



Elie E. Steffensen

October 20, 1919 - August 2, 2011

Elie E. Steffensen, a “grand dame” in Danish communities in Chicago, Omaha, and most recently Houston, passed away on August 2nd at the age of 91. She is survived by sons Paul (Des Moines) and Carl (Houston) and their respective families, sister-in-law Anne Nielsen (Taastrup, Denmark), and many cousins around the globe.

Elie was born on October 19, 1919 in Isenvad, Denmark. Her father was a farm hand and times were hard in Denmark during the 20’s, so Elie’s parents Christian and Karen Pedersen decided to follow several of Karen’s siblings to America and a better life; Elie was 10 and her brother Paul Egon was 7. They landed in New York after an 8-day voyage across the Atlantic on board the SS United States; the same day they took the train to Chicago and arrived the next day. Elie recalled that while enroute to Chicago they saw children with wheels under their feet – it was the first time she and her brother had seen rollerskates!

Once in Chicago, they lived for a short while with relatives in the area that was known at the time as the “Danish colony”, where grocery stores, bakeries, and butcher shops were owned and operated by Danes (an important fact since no one in Elie’s family spoke English). Elie’s father quickly got work with a Danish construction company, and before long they felt right at home in the various Danish organizations like the Danish American Athletic Club, the

Danish Singing Society, Harmonien, and Dania. Elie and Paul Egon learned English in school, and within 3 or 4 months they could handle themselves against the teasing from the other children.

The US was not immune to the economic crisis of the 30's – banks closed, and thousands of people were without food and money. Elie's parents opened a boarding house on North Avenue called "Pensionat Rebild" for the benefit of young Danish men who lacked a place to live and eat. For many years they had 6 to 8 young male residents in addition to others who came for three meals each day. Those who had jobs paid weekly, while others who were unemployed were allowed to eat and/or live on credit until they found jobs and could pay their debts. Elie's parents sold the boarding house in 1941, and her father died following a construction accident in 1953.

During those early years Elie was a diligent student, and social life revolved around Chicago's Danish organizations. Elie represented Denmark in the 1933 Chicago World's Fair, graduated from Yates high school, worked as a professional photo model, and went to secretarial school. After the war she worked as a secretary, first for Slick Airways and then for a legal firm.

Then in 1951 she decided that it was time for her to make her first trip back to Denmark to visit family. She sailed from New York aboard the "Oslofjord", and one evening decided to accept an invitation to visit the first-class lounge. Although she tried to be inconspicuous, a ship's officer discovered her and asked her to dance – she looked in his eyes and knew that this man, Poul Steffensen, was someone special. When they docked in Copenhagen, a 3-month courtship began in earnest, and on July 18, 1951, Poul and Elie were married in Copenhagen's City Hall. Poul had already started the process to immigrate to America, and he and Elie moved to Brooklyn, New York. Poul found work as a designer in the Mechanical Design & Drafting Department of a large power plant construction company, and the following year their first

son, Paul Alan, was born the day before Elie's birthday.

In 1955 they decided to join the rest of Elie's family and moved to Chicago, Illinois. Poul worked his way up from Designer, to Draftsman, Mechanical Engineer, and eventually to Departmental Manager at a number of different companies in downtown Chicago. In 1958 Poul and Elie welcomed the arrival of their second son, Carl Kristian, who shares the same birthday as Elie's brother Paul Pedersen. Poul and Elie loved to socialize and entertain and were the consummate hosts to many visitors from Denmark over the years. Throughout the 60's the family would spend many weekends at "Rønnelly" their beloved summer home in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin where they took great pleasure in harvesting peaches and other fruit with close friends and family.

Elie and Poul were tireless volunteers on behalf of all things Danish. Elie served as secretary of the Danish American Athletic Club for many years while Poul was President, and the entire family participated in gymnastics and folkdancing. The Danish Old People's Home was another hub of activity, and Elie could always be found in the kitchen making smørebrød during the annual Sommerfest. In 1978 Poul and Elie surprised everyone in Chicago by moving to Omaha, Nebraska where Poul had found the ideal job. It didn't take long for them to become entrenched in the Scandinavian culture of Omaha, with much of their time devoted to the Scandinavian Folkdancers of Omaha. Elie both demonstrated and taught Danish knipling (bobbin lace making) and was a founding member of the Lace Guild in Omaha. Both were extremely dedicated supporters of the Danish Immigrant Museum in Elk Horn, Iowa. In 2007 Poul and Elie moved to Houston Texas where they became members of the Danish Club of Houston.

Elie came from an old, established lineage originally named "Bjerre" and had

been the family representative in the US for decades, sending information about marriages, births, confirmations, etc. to the main organization in Denmark. No relative was ever a “distant” cousin, and Elie always welcomed guests into her home with typical Danish charm and hospitality. She was renowned for sending cards and letters to family and friends for any occasion, and was always a magnet for drawing family together – both American and Danish. Her warmth, humor, compassion, and graciousness will be missed by many.

In lieu of flowers the family requests that donations be made in Elie’s memory to the Danish Immigrant Museum in Elk Horn, Iowa or the Danish Home in Chicago.

Tribute Wall



“ *Elie E. Steffensen*

October 08, 2023 at 10:52 AM



“ *Elie E. Steffensen*

October 06, 2023 at 01:12 AM



“ *Elie E. Steffensen*

October 05, 2023 at 09:45 AM



“ *Elie E. Steffensen*

October 05, 2023 at 01:54 AM



“ *Yes, Elie was a 'GRAND LADY' I sure will miss our talk, ELIE'S Christmas Greeting she always had so much to tell, what happend doing the year, about her family
I will never forget Elie or Poul, they were a beautiful couple.
I send my love to Elie's family.*

*Ruth J Kressler
Myrtle Beach
SC 29577*

Ruth Jensen Kressler - December 11, 2011 at 05:25 PM

LS

“ Carl and Frances and Paul Alan: It was good to talk with you last week, Carl--and with you the week before, Paul... Lillian and I have been talking and thinking about you three and Elie for the past 2 weeks... We echo Wayne's sentiments--she was such a class act and an "others focused" soul. As I said to you, there were many years when the only birthday cards I got were from my mother and Elie...and hers were never superficial--they always had some personalized note in her impeccable handwriting along with Danish Flags, "Til Lyyke", etc. She will be missed by a great many of us for just that alone..... I recall a very special day we shared with her two years ago when she came to stay with us for Summerfest... On Sunday morning I took them to church---1st to the Kenilworth Union Church for Christian services and afterwards to the Baha'i house of worship where we saw Christians reading the Gospels, Orthodox Jews reading the Torah, Muslims reading the Koran, Hindus reading from the upanishads(I think)and Baha'is reading from the writings of Baha'u'llah... We then took a long walk along lake Michigan by Wilmette harbor on a picture perfect day, and afterwards I took them both to Meirs for lunch(which they both loved) Elie was absolutely glowing with joy... It was as if the burdens of life and the world were lifted from her soul and she was in a totally relaxed, yet ecstatic state of being..... Another moment in time that I will never forget was when your uncle passed away and I took Elie to the funeral home where his body had been taken... Even though I had cold feet, she was determined to see him and say her last goodbye. So, I offered her my arm and in we went and there he was and she immediately rubbed his hair and started to cry and leaned down and kissed him and spoke a few private words to him---and it was so obvious that she loved him very deeply and profoundly... As I said on the phone, I am deeply struck by the suffering that so many have had to endure(Lillian included)but especially for Elie. There is no couple I have ever seen together that better exemplified what Emmanuel Swedenborg called "conjugial love" or "Marriage love" than Elie and Poul. He said, "True marriage love is, in it's essence, a union of souls, a linking of minds, a striving to link up in the emotions, and, as a result, in the body. The various internal states

associated with this love include innocence, peace, bliss, joy and the mutual desire in mind and heart to do only good to the other. After the love of God, Marriage love is the highest of all human loves as it has as its great purpose and design the bringing of children into the world and from them a heaven from the human race"..... To have such a love shattered by a car accident and all the suffering for so many years for them and all associated with them is beyond my comprehension.....Why God allows all this suffering--an ancient question that all religions try to address... At least and at last they are now together... Kudos to Carl and Francis for all you did to take care of both of them in Houston. Your actions have inspired me to take care of Lillian and all that it entails... I close by sharing a moment when I was with Elie working on Paul Pedersen.s estate and she pulled me aside and said: " The one thing I want my 2 boys to know when I am gone is that I absolutely love them both equally--That I don't favor one over the other.....I raise my glass to another remarkable Danish Viking that I had the luck and good fortune to know during this short journey here on this planet....While we are much poorer, Heaven just got a lot richer.....God Bless All of you.....Cliff

lillian bichel &clifford siegh - August 25, 2011 at 02:11 PM