



## Rita Margaret Relph

March 26, 1929 - May 23, 2018

Rita Margaret (Parsons) Relph, 89, a long time resident of Fredonia, died Wednesday, May 23, 2018, at Fredonia Regional Hospital after a brief illness. She was co-owner and publisher of the Wilson County Citizen since 1961.

She was born March 26, 1929, at Burden to Earnest Avery and Mabel Claire (Cook) Parsons. When Rita was four years old, her mother died, and she went to live with her uncle and his wife, Vern and Elsie Cook. She lived in Liberty, Mo., and Bonner Springs, attending schools there. The family moved to Independence, and she graduated from Independence High School in 1947. She earned an associate's degree from Independence Junior College, and earned certifications from Oklahoma University.

On June 30, 1948, she was married to Joseph Stephen "Joe" Relph in St. Andrew Catholic Church, Independence, by Fr. (later Monsignor) Patrick Leahy. Mr. Relph survives at their home.

The couple lived in a number of places, following Joe's work in the oil industry. But in 1961, both made an enormous change, following a dream Rita had to run a small newspaper, they bought the Wilson County Citizen from its original family, the Gilmores.

If establishing a new regime in the newspaper business was time-consuming,

Rita did not let it consume all her time. A lifelong supporter of the arts, she was on the team that established the Fredonia Arts Council, the entity that celebrated its 50th anniversary last year. An avid reader, writer and historian, she was a member of the Fredonia Public Library board.

She was one of the first community members who came together to change St. Margaret's Mercy Hospital to Fredonia Regional Hospital, and served on its first board of trustees. She was a member of Fredonia Business Women and its predecessor Business and Professional Women. She had a keen interest not just in local politics, but in state and national issues as well. As a member of Wilson County Republican Women and a GOP precinct committeewoman for many years, she was selected to serve as a delegate to the 1980 Republican National Convention.

Later in her life, she did significant volunteer work for a number of organizations, including knitting hats and mittens for local children — a fitting task since she had started knitting sweaters for World War II children in England.

She was a member of Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Fredonia.

Rita and Joe were recently recognized by the Kansas Press Association as outstanding mentors in the field of community journalism.

Survivors in addition to her husband Joe include five children:

Mina DeBerry of Fredonia

Patricia Relph Gross of Fayetteville, Ark.

Ross Relph and wife Josie of Lenexa

Virginia Relph of Fredonia

Meredith Odell and husband Phil of Fredonia

Five grandchildren

Elizabeth DeBerry and partner Sarah Stonehocker of San Francisco, Calif.

Rebecca Relph of Olathe

Emily Relph of Shawnee

Jillian Johnson of McPherson

Stephanie Wilson of Fredonia

Step-granddaughter Kimberly (Gross) Pennell and husband Duke of Fayetteville, Ark.

One great-grandson Giovanni

Many nieces, nephews and step-grandchildren.

Also, her little doggie, Pepper Jean, will mourn her passing.

Her son, Joseph Stephen "Steve" Relph II; her grandson, Stephen Kirk DeBerry; two sons-in-law, Roger Gross and James Johnson; her brother, Clyde Calvin "Dusty" Parsons, preceded her in death.

Cremation has taken place.

A Mass of Christian Burial will be recited Saturday, June 2, at 10 a.m., at Sacred Heart Catholic Church. Father Daniel Vacca will officiate.

Countryside Funeral Home, Fredonia, is in charge of arrangements.

Memorial contributions may be made to the Fredonia Arts Council or the Fredonia Public Library and may be sent to the funeral home at 420 N. 20th - PO Box 247, Fredonia, KS 66736.

# Cemetery Details

## Fredonia Cemetery

Fredonia, KS 66736

# Previous Events

## Service

JUN 2. 10:00 AM (CT)

Sacred Heart Catholic Church  
1201 Madison  
Fredonia, KS 66736  
(620) 378-3658

# Tribute Wall

JK

“ We are truly sorry for your loss. Our prayers are with the family. Jim & Jean Ann Kariker

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**Jean Ann Kariker** - May 29, 2018 at 07:43 PM

HP

“ We are sorry to hear of your loss of Rita. We always enjoyed seeing her smiling face and also enjoyed her great wit when we lived in Fredonia. Please know you will be in our thoughts and prayers. May God's Spirit and your many wonderful memories comfort you in the days to come.

*Harriet (Purdy) & Dewayne Powell  
Amarillo, TX*

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**Harriet & Dewayne Powell** - May 28, 2018 at 09:11 PM

CM

“ To the Family of Rita Relph.

*Your Mother's contagious smile and laugh will certainly be missed.*

*Thoughts and Prayers are with you and yours.*

*Cindy Mitchell,  
Fall River, KS*



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**Cindy Mitchell** - May 27, 2018 at 12:46 PM