

Alice Virginia (“Ginny”) Stansell passed away peacefully in her home in Northfield on February 9, 2021, after suffering with colon and metastatic liver cancer. She was preceded in death by her parents Malcom Creamer and Alice duBois Creamer and an older brother, Kenneth. Born in Bridgeton, N.J., 1939, and raised on the family farm, she graduated from Bridgeton High School in 1957. Virginia attended Oberlin College/Conservatory, graduating in 1961. Her first job was an appointment as Director of Music at Wayne Street Methodist Church in Ft. Wayne, IN. Attending a harpsichord concert at Concordia Senior College, she met her future husband, Gary. They were married in 1964 in Ft. Wayne, and after Gary’s graduation from Concordia Theological Seminary, St. Louis in 1967, Virginia and Gary moved to Heidelberg, Germany, for his doctoral studies at the university. During their six-year stay in Heidelberg, their daughter Amanda was born in 1971. When Gary was appointed to the Religion Department at St. Olaf College in 1973, the family moved to Northfield, where they resided until Virginia’s death.

A lover of the arts and music, and gifted with perfect pitch, Virginia began studying piano and organ at an early age, later sensing that her vocation was church music. She received the B.M. degree in Sacred Music and Organ Performance from Oberlin Conservatory, studying organ with Grigg Fountain. Her organ studies included a year at the Mozarteum in Salzburg, Austria (1959-60). Other mentors in her continuing studies were Paul Manz, St. Paul, MN, Harald Vogel, Bunde, Germany, and Michael Mages, Flensburg, Germany. A highpoint toward the end of her professional career was attendance at an international organ workshop in French organ music (Flensburg, Germany), directed by Daniel Roth, titular organist at Saint-Sulpice (Paris). While living in Heidelberg, she studied harpsichord and 18th century performance practices; later in Northfield Prof. David Porter, Carleton College, became her harpsichord mentor. She was appointed subsequently as adjunct instructor for harpsichord at both Carleton and St. Olaf Colleges.

One of her several passions was for what she called “the church’s sacred treasury of hymnody,” demonstrated in playing for church services and directing choirs, especially children’s choirs. She was Director of Music at several churches in Northfield, Red Wing, Lonsdale and Minneapolis, as well as at the Cathedral of Our Merciful Savior (Episcopal), Faribault, concluding her career with a lengthy stay at St. Mary’s Roman Catholic Church, Stillwater, MN. Perhaps her greatest compliment as a choirmaster was that of a teenager in her adult choir: “Virginia could teach a monkey to sing.” At St. Mary’s she presented well-received organ concerts, always linked to the liturgical year. Her love of church and organ music was matched by an understated yet boundless interest in, and energy for, socio-economic issues, especially the needs of the unemployed, the economically disadvantaged, and immigrants; various charities were the recipients of her generosity.

In the 1970s and 80s, Virginia was intensely involved in Northfield’s “ABC Program” (A Better Chance) for inner city youths, sponsored by Carleton College. She served both as host family for numerous high school girls and later as president of the Northfield “ABC.” She also became a real estate agent at Al Thorpe Realtors, then earned her broker’s license and formed her own company, “Virginia Stansell Real Estate Services,” along the way renovating and restoring historic houses in Northfield.

Her survivors include her husband Gary, daughter Amanda, son-in-law Ian Lessing (Santa Barbara, CA), sister-in-law Donna Creamer (Endicott, NY), nephew Mark Creamer and spouse Bobbie Jo Kelsey (Hallstead, NY), brother-in-law Russ Stansell and spouse Constance (Ft. Worth, TX).

Profound thanks to the Allina Hospice team, which provided exceptional care and guidance for the past seven months. The Stansell family is deeply in their debt. The family suggests memorials to her favorite charities: the Union Gospel Mission in St. Paul, ChildFund International (humanitarian, international, not-for-profit, non-sectarian child development organization) and the Northfield Food Shelf.

Funeral and memorial services to be scheduled at a later date due to the pandemic.