

Ellen Louise Ballard, 78, of Buffalo Gap passed away October 14, 2024, at Custer Care & Rehab Center in Custer, SD.

Ellen was born Oct. 25, 1945, in Baltimore, MD, to parents Kenneth and Florence (Zaboski) Diekhoff, who were stationed there during WWII, as Ellen's father worked for the Glenn L. Martin Aircraft Company. In 1946, the family of three traded stamps for gas to move back to Kenneth's home state of South Dakota. The family settled in Wessington, where they farmed and ranched, living in a home without running water, electricity and indoor plumbing. In 1952, sister Becky joined the family.

Education was important to Ellen's parents, and they wanted to make sure she went to an accredited school. So, Ellen attended Huron High School, staying with friends Clint and Alice Hanson during the school week, and then coming home on the weekends to help on the farm. Ellen went on to attend South Dakota State University, where she got her teaching degree. She went on to get her Master's through SDSU in language and newspaper publishing.

While she was a senior at SDSU, Ellen struck up a great friendship with Dorthea Edgington, who invited Ellen out to the Black Hills to assist with the horse rides at Rafter JBar Ranch. She fell in love with the Black Hills.

Ellen's first teaching job was in Madison, MN. But after assisting with the horse rides, Ellen knew she wanted to live and work in the Hills. She taught two years at Rapid City Central High School, before switching to Custer High School, where she taught English for 36 years. In addition to teaching, Ellen was a farrier, teaching many local farmers the trade and art of the business.

Ellen met and married her husband, (Dale) Russell Ballard, June 30, 1974. They celebrated 50 years of marriage this year. In addition to being teachers – Russ taught industrial arts for 12 years at Custer High School – the two owned and operated several businesses, including: a saw shop, trucking business, and Ballard Logging. But for the last 24 years, they have operated Ballard Ranch near Buffalo Gap, SD.

Ellen was known for her years of teaching the youth of Custer County, helping her neighbors, and a strong political view. You could also always count on Ellen to cook a delicious meal to be served after brandings.

Ellen is survived by her husband of 50 years, Russ; son, Sean Brown of Montrose, CO; granddaughters, Kathryn Brown of Okayama, Japan and Larissa Brown and great grandchildren: Kaleb, Reyna & Viv of Gilbert, AZ; step-daughters, Diane (Yiannis) Josephakis of Dallas, TX, and Donna (Russell) Crowe and step-grandsons Ryan, Devin & Brennen of Mustang, OK; sister, Becky (Rich) Nelson of Miller, SD; niece, Jennifer (Dylan) Templeton and great nephews, Dayken & Davin Nelson of Miller, SD; Aunt & Uncle, Bern & Elsie Zaboski of Browns Valley, CA; as well as many special pets, and numerous friends, neighbors and students.

She was preceded in death by her parents, Kenneth and Florence Diekhoff and granddaughter Samantha Brown.

A Lifetime Remembered



Hay In My Pockets

by Devin Conley

*When I leave this world, and may that be many years from now...
 bury me with hay in my pockets.
A lifetime of staring into the wind will leave my face a map of lines.*

*My hands will not be soft, and my back may no longer be straight.
When my last words pass through lips that laid kisses on good men
 and the soft muzzles of good horses, may the words be sweet.*

*When I draw a last breath, may I smell the sagebrush after a rain.
As my eyes close for the final time, may I be greeted with rolling,
green hills at gloaming hour, framed through the ears of a horse.*

*After a life lived through hard work, don't bury me in satin,
 for it will feel foreign on my skin.*

*Don't set my hair in perfect curls, but leave it windblown.
Let me go into the Earth with half a grin, remembering
long nights under arena lights, and gathering cows in June.*

*I want to go out as I lived, reminded of what I love.
So, leave my boots on, and don't mind the mud.
 And bury me with hay in my pockets.*



IN LOVING MEMORY



Ellen Louise Ballard

*October 25, 1945 — October 14, 2024
Baltimore, Maryland Buffalo Gap, South Dakota*

*CELEBRATION OF LIFE
12:00 p.m., Sunday, November 3, 2024
Buffalo Gap Community Center
Buffalo Gap, South Dakota*

Please join the family for a meal and memories