

Marian Simpson of Woodland Park, Colorado passed away peacefully at home on Saturday, October 4, 2025. Born in Bentonville, Arkansas, November 19, 1933, to V.H. and Lena Pendergraft, Marian was a dedicated wife, mother, educator, and proponent of health and exercise. A woman of deep faith, she was ‘the hat lady’ at every church she attended, wearing a hat to church every Sunday since the late 1940s, with well over 30 hats in her collection.

An only child known for her fierce independence, Marian’s childhood was framed by the struggles of the great depression and memories of the day World War II ended. Growing up in Noel, Missouri (the “Christmas” city), she would say “everyone in town was poor so none of us knew we were poor”, but they were rich in community. These were the days of outdoor facilities and no telephone or television. Marian’s parents installed indoor plumbing after she went to college and did not have a telephone in the home until her mother retired and announced she was using her first social security check to have a phone installed! Radio was the family’s source of information, and it was as a child listening to the radio with her father that Marian acquired her lifelong love for St. Louis Cardinals baseball.

Marian loved being outdoors in nature and was loyal to her hometown and the region of southwest Missouri and northwest Arkansas throughout her life, recognizing the impact the area had on the foundations for her life. Her father, with barely a sixth-grade education, made sure she attended college - starting at Southwest Missouri State College in Springfield, MO, graduating in 1955 with her undergraduate degree at Northeastern Oklahoma State College in Tahlequah, OK, and finally in 1959 her masters degree in dance from Texas Women’s University (TWU) in Denton, TX, where she was the Director of the University’s synchronized swimming team.

Her first teaching job was at Daniel Webster High School in Tulsa, Oklahoma in 1955, at the time one of the top physical education programs in the country, where she infamously had the opportunity to meet Elvis Presley in person when he came to the school but chose not to as she “didn’t really like his music.” After graduating from TWU, she ended up in Pittsburg, Kansas, where, as the Cheerleading Sponsor, she met the college’s handsome quarterback named LeRoy Simpson who was completing his degree on the GI Bill after his military service. Seeing her in the departmental office one day, he said, “hey lady, can I get your phone number?” Their first date was in October 1959, they were engaged on Marian’s birthday in November, and married the day after Christmas that same year. Surprising no one who really knew them, their honeymoon was traveling through the south to all of the primary football bowl games that year. Their record for attending football games in person was 12 games in one weekend, starting with scouting the junior varsity games on Thursday

night through a Kansas City Chiefs game on Sunday afternoon! Their three-month courtship lasted 52 years and really until Marian's passing.

Marian was before her time, in many ways, and fought in the male-dominated education field for meaningful work in dance and physical education as they started their life together in Aurora, Mo, on to Kansas City, then the University of Arkansas and Slippery Rock State College, before settling at Wayne State College in Nebraska for over thirty years where she ended her working career as assistant track and field coach and dance choreographer for the drama department's children's theater. Although she would adamantly say to anyone who asked that she was not a feminist, she was a leader in gaining access to jobs for women in the field of physical education through stubborn resolve, persistence, and some might say wearing down many men's initial resolve at not hiring a woman. She was dedicated to her students, and made sure they left class with knowledge and skills – no matter how painful the learning experience might be.

Marian was possibly most proud of her role as mother. After nearly ten years of wishing, hoping, and praying for a child, she and LeRoy adopted a son, Jeff, in the summer of 1968. An only child herself, she prided herself on her determination and ability to strictly avoid raising a 'traditional' only-child. This meant clear limits on all grandparents regarding Christmas and birthday gifts for sure, but also unlimited love, pride, and devotion to her son throughout her life.

The work she did with Project Success, a federally funded program to train educators in lower socioeconomic communities across the United States on how to teach students with learning disabilities, was perhaps the pinnacle of her career. Using her dance training, she created ways of teaching in classrooms through movement, using music to develop patterns and memory retention through physical actions, that dovetailed into auditory learning and other emerging techniques. She never missed an opportunity to dance at celebrations and events, whether with her somewhat reluctant husband or her slightly more willing son, and traveled to Sweden one year to attend a celebration of folk dance from across the globe. Although a devoted ballet fan, folk and modern dance were her passions, and ever the teacher she never hesitated to help a novice learn a few steps.

One cannot define Marian without understanding her passion for sports. In fact, her nickname among her home healthcare team the last few years of her life was the "Sports Lady". Starting with St. Louis Cardinals baseball in the 1930s and her Kansas City Chief's football team, she never passed up an opportunity for a sporting event and attended three summer Olympics in her lifetime, as an avid spectator. An active volleyball player in her youth, she also enjoyed tennis, golf, and anything with physical movement. She loved being a track and field coach and, in retirement, an official for the Air Force Academy and the

Mountain West Conference. For years, she attended nearly every home Air Force Academy football game, basketball game, and hockey match and when she could no longer attend tried to keep up with the games on television – expressing displeasure when games were not televised. Being outdoors in nature was built into her DNA from growing up playing in creeks, rivers, and the mountain bluffs of Missouri and Arkansas. More times than can be counted she dragged her family on a day-long hike in the mountains to go see a waterfall, stream, or mountain lake just for the sake of being active and outdoors.

Marian dedicated years of her life to volunteer service with the American Heart Association, and received numerous awards and recognition for her work. She was an active member of P.E.O. for over 40 years and volunteered at the Air Force Academy and the USA Olympic Training Center for decades. Her professional recognitions are too numerous to list, but in 2014, she received the Joy of Effort Award from the Colorado Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance, recognizing her professionalism and dedication to the organization's mission. She served as President of the National Dance Association from 2004-2005 and was a founding member of the National Dance Society. In 2017, she was awarded the Society's Dance Legacy Award for her lifetime of service and mentorship in the field.

Marian was preceded in death by her beloved husband, Dr. LeRoy Simpson, and many close family members and friends. She is survived by her son, Jeff Simpson, of Stillwater, Oklahoma and niece Natha Walbaum, her husband John, of Ft. Calhoun, Nebraska, and their family, as well as dear cousins, friends, students, and athletes who she and LeRoy considered family (or as she would say "her track kids").