

Doris Willoughby



Doris Mellott Koerner Willoughby was born on June 29, 1936, in Easton, PA, and died on September 8, 2021, in Lakewood, CO. She moved to Boulder, CO, with her family when she was 11 and graduated from Boulder High School as class valedictorian in 1953. She earned a bachelor's degree in education from Grinnell College in Grinnell, IA, in 1957 and taught second grade in Cedar Rapids for 11 years. She met her husband D. Curtis Willoughby in 1966. They were married on June 24, 1967, in Cedar Rapids, IA, and honeymooned in Clear Lake, IA, Los Angeles, and Hawaii. The event in Los Angeles was the national convention of the National Federation of the Blind, the first of over fifty NFB conventions for Doris.

From the time they met, Doris became a driver and reader assistant for Curtis. Since he was an electrical engineer, perhaps the first blind electrical engineer in the country, and most of the material he wanted to read was technical, Doris's assistance was extremely valuable.

During the school year 1966/7, Judy Young, a young blind woman, was seeking a degree in elementary education from the State University of Iowa, but the University had difficulty finding a place for her to do her student teaching. Doris volunteered to be the supervising teacher and enjoyed the opportunity to work with Judy. Together they found techniques to make Judy an excellent teacher. Doris received her certification in the teaching of blind children in 1969 after studying during the summers and evenings and then began teaching blind children.

The Willoughbys moved to Des Moines in 1972, and Doris taught blind children there until 1993. Curtis was often asked to work on electrical and telephone equipment at the Iowa Commission for the Blind, and Doris often assisted. Shortly after they were married, she said with a smile, "I married an electric wire."

In 1990, she received her ham radio operator's license. Her husband, mother and sisters have all been hams. Doris continued to work with Curtis on many projects for nearly 30 years.

Doris was an active member of the United Methodist Church and invited Curtis to join. They continued in this denomination in Des Moines and in Colorado.

The Willoughbys moved to the Denver area in 1993, and Doris received a master's degree from the University of Northern Colorado soon after that. Doris taught blind children in the Adams 12 School District near Denver. She later taught blind adults at the Colorado Training Center for the Blind, where she helped students prepare for citizenship and the GED test, among other things.

Doris was a pioneer and leader in the education of blind children for at least 4 decades and wrote or co-authored 4 books on that subject. At its 50th anniversary convention, the National Federation of the Blind honored Doris with its highest award in education: the Distinguished Teacher of Blind Children Award.

Doris was soft-spoken, kind, generous, creative, and hardworking. She was preceded in death by her parents Margaret and Harold Koerner. She is survived by her husband and her sisters (Margery Herrington of Pueblo, CO, and Marian Lord of Omaha, NE). There are 6 nephews and nieces and 9 great nephews and nieces.

Doris was an important part of the Willoughby and Koerner families, her church congregations, the NFB, and her communities and will be missed by all. A celebration of Doris's life will occur at 1:00 pm on Sept. 18, 2021, at the Wheatridge United Methodist Church in Wheatridge, CO. Memorial donations may be made to the National Federation of the Blind or the Wheat Ridge United Methodist Church.