



Willy Lou Warbelow-Young

August 7, 1915 - February 20, 2019

Our mom, Willy Lou Warbelow Young went on to her next life mid-morning February 20 here in Fairbanks. This little farm girl from the jack pine country of northern Wisconsin was born August 7, 1915 in the farmhouse that her dad built. She spent a year bed bound with rheumatic fever when she was twelve years old and always credited her mother, Elsie, for nursing her back to health from a disease that was fatal for many. She lived through the Great Depression and experienced the toll it took on her family when they lost their farm to the bank for a matter of a few hundred dollars of debt. She attended Superior State Teacher's College and then launched her fifty plus year teaching career. In October 1945 she married her college classmate, Marvin Warbelow and after driving across the country to Seattle, taking a steamship to Seward, a train to Fairbanks and a series of airplanes and eventually a dogsled, they arrived in Shungnak, Alaska to teach for the Alaska Native Service. They eventually taught in Unalakleet, Selawik and Tetlin. Along the way Dad learned to fly, they grew to a family of six with a daughter and three sons, and they bought a surplus military communications site at Milepost 1338 on the Alaska Highway, which became Cathedral Bluffs Lodge. In their thirteen years at the lodge, Dad operated Warbelow's Air Ventures, a bush flying service, and Mom ran the lodge and homeschooled all four of her children through high school. When Dad was killed in an explosion in our shop in 1971, Mom moved to Tok, worked at the Tok Information Center, substitute taught, helped build her own house three miles from town, was an unpaid but enthusiastic employee at Forty Mile Air, Cassaron Turbo Helicopters, and Tacks' General Store, helped raise tons of grandchildren, and rescued stray cats. In 1975 she married Dale Young and added developing sourdough recipes for Young's Café to her resume. She loved having Dale's six adult children and their families in her life, working with him on his coffee farm in Hawaii and traveling all over the world together. Along the way she authored six books, ran a small equipment rental business; bought, rented and sold a condo in Hawaii and barely broke even; and continued to rescue cats. Mom's resilient spirit was tested in 1995 when she lost both Dale and her son Ron, and then again in 1999 when her son Charlie was killed in a helicopter crash.

In 2008, we convinced Mom (Art says we kidnapped her) , and she moved to Fairbanks to live in a house we built for her next to Cyndie's. In 2011, after a series of unfortunate health events, we felt we should move her to the Fairbanks Pioneer Home. Each of these moves took from her freedom, but her abilities were becoming less too. The good part is that she was always able to have her own cat at The Pioneer Home, and as each reached the end of its life, we would let Mom help choose another elderly cat from Pet Pride. In all, Mom's time at the Pioneer Home provided homes for four cats, one of which moved almost directly to Cyndie's house because we quickly figured out that Delilah was not a candidate for elder care. Her fourth cat, Sugar, is one of those rare individuals who managed to move out of the Pioneer Home alive, and she will have a permanent home with Cyndie's cats. For the last ten years, Mom loved to ride in the car to get a coffee at Mocha Dan's and always

commented on "the beautiful trees", where are all these cars going?", and "you are such a good driver!" (The last compliment was never directed at Art.) She continued to ride her tricycle until she was 102. She played songs of her own on the piano in her room and corrected every wrong note that her kids and grandkids hit when they attempted to play for her.

To the end she was stubborn and fiercely independent. Her love of cats, of all other animals, and of people, probably in that order, defined her. Her café counter at Cathedral Bluffs and her kitchen table at her house in Tok were known for a full cookie jar, the best potato salad in the world, endless cups of bitterly strong percolated (and possibly warmed over from the day before) coffee, and Willy Lou regaling her guests with stories while simultaneously knitting a wool sock, always turning a perfect heel.

Even though we know she did not waste a minute of her 103.5 years, it is still difficult to give her up. Advocating for kindness and compassion for all living things, especially animals wild and domestic, is probably the legacy most important to Mom. The friendship and love that everyone showed her during her life is all that Mom ever wanted. Nothing else is necessary, but for those who wish to do so, a donation to Pet Pride Fairbanks in her name would support what was most important to her. When Mom returns to earth again, we are pretty sure it will be as a cat! Meantime her ashes will be spread on Mt. Warbelow where she will be with Marvin, Ron and Charlie.

Our plan is to gather and celebrate Mom's life this coming summer in Tok, the place in Alaska she called home.