



Katerina Simic

August 15, 1931 - April 17, 2022

Katerina Simic, 90, passed away on Sunday, April 17, 2022, in Wheeling, IL. She was born August 15, 1931, in the Ukraine, came to the US in 1957, and was a longtime resident of Chicago. Katerina was a devoted wife and mother, worked for a time as a cleaning lady, and then became a nurse's aide at Resurrection Hospital in Chicago. She enjoyed reading but most of all loved cooking and taking care of her family.

Surviving are her four daughters, Tomislava (William) Schoeneman, Vesela Simic, Nadia (Keenan) Dreger, and Katerina (Fred) Simic, and her three grandchildren, Samantha (Anurag) Patel, Jasmine Shevick, and Adam Lucchesi.

She was preceded in death by her husband, Ilija, in 2019, and by her sister, Klara Cristia, and her brother, Stepan Bondar.

A funeral service will be held at 11:00 a.m. on Tuesday, April 26, 2022, at Holy Resurrection Serbian Orthodox Cathedral, 5701 N. Redwood Drive, Chicago, IL. Interment will follow at Elmwood Cemetery. Memorial contributions can be made to the Alzheimer's Association. For info, 847-362-3009, or share a memory at www.burnettdane.com.

Previous Events

Funeral Service

APR 26. 11:00 AM (CT)

Holy Resurrection Serbian Orthodox Cathedral
5701 N. Redwood Drive
Chicago, IL

Tribute Wall

“ *Eulogy for Katerina Simic, Part 1*

Katerina Simic was born in Lebedyn in the Sumy region of Ukraine, on August 15, 1931, to Eva and Joachim Bondar. Katerina was a woman of remarkable strength and courage. She had reason to be afraid and anxious many times during her life, and she was, but every time she nonetheless persevered to uncover the bravery and resilience she herself didn't know she possessed.

The first time Katerina's mettle was tried, she was a very young girl who wanted to help her beloved older brother, Stepan, chop wood for the family's use. Stepan told her she could, one by one, roll the small logs of wood toward him to split with his axe. This they did, until she rolled one of the logs toward him and Stepan's axe fell too soon, chopping off the fingers on Katerina's right hand. "So much blood," she'd recall. Throughout her life, whenever Katerina was asked what happened to the fingers on her hand, she would state the facts of how it happened briefly and then focus on the compassion she felt for her brother, who couldn't accept what he'd done. He made himself an outcast and ran away for a time, returning then to face his parents' horror and to care for his sister. "How he cried!" Katerina would remember. "He couldn't tell me enough how much he loved me or show me in every way he could think of how sorry he was for the accident."

Not long after, Katerina was still a young girl, 10 years old, when the Nazis invaded her city, and she and her family were hurled into the nightmare of WWII. The Bondars saw their home burned to the ground before they were separated from one another, with the Nazis using Joachim and Stepan for their own purposes while Katerina and her mother were sent to a concentration camp.

Imagine being 10 years old in the midst of such horrors! —Later in life, Katerina rarely spoke of all she endured. What her children heard when they asked her about growing up during the war was, "I pray you never have to know what war is."

When Katerina and her mother were one day transferred from the concentration camp to a labor camp, they were spared the gas chamber to work as laborers on a farm in Bartelsdorf, Germany—where they were also miraculously reunited with Katerina’s father.

When the war was over, Katerina and her parents lived in what was called a Displaced Persons Camp, this one not far from Cologne, Germany. Thousands of refugees lived in these camps for several years before resettling and rebuilding their lives elsewhere—and among them, Katerina eventually met the love of her life, Ilija Simic. “On our first date we walked by the river,” she’d recall again and again in her last years. Katerina and Ilija were married in January 1954, in Cologne, Germany. They had their first child, Tomislava, in October 1954 and immigrated to the United States in 1957.

Katerina continued to demonstrate a measure of courage and strength as she learned the language and customs of her new and changing country—but for many years to come, her life was filled with an increase of blessings. She and Ilija moved her parents and her sister to the US to live nearby and begin anew alongside them, and she and Ilija gave birth to three more daughters—Vesela, Nada, and Katerina (her namesake). In a classic story of immigrants making good in a new land, Katerina and Ilija steadily worked and prospered. After years of apartment-dwelling, they eventually bought their own house and became homeowners for the rest of their years. Wherever they lived, Katerina’s artistry and devotion as homemaker and mother were on display—a pristine home, homemade meals all week long every week, clothes that were mended instead of tossed away, clothes that were hung out to dry on a clothesline (that fresh smell), flowers that were tended to in the backyard—and as busy as a mother of four was, never failing to find time for the parent-teacher meetings and open houses in the various schools her growing girls attended.



Thank you for writing it Vaya. ❤️

Katerina Simic - April 27, 2022 at 11:28 AM

“ *Eulogy for Katerina Simic, Part 2*

When her daughters were all grown up, Katerina loved working at the nearby hospital as a nurse's aide, and the staff and patients loved her right back. She was even able to travel and revisit her first homeland of Ukraine, reuniting with some old friends and friends of the old friends who were lost in the war.

*Katerina and Ilija's daughters have always found their birthdates interesting. Tomi, Vesela, and Nada all share birthdays in the first week of October (October 3, 5, and 7). Once they were old enough to calculate nine months of pregnancy backward, it was clear to them that their mother and father truly enjoyed celebrating their January wedding anniversary. When the youngest sister, Katerina, was born in February, the interruption in this pattern made it clear that their parents enjoyed celebrating their love whenever they pleased, not just on their wedding anniversary. Ask anyone who knew Katerina and Ilija, and you'll quickly learn that their love was epic—full of the devotion and commitment that make a strong marriage, and full of more comedy between them than most. Maybe the best way to capture their bond is to say that one day Katerina's sister, Klara, called her to say she'd just seen a movie called *The Notebook*. “I thought of you and Ilija,” Klara told her sister. “You need to see it. They're like the two of you.”*

This foundation of marriage and family—which grew to include Katerina's grandchildren Samantha, Jasmine, and Adam, and her sons-in-law Bill, Keenan and Fred and their families—blessed Katerina with the strength and courage she would need to draw upon again when her beloved Ilija declined into dementia in his final years. He needed care and understanding and patience, and she gave him these and more until the very end. After his passing, it was no surprise Katerina quickly fell into a grief that didn't ease in the years left to her. She literally fell soon after Ilija died and would never walk again, living out her last years in a nursing home, where she could receive the assistance she needed. Then Covid stopped

the world and put everyone on lockdown. The elderly, now further isolated, suffered greatly. When a masked Katerina was reunited with her masked daughters as the world slowly opened up again, it was immediately apparent to them that her mental health had suffered. Now Katerina was living with her own dementia. "Have you seen your father?" she would regularly ask. "Where did he go? He put on his coat and went out, but I don't know where. And my parents? I need to help my mother prepare the food. She shouldn't do all the work. Can we go to their house?"

What brings all the loved ones Katerina has left behind peace during this time of deep loss is the thought that Katerina is now reunited with Ilija and her parents. She lived a rich life, a full life, and she leaves behind a legacy of wisdom and great love born of her steadfast strength and courage and her faith in God's plan.

Marcee Dane - April 27, 2022 at 10:41 AM

MB

“ My family and I met Katerina in early 1988. We were fortunate to move across the street from the Schoeneman family at a time when we were sorely missing our own parents and siblings on the West coast. Babusa enfolded us in her embrace and because of her, we have strong enduring relationships with Tomi, Bill, and Sama...and were privileged to meet and share wonderful times with Vaya, Nadia and Katia We have such wonderful memories of her. She was special. She was kind. Babusa welcomed us and shared her expertise in cooking unbelievable meals and gifting us her special family recipes and knowledge, the elfish winks, delight, and secrets during every Christmas, and her laughter and joy when telling wonderful stories about her daughters and Samantha (and later, more grandchildren!). We gained wisdom from her unimaginable life experiences that increased our appreciation of resilience and the power of love. We are so thankful that we knew her and how she brightened and added warmth to our lives...and especially to the life of our young daughter. When we first heard of Babusa's passing, we felt sadness...and then it turned to peaceful acceptance in knowing she and Dedus are together again...already fussing but joined with a hug, a shoulder pat, and a kiss on the cheek. We will always miss you, Babusa...but see your reflection in the faces of your beloved family. We will carry you forever in our hearts. With much love, Mindy, Bill, and Mallory.

Mindy Baker - April 25, 2022 at 11:31 AM

VS

This is beautiful, Mindy--thank you!

Vesela Simic - April 26, 2022 at 09:06 AM



“ *Sweetest Sunrise Bouquet was purchased for the family of Katerina Simic.*



April 24, 2022 at 03:16 PM



“ *Full Of Love Bouquet was purchased for the family of Katerina Simic.*



April 23, 2022 at 09:02 PM



“ *She was the first person who ever mothered me; though, I thought she didn't like me at first because she she kept calling me Slata, which I came to learn meant angel. My funniest memory is when I was first invited to a Slava dinner and I accidentally blew out the candles from laughing. Everyone panicked, including Father, and scrambled to relight the candles before she came back in the room because it was bad luck. I was forgiven. Both of them always made me feel safe and I will love them forever.*

Toni Hartsell - April 21, 2022 at 04:28 AM



Love you, Toni! I hope we see you next week. ~ Vaya

Vesela Simic - April 21, 2022 at 12:30 PM



Thanks Toni. 🥹

Katerina Simic - April 21, 2022 at 09:13 PM