



Lois Swett, age 86, of Ericson, Nebraska died in her home after a short battle with cancer on August 15, 2023, surrounded by her loving family.

Lois Elaine Barthel was born on the family homestead near Amelia, Nebraska, on September 30, 1936, to Louis and Katie (Nelson) Barthel. She was the fifth of six siblings.

At the age of 4, Lois began her education by riding a horse across the Nebraska Sandhills to a one-room schoolhouse often eating bread and gravy for supper. She skipped second grade to start high school at age 12. While boarding in town for high school, she lived with an elderly couple that fed her a meal of rabbit meat with the fur still on it. Lois was the class president of the Burwell High School graduating class of 1953. She attended Normal Training in Kearney, NE and worked as a schoolteacher for two years.

On June 12, 1955, Lois married Virgil Swett at the Burwell Christian Church, on a day so hot the candles melted in the candelabras; cake and punch were served. To this union five children were born: Terrill Swett, also known as TR; Robert Swett (Sharon); James Swett (Nancy); Katherine Curry (William); and Susan Fiorino (Joseph). A year after they were married, Lois and Virgil became the caretakers and guardians of Lois' younger sister as a result of the death of Lois' parents.

In 1955, the Swett's purchased the Flea Hop Ranch on the Cedar River Road, northwest of Ericson. There, as a tireless worker, Lois excelled as a ranch wife. Along with helping Virg with the cattle work, she kept a huge garden and one summer raised and butchered 1000 chickens on her own. Lois cooked three homemade meals a day for a growing family. Once she even delivered warm peach pie and cold ice cream to the hayfield crew.

A devoted mother and lover of children, she volunteered as 4-H leader for many years. Lois also drove the activity school bus for Wheeler Central Schools for over fifteen years. She received the Ak-sar-ben Good Neighbor Award in 1983. She was a pillar of the community.

A faithful Christian, Lois willingly served at the Ericson United Methodist Church in a multitude of ways for many decades in roles as varied as Pastor Parish Committee to mowing the church lawn and by providing food for countless Vacation Bible school snacks, funeral dinners, and carry-in suppers.

An ambitious entrepreneur, in 1981, Lois launched Swett Catering which pioneered wedding catering in the area. For 34 years, Lois combined her financial savvy, her desire to help people, and her love of good food into a profitable business. At her peak she would send three different crews to different locations and serve 1,200 people in a weekend in the local region. In 1994, Lois, a lifetime Sandhiller who never vacationed, was asked by the Nebraska Beef Council to travel to Japan for a short trip to promote Nebraska beef. She loved Japan but their food was "too much raw fish."

She was preceded in death by her parents; all of her siblings: Kenneth Barthel, Eleanor Johnson, Calvin Barthel, Keith Barthel, and Joan Barthel, and all of their spouses; all of her in-laws: Lynn and Ruby Swett, Ken and Beulah Swett; and four beloved nephews.

She is survived by her faithful husband of 68 years, Virgil Swett; her five children; seventeen grandchildren: Rachelle Wright (Travis), Tyler Swett (Sarah), Steve Swett (Andrea), Jaci Palmer (Jay), Jarrod Swett (Emily), Katie Diediker (Andi), Shyla Curry, Sara Krueger (Logan), Kali Bolli (Taylor), Haley Curry (Ryan Tvrdy), Jacob Curry, Olivia Fiorino, Sofia Fiorino, Dawson Fiorino, Roslyn Fiorino, Gwendolyn Fiorino, and Vivian Fiorino; twenty great- grandchildren with two more on the way; and numerous beloved nieces and nephews and their families. As the daughter of a rancher, the wife of a rancher, the mother and grandmother of ranchers, Lois has insisted that when the whole family gathers for Christmas, good beef must be served.

Lois leaves her loved ones with a legacy of an enduring marriage with Virgil, a ready willingness to help wherever needed, a tremendous work ethic, and clearly a love for food-leaving specific instructions in her last wishes what was to be served at her funeral dinner.

Funeral services will be 10:30 a.m. Friday, August 18, 2023 at Calamus Trinity Methodist Church in Burwell, Nebraska. Burial will be in Cottonwood Cemetery in Burwell. Pastor Steve Swett will officiate. Visitation will be Thursday from 5 – 7 p.m. at the church. Memorials are suggested to the Ericson United Methodist Church or the Wheeler County Foundation. Hitchcock Funeral Home in Burwell is in charge of arrangements.