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Aviation pioneer Caro Bayley Bosca dies

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By Tom Stafford

Staff Writer

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Aviation history will remember Caro Bayley Bosca as a pioneer who flew with the Women's Airforce Service Pilots in World War II, set a world altitude record in the early 1950s and had a daring spirit that made her a star in aerobatic shows.

Friends and family remembered Bosca on Friday as a down-to-earth friend whose sense of humor, love for life and can-do spirit reached out to others even in the midst of her declining health.

Bosca, 85, died at 8:30 p.m. Wednesday in Community Hospital, months after being diagnosed with pancreatic cancer.

"I was very fond of her," said her older brother, Robert Bayley, 89, who owned a plane with Bosca for about 30 years until both gave up flying in 1992.

"She was very good with people. She had lots of friends. The parties she had at that house of hers on Home Road were fabulous," he said.

Ann Collier on Friday said there was a "big hole" left with her friend's departure.

On skiing trips, vacations and other outings, Collier found in Bosca a companion with an uplifting can-do attitude who had "friends from all walks of life" and had a love of art, an interest in the world and concern for all who crossed her path.

"She was a wonderful mentor in how to live life," Collier said.

Bosca also had a sense of playfulness and humor.

While on a trip to Italy with their stock club in 1990, Collier remembers everyone getting dressed up for a formal dinner, "and here's Caro in this ultra-suede suit with these hysterically striped knee-high socks.

"She always had a surprise element to her delivery — anything that would make people laugh."

Stock club member Sylvia Krupp echoed Collier's words.

"You never felt like a stranger with her. She was just a very down-to-earth person who loved to live" and got excited about traveling "and doing all sorts of things."

Flying was one of Bosca's first loves, and her brother said she learned in 1941 through a government-sponsored programs.

"They weren't taking women then," Bayley recalled, "but my father paid for her to take it with the boys."

The young Caro Bayley attended Ridgewood School, Springfield High School and spent two years at St. Mary's College in Raleigh, N.C., before the war broke out.

With the war effort short on pilots, she entered the Women's Airforce Service Pilots in 1943, shuttling all kinds of military planes from manufacturing sites to training bases, towing targets and flying other mission simulations to prepare soldiers for combat.

After the war, she joined a group of other former WASPs in Florida to pursue an aviation career, learning to be a mechanic, then exploring aerobatic flying and signing on with various flying shows, including Jess Bristow's All Women's Air Show.

She became the International Women's Aerobatic Champion on Jan. 3, 1951, in her Pitts Special biplane, Black Magic, and the same day she flew to 30,203 feet in a Piper Super Cruiser, setting a world altitude record for class II aircraft. That same year, she crossed paths in Florida with Springfielder Orsino Hugo Bosca, of the Hugo Bosca Co., and they married.

A family written obituary said that "with her typical enthusiasm for life, Caro had four children in five years," raising them in Springfield and summering in Harbor Springs, Mich. and Wilmington, N.C.

Active in women's and social clubs and in women's aviation organizations, Bosca served on the board of the International Women's Air and Space Museum, as president of the WASP alumni association, and belonged to the Experimental Aircraft Association.

An inductee of Ohio's Aviation Hall of Fame, her story is one of 50 scheduled to be featured in Ann Lewis Cooper's "Stars of the Sky," a book on women aviation legends scheduled to be published next year.

Daughter Marcy McGregor remembered her mother Friday as an "incredibly welcoming, sweet and engaging" person who "handled herself just beautifully" even during the course of her last illness.


Bosca was preceded in death by her husband, by son Martin Bayley Bosca, by brother Elden Bayley and by sister Dodie Bayley.

In addition to her brother, Robert, and his wife, Ruth, and daughter Marcy and her husband, John, Bosca is survived by her son, D'Orsi Bosca, Springfield; daughter Caro-Gray Bosca, Boston; and grandchildren Orson, CaroMia and Elena-Lee Humphrey, all of Harbor Springs, Mich.

In lieu of flowers, the family asks that donations be made to Community Mercy Hospice. The body will be cremated, and a memorial service is scheduled for 5 p.m. Sept. 27 at Christ Episcopal Church with a reception to follow. Arrangements are being handled by Littleton & Rue Funeral Home.

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