Stella Niemier was truly one of a kind with her caring nature. Her family meant so much to her, and through good and hard times in life, she used her experiences for the benefit of helping others. Although she is deeply missed, the memory of Stella will live on in the hearts of those who knew and loved her.

Born on December 29, 1937, Stella Katherine’s birth was a most welcome event in the lives of her parents, Aloysius and Lottie (Kuczwara) Niemier of South Bend, Indiana. It was an eventful year altogether in the nation as the Golden Gate Bridge was brought to completion in San Francisco, California. Aviation pioneer and noted author Amelia Earhart’s disappearance that year continues to remain a mystery, and the explosion of the Hindenburg marked the end of the airship era.

The oldest of four children in the Niemier household, Stella later welcomed younger siblings Jacob, who later dedicated his life to the priesthood as Father Roch Niemier OFM, her sister, Maryann who also devoted her life to the Catholic church as Sister Mary Jude Niemier CSFN, and Aloysius.

As a young girl, Stella saved the life of her brother, Al. Eight years old and while riding his bike, a wild dog attacked him. Stella, hearing his screams, ran to his rescue, chasing the dog away. Although he received several dog bites requiring multiple stitches and had to undergo a series of rabies shots, he wouldn’t be alive today had it not been for his big sister, Stella.

Stella attended the area schools and was raised in a devout, Catholic home. She graduated in 1955 from St. Joseph High School and went on to attend Holy Cross Central School of Nursing in Notre Dame, Indiana. In 1958 she graduated, receiving her license as a registered nurse. Early in her career she worked in a hospital and clinic, but ultimately landed a position with Blue Cross Blue Shield as a quality control nurse. Stella much preferred office work over the clinical aspect of nursing. She eventually retired in 2000 at the age of 62 having worked in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Throughout the years, Stella dated several young men as a teen and young adult. Two of which were quite serious, but nothing developed further in either of these relationships. Stella concentrated on her work and most importantly, her family. Over the years she shared memorable times with those she loved, such as her brother, Father Roch’s ordination in 1965, and serving as the matron of honor at her brother, Al’s wedding in 1970. Along with other family weddings and celebrations, Stella loved enjoying Christmas dinner with her family, and celebrated her 65th birthday with them at the Steak and Ale...
Restaurant in South Bend. Stella also loved dining out. One of her most exciting experiences, however, included traveling to Australia with Father Roch in 2004 to visit their sister, Sister Jude. Stella always looked forward to her weekly date every Sunday morning talking to brother, Al on the phone.

After achieving 36 years of sobriety, Stella helped many others as a compassionate and effective sponsor. She formed many loving friendships through Alcoholics Anonymous, and during her recent hospitalization, a few of the women she sponsored, past and present, commented how much they loved her. Stella even helped run the local group, serving as the secretary and treasurer. Around 1977, Stella met Walter “Wally” Baran at one of the meetings and they became friends. After about three years, Wally asked Stella, “to be his gal”.

Wally’s marriage to his former wife, Nellie ended in divorce about eight years before Stella met Wally. She and Wally were sensitive and respected how Wally’s children and Nellie would feel about their relationship. When Stella was eventually introduced to them, she was welcomed with open arms. They invited her to all the Baran family gatherings, and were genuinely pleased to see them so happy together. Stella was soon considered a part of the family. Before long, Stella and Nellie formed a close friendship, as well.

When Wally had open heart surgery in 2001, he moved into Stella’s apartment while recovering. With her nursing background, it was only logical she would care for him, and his family was very grateful. Although only intended as a temporary arrangement, Wally was soon diagnosed with throat cancer. His recovery was much more extensive, but with Stella looking after him, he lived happily and in relatively good health afterwards. Wally always mentioned how Stella took such good care of him and how “he wouldn’t be here if not for her”. She could barely endure leaving Wally for any length of time and while away would call him multiple times to check in. Her first, loving words to him were always, “Hi Sweetie”.

Stella’s giving heart was selfless. In 2005, Nellie broke her hip at the age of 91 and had hip replacement surgery. She was always very independent, but was much weaker, and had to use a walker. The entire Baran family pitched in to help. Stella and Wally cooked many of her meals and one or the other visited every day for lunch or dinner. Nellie was ever grateful for the friendship she shared with Stella and Wally.

Stella liked reading, and also collected angels, bells, and teapots. She enjoyed watching football and baseball on TV, but especially football. She was, of course, an avid Notre Dame fan, seeing as she was a devout
Catholic from South Bend, but she also favored the Packers and Brewers. Stella also liked a good game of cards, especially cribbage. She and Wally played at least one game every night before going to bed without fail. When her beloved brother, Father Roch visited, they would often play a few three-handed games. One of her family’s most comforting thoughts of Stella, Wally and Roch is the vision of them playing three-handed cribbage together, once again.

Stella loved playing the role of “paparazzi” and always took so many pictures her family had to hide her camera!

Stella loved visiting other churches and meeting new people. Her caring nature was a bright light in the hearts of many, especially her dear friends and family. They enjoyed her fine sense of humor, and positive demeanor. She lived by, and encouraged others to simply, “take one day at a time”.

Stella K. Niemier, age 75, passed peacefully to Eternal Life on Friday, January 25, 2013 from complications following surgery. She was the beloved life partner of the late Walter Baran; she was preceded in death by her parents, brother, Father Roch “Jacob” Niemier OFM, and sister, Sr. Mary Jude “Maryann” Niemier CSFN. She dearly loved and will be greatly missed by her brother, Aloysius (Carol) Niemier; nephew, Michael (Amy) Niemier and their daughters; dear friend, Sr. Caroline Jakubowski SSND; Walter’s children, Mary Ann (Jim) Coughlin, Michele (George “Skip”) Wittler, and Michael (Lisa Fohey) Baran; Walter’s grandchildren, Megan (Joe) Coughlin, Meredith (Atlas) Anagnos, Matthew Coughlin, Joseph (Amber) Coughlin; Walter’s great-grandson, Emmett; and many, many treasured friends.

Family and friends will gather at the Suminski Life Story Funeral Home, Niemann / Suminski, 2486 S. Kinnickinnic Ave (414) 744-5156 on Sunday, February 10, 2013 from 1:00 PM until the time of her memorial service at 2:00 PM. A Mass of Christian Burial will be held at St. Joseph’s Chapel at Holy Cross College Notre Dame, Indiana on Saturday, February 23, 2013 at 12 noon. Memorials to Alcoholics Anonymous-Milwaukee or to South Milwaukee Human Concerns are appreciated. Please visit www.SuminskiFuneralHome.com to share a special memory and photo of Stella and to sign her online guest book.