



Yvonne L. Vinstra

November 16, 1945 - May 20, 2023

*In lieu of flowers the family would appreciate donations be made to PAAW: <https://paawarren.org/>
or All About Animal Rescue: <https://allaboutanimalsrescue.org/veterinary-services/all-about-pricing/> in Yvonne's honor*

Yvonne Vinstra was born on November 16, 1945 in Hamtramck Michigan. She was the daughter and only beloved child of the Very Rev Stephen Rusiniak, a Russian Orthodox priest and Luba Rusiniak, a homemaker, priest's wife, and doting mother to Yvonne. Yvonne spent the first year of her life in Hamtramck where her father was attached to a Russian Orthodox Church there before moving with them to Lakewood Ohio where her father was the founding priest at St. Peter & Paul Russian Orthodox Church. At the age of 12 Yvonne returned to Detroit, a city she would live in for almost the entirety of her life from that point, where her father was the priest at Holy Ghost Orthodox Church on Mound Road south of 8 Mile. Yvonne would reside with her parents in the church rectory for 30 years from the age of 12 until her father retired from his position as Head Priest at Holy Ghost in 1986. She moved with her father to a different location on the east side of Detroit after he retired where she was often his caregiver after he recovered from a stroke as well as being his near constant companion. Yvonne and her father moved alone to the new location preceding her father's retirement because her mother had passed away from diabetes in 1983.

Yvonne graduated with a High School Diploma in 1963. In the summer of 1963 Yvonne became an intern at Northland Playhouse on Greenfield Road in Oak Park where she was a costume and props assistant during their summer stock performances. Yvonne would return to this intern position for the two following summers of 1964 and 1965. While an intern with Northland Playhouse Yvonne met many movie and theater actors and actresses from the golden ages of Hollywood and Broadway and even befriended a few with whom she exchanged correspondence. She would often tell her husband Andrew and others of her experiences meeting and interacting with these famous and semi-famous character actors. One story that particularly stood out to Andrew is how the character actor Murray Hamilton from the great Paul Newman and Jackie Gleason picture *The Hustler* criticized Yvonne for the way she swept the theater floor. Yvonne developed actual close personal friendships or at least close personal acquaintance with a few names people might recognize such as Celeste Holm, Annette Funicello and Robert Goulet. In addition to being a costumes and props assistant Yvonne was also an aspiring actress herself and once played the title role of Juliet in a production of William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* at the Civic Center Theater in Detroit. She also played Amanda Wingfield in a production of the Tennessee Williams play *The Glass Menagerie* at the same theater as well as many smaller supporting roles in various productions.

Yvonne was engaged for a short time in 1968 to a fellow aspiring actor and playwright but that engagement was cut short by the young man's untimely and tragic passing in early 1969. After the passing of her young suitor Yvonne developed an anxiety disorder but struggled bravely on and took a job for 4 or 5 years as an after school dramatics and speech teacher at Considine Recreation Center in Detroit. Several of the young men she taught contacted her many years later to thank her for the role she played in helping them into adulthood after struggling through a troubled and challenging adolescence.

One became a minister at a predominantly African American church in Detroit. Another became a musician and entertainer. Several struggled and never made it out of adolescence which was another troubling blow Yvonne carried with her through life. During this time and after Yvonne turned more and more to another more solitary creative pursuit.- the writing of poetry. This would be a creative pursuit to which she would dedicate the remainder of her life and it would lead directly to her eventual meeting and connection with her husband Andrew Vinstra who was facilitating and teaching a poetry workshop in Ferndale when he and Yvonne met.

In the intervening years between 1974 or 1975 when Considine Recreation Center closed and 2005 when Yvonne met Andrew she was the sole caregiver to her father after he suffered a stroke from which he would eventually recuperate but nonetheless need her help and support. Also during this time Yvonne would care for and adopt many stray and abandoned animals, mostly cats, but also a toy poodle she named Cottony and a rabbit named Mr. Ginger who lived in the garage of the rectory. Yvonne cared for her father until his passing in early 2003 and struggled on bravely alone on Supplemental Security Income in a small apartment in Detroit near 6 Mile and Woodward Avenue.

After meeting Andrew in 2005 at the poetry workshop Andrew would join Yvonne in this small apartment in August 2006 where they lived and struggled together for several years until the apartment was burglarized and many of their valuable belongings were stolen. It was also around this time that Andrew's father Kenneth set Andrew up with a job as an online book and media purchaser for the online presence of a bookstore up in Oscoda Michigan. This was a job which Yvonne assisted Andrew with by looking up estate and garage and library booksales on line and often accompanying Andrew to the sales where she would look at sale items because of her own

interests in antique furniture and ladies fashion and occasionally find some inexpensive item she could purchase for her wardrobe or home.

During this entire time Yvonne and Andrew loved each other and struggled together for 8 years before finally getting married on October 4th of 2014. For the years before the wedding and some after Yvonne would support and love Andrew through doing yoga together, going to pool aerobics with him at a community center in Warren, taking occasional walks in nature, going to various bars and taverns where Andrew would sing karaoke or open mic jazz and attending poetry workshops and poetry readings where they both would read and share their writings. Yvonne was published in several journals and magazines including The Wayne Literary Review and The Paterson Review as well as a few online journals. She also had several chapbooks published named Playground Poems and Exotic Tea. She was published somewhat frequently in the early 70's and then that tailed off as she had to care for her father until his death and she met Andrew.

Yvonne was born and raised Russian Orthodox and Andrew would occasionally attend services with her. They also attended a Congregational Church in Troy where they were married on October 4th of 2014 and an Episcopal Church in Southfield where Yvonne assisted Andrew with picking out poems and songs for a noon service that Andrew informally ran along with Father Chris Yaw who officiated the weekly communion.

After marrying in late 2014 Andrew and Yvonne had several more good years together before Yvonne's health took a slow turn for the worse. Yvonne continued to love and support Andrew as he looked for work and held various part time jobs after the internet sales dried up and Great Northern Bookstore closed their physical location when Andrew's parents retired and sold the store and remaining inventory. Yvonne and Andrew together cared for and fed many stray and abandoned community cats and fostered several adult

females and a half dozen or so kittens they were able to get adopted into other loving homes as well as taking in a total of 5 stray abandoned cats into their home over 17 years in addition to the 3 cats Yvonne had when Andrew moved in with her, all of whom passed away. Yvonne struggled to continue writing poetry, taking care of her cats and her beloved husband until her great loving heart finally gave out on her at Harper Hutzell Hospital on May 20, 2023. She is survived by many friends and her husband Andrew who will miss and mourn her daily until he too passes from this life into eternity.

Cemetery Details

Forest Lawn Cemetery

11851 Van Dyke
Detroit, MI

Previous Events

Instate

MAY **31**. 10:00 AM (ET)

Holy Ghost Russian Orthodox Church
38500 Ryan Rd.
Sterling Heights, MI 48310


Funeral Service

MAY **31**. 11:00 AM (ET)

Holy Ghost Russian Orthodox Church
38500 Ryan Rd.
Sterling Heights, MI 48310

Tribute Wall

EM

“ Yvonne was a great friend . I have known Yvonne since 1982. We became the best of friends writing to each other. I knew something was wrong. Rest in Peace my dear friend. You will be missed



Evelyn Vazquez Montalvo - September 23, 2024 at 05:34 PM



“ Yvonne L. Vinstra

October 23, 2023 at 04:00 AM

MR

“ I feel privileged to have been friends with Yvonne. She was a sweet, gentle, unassuming soul, but a strong poet. Her poetry was profound and beautiful, characterized by memorable metaphors. The love she shared with Andrew undoubtedly helped her cling to life although she was seriously ill. She looked beautiful when I saw her in April. I will remember her beauty and faithfulness. And I Pray Andrew will carry on for her. M. Jane Roberts

M. Roberts - June 17, 2023 at 04:01 PM

ML

“ Yvonne was a wonderful poet and very kind soul. She was a good friend to all of us in the Detroit poetry community. Her poetry was beautifully crafted with imagery and metaphors. We will miss seeing her at our monthly poetry group meetings. Prayers for her beloved husband Andrew-another fine Detroit poet.

M. L. Liebler - June 04, 2023 at 01:11 PM

LM

“ *My condolences to you, may she rest in peace.*

Lisa M - May 24, 2023 at 04:04 PM

MC

“ *Sorry for you loss Andy.*

Mike Cribley - May 23, 2023 at 06:23 PM

BB

“ *Thinking of you Andy. God Bless and a big hug from Aunt Becky and Uncle Bill...*



Becky and Bill - May 23, 2023 at 04:52 PM