



Nancy Schmidt

May 17, 1936 - January 8, 2018

Nancy Schmidt, 81, anthropologist, scholar, teacher, librarian, and philanthropist died Jan. 8 at Hearthstone Health Campus in Bloomington where she'd lived for 2 years.

Nancy grew up in Cincinnati. Even as a youngster she had an adventurous spirit and concern for those less fortunate. She caused her parents great concern when in her teens she volunteered at a settlement house in one of Cincinnati's poorest and roughest neighborhoods, where even in the 1950s indoor plumbing was rare.

Her appetite for world travel and cross-cultural interactions was honed by her Girl Scout troop's summer-long trip around Europe, which the girls funded by several years of bake sales and babysitting. Nancy and other scouts wrote dispatches about their adventures for a Cincinnati newspaper, and upon their return published them as a booklet, "Across the Blue in '52."

Nancy attended Oberlin College and the University of London. In London she met many Africans and that set her career direction, as an anthropologist of African culture. Her PhD in anthropology and African studies is from Northwestern University. Her unique insight was that contemporary African literature and film could be mined for anthropological material. She edited/wrote several books on that subject.

She taught at various colleges, including Rockford, Stanislaus State and St. Lawrence, then at mid-career got a degree in library science from IU. For many years she was head of Harvard's Tozzer Library, the world's largest anthropology library. Later she returned to Bloomington as African bibliographer for the IU library.

In retirement Nancy pursued a life of volunteering for local social service and cultural institutions. One of her joys was working at the T. C. Steele Historic Site in Brown County, but her greatest pleasures seemed to come from tutoring non-English-speaking immigrants in American English, and helping fill prescriptions at a non-profit pharmacy for the underserved.

Nancy was generous with financial contributions to institutions that shared her sense of fairness and decency, including Berea College, and Koinonia Partners, a Georgia Christian commune that stood against racism and started a house-building program later spun-off as Habitat for Humanity.

Nancy's parents, Drs. Leon and Ida Schmidt, well-known medical researchers and educators, pre-deceased their daughter. Nancy is survived by her brother Richard Schmidt of San Luis Obispo, CA.

No services are scheduled. If friends wish to memorialize Nancy's memory, gifts to the VITAL program at the Monroe County Library, Volunteers in Medicine, Habitat for Humanity, or any charity of the giver's choice are suggested. Allen Funeral Home and Crematory, 4155 S. Old State Road 37, Bloomington, have been entrusted with arrangements. You are invited to share a memory or leave an online condolence to Nancy's family at www.allencares.com

Tribute Wall

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“ Nancy was the most dedicated, sincere volunteer who worked with ESL students in my classroom. She planned carefully, individualizing to meet each student’s particular needs. In recent years, she was sad that her declining health demanded she stop her volunteering. I will miss her!
Sandra Bender

sandra bender - January 27, 2018 at 01:27 PM