other churches in the area, to uplift women in song. Clara also taught leadership training and went on to lay ministry training herself, becoming a lay pastor and providing pulpit supply throughout the Upper Peninsula (UP) of Michigan. On an area radio show, Clara provided a weekly 5 minute devotional, spreading positive thoughts throughout the UP.

She loved living in Michigan, being a grand mother, and making memories with her three grandchildren there and build a relationship with her step-children, Regie and Steve Thykeson. After Trig had a heart attack and was medically disabled, Clara returned to school and earned her associates degree in medical records technology. She started at the Dickenson County Memorial Hospital as a medical records coding clerk, retiring from there fourteen years later as director of the medical records department. After retiring at age 62, Clara began working at the Fortune Lakes Lutheran Camp when the camp needed someone to act as the administrative coordinator for the office. Trig volunteered at the camp, too, running errands and counting the camps proceeds. Together, they made a great team for the camp.

She left the camp a few years later, moving to Decatur, Alabama, for better weather conditions, and to spend time with her daughter Pam and her three other grandchildren. After a few short months in Alabama, Trig, died following

a head injury. One month later Clara was diagnosed with lung cancer and spent the next year or more undergoing radiation and chemotherapy. About two years after her initial diagnosis, when she began to recover from the harsh medical treatments, and her hair began to grow back, her loneliness led her to the internet and an online dating service called Christian Mingles. It was there that she met and fell deeply in love with her third husband, Ted. They married shortly thereafter and moved to an amazing senior community called Indian River Estates in

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Vero Beach, Florida. From there she had a great time, playing games like shuffleboard, Mexican train, and duplicate bridge. Clara made many wonderful

friends and had opportunities to socialize with, entertain, cook and bake for lots of friends in that community. She also had the opportunity to travel the world for the first time with Ted. They visited places like Greece, Israel, Alaska, and took many Caribbean cruises.

Clara became a published author in Vero Beach, in 2006, with a book called "Everything will be OK." The book title was inspired by an experience she remembers as a young child where she was, walking home from a friend's house ,scared and alone outside after dark, when Jesus appeared to her telling her that everything will be OK.

After 5 and a half wonderful years, Ted died of metastatic prostate cancer in November of 2009. Clara mourned his loss for sometime but again wanted a companion to share life's adventures. She again turned to Christian Mingles. It had worked so well before! She met several men and even some scoundrels before she replied to an interesting guy from Australia. If her daughters thought her courtship with Ted was quick, her experience with Vic Pfitzner from New South Wales was a whirlwind! In November of 2010, she was communicating by phone with him while spending time with all of her daughters in Florida. By December they had decided they were compatible and wanted to meet. Vic planned to fly to Florida at the end of December 2010 and before he left Australia, they had decided they would marry shortly after he arrived.

Clara Ann (Mullett, Vacik, Thykeson, Wolfe) Pfitzner, wed her fourth husband, Vic Pfitzner, on 4 Jan 2011 and left for his home in Australia in Mid-February. They had plans for a wonderful life together and had done some traveling and adventuring both in the United States to see all of her kids, and some family and friends before they left the country, and over in Australia after they arrived there. They had also begun to turn his house in Australia into their home.

Just before her 74th birthday, Clara was giving a photographic talk in Australia about her first impressions after arriving there, to the University of the Third Age (U3A), a senior group. She was presenting her talk at a local hospital, when she collapsed. She lost consciousness as they arrived at the hospital's emergency room and soon required life support. Tests revealed a massive stroke. Two of Clara's daughters spoke with the doctor. He said his neurological tests showed that there was likely no brain function left, and there was little chance of survival. The time zones were a challenge in understanding when Clara died. Around 6 am on the 8th of April (CST), and 9 pm the evening of the 8th in Australia, and the day after her 74th birthday, Clara was removed from life support and peacefully passed away.

Clara lived life to the fullest and left this earth with very few regrets. Her children know she died doing something she loved, sharing her experiences with others. She traveled the world sharing her Christian love with others and gathering up their love in return to it spread far and wide.

Clara is survived by five children, Deborah Vacik, of Huntsville, AL (and West Des Moines, IA), Pamella (Vacik) Hennigan (Dr. Michael Hennigan) of Huntsville, AL, James Vacik (Kim Vacik) of Mobile, AL, Rebecca (Thykeson) Smart (Richard Mortl) of Iron Mountain, MI and Todd Thykeson of Vienna, WV; six step-children: Regie Thykeson of Dallas, TX, Steven Thykeson of Scranton, AR, Ted "Bur" Wolfe (Lisa Fagen Wolfe) of Edina, MN, William Wolfe (Billie Sue Wolfe) of St Paul, MN, Morris Pfitzner (Beth Pfitzner) of NSW, Australia, and Bob Pfitzner (Natasha Pfitzner) of NSW, Australia; her siblings, Robert Mullett of Connersville, IN, Rosemary (Mullett) Allen of Kokomo, IN, Victor Mullett of Kokomo, IN, and Elvira (Emerson) Cook of Royal Center, IN; grandchildren, Allison (Hennigan) Martin (Dylan Martin), Matthew Hennigan, David Hennigan, Geoffrey Smart, David Smart, Laura Smart, and Samantha Vacik; step-grandchildren, Nora Hamlin, Hillary Hamlin, Becky

Hamlin, Paula (Wolfe) Palen, Nellie Wolfe, Billie Jo Wolfe, Kyle Wolfe, Brent Wolfe, Alli Wolfe, Kate Wolfe, Lucy Wolfe, Ben Pfitzner, Sharon Pfitzner, Lisa Pfitzner, Paul Pfitzner, and Timmy Pfitzner; a step-great granddaughter, Lucy Wolfe; and many nieces, nephews, other relatives and friends.

Visitation will be on Tuesday, May 10, from 10am-11 am at First Lutheran Church in Iron Mountain. A memorial service will follow at 11am at the church. Rev. Stephen Cowen will officiate. Burial will be in Quinnesec Cemetery.

In lieu of flowers, donations can be sent to two organizations Clara supported: the Fortune Lakes Lutheran Camp, Crystal Falls, MI, Go to [www.fortunelakelutherancamp.org](http://www.fortunelakelutherancamp.org) or phone for more information or the Living Lord Lutheran Church, Vero Beach, FL, Contact: [office@LLLchurch.org](mailto:office@LLLchurch.org) for more information.

Condolences to the family of Clara Ann Pfitzner may be expressed online at [www.ernashfuneralhomes.com](http://www.ernashfuneralhomes.com).

The family has entrusted the Erickson-Rochon & Nash Funeral Home of Iron Mountain with the arrangements.

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# Previous Events

## Visitation

MAY **10**. 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM (CT)

First Lutheran Church  
1210 S. Stephenson Ave.  
Iron Mountain, MI 49801

## Memorial Service

MAY **10**. 11:00 AM (CT)

First Lutheran Church  
1210 S. Stephenson Ave.  
Iron Mountain, MI 49801