Chopyak-Scheider Funeral Home, Inc.

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Jean "Jean" Prusik

May 11, 1927 – October 27, 2023



Jean Prusik (née Genowefa Merchel), 96, passed away peacefully in Endwell, NY on October 27, 2023.

Jean was born in Żelazna, a small village in central Poland. As a young child, she dutifully helped her parents and siblings on the family farm and attended school, but due to restrictions on education in rural areas, her formal education ceased at the end of 4th grade. World War II broke out shortly thereafter. The difficult years that followed were punctuated for Jean by the events of October 1944, when Nazis entered her village and detained numerous men, including her father Wincenty and two brothers Wincenty and Władysław (Władek), on suspicion of resistance and aiding the Allies. The men were forcibly marched out of the village. Only Władek would survive and return to Żelazna after the war. Decades later, Jean would learn from the Red Cross that her father and other brother died at Mauthausen Concentration Camp a few months before its liberation. After the men in her family were taken, Jean, at the age of 17, took over the bulk of the manual labor on the farm.

In 1947, Jean married a young man from her village, William Prusik, and together they relocated to Klęcino, a village in the north of Poland, to establish their own farm and build their family. Jean became a skilled pig breeder, raising award-winning gilts to be sent abroad. Always desiring further education, she also participated in a night school program that enabled her to acheive a 7th grade education. Later, with a successful farm and small shop run out of their home, Jean and William purchased a motorbike, and Jean became the first woman in the village to drive a motorbike – a true feat for the time.

In 1963, Jean followed in the footsteps of her beloved older sister Mary and sailed across the Atlantic with William and their two teenage daughters to begin a new life in America. They lived on Main Street in Binghamton, NY, in an apartment they constructed in the basement of an apartment building owned by William's uncle. Jean secured a job as a cleaner at Lourdes Hospital – a job she endured but never liked. She also enrolled in English classes, walking twice a week for 5 years from her apartment to the local high school to attend. Later, William helped Jean secure a job as a meat cutter – a job she much preferred, was highly proficient in, and would hold until her retirement. Eventually, Jean and William bought their first car and a family home, and years later, they became landlords, purchasing the apartment building on Main Street where they first lived as well as another property.

Jean carried the lessons and values of her youth – her hard work ethic, reverence for education, and appreciation for family – with her throughout her life. She had a survivor's spirit and scoffed at traditional notions of a woman's role in this world. She was fiercely independent with a quick wit and a gentle heart. She enjoyed reading – never taking her literacy for granted – and was an excellent baker. She steadfastly pursued a better life for herself and her family, and in so doing, she enabled the dreams of her children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren.

Jean is predeceased by her parents, Wincenty and Antonina (Oleskiewicz) Merchel; her three sisters, Helena Grabowska, Mary Kucinski, and Zofia Olender; her three brothers, Stanisław, Wincenty, and Władysław Merchel; and her son-in-law, Stanisław Janisiewicz. She is survived by her two daughters, Theresa Janisiewicz and Jean Prusik; her two grandchildren, Philip and

Final Resting Place

St Stanislaus Kostka Cemetery

1318 Airport Road

Binghamton, NY 13905