

THELMA KEANE



Thelma Keane, wife of cartoonist Bil Keane and model for the character of Mommy in the newspaper comic "Family Circus," died Friday, May 23, 2008 of Alzheimer's. She was 82.

Her fictional comic persona - the always-loving and ever-patient suburban mother of four young children - was patterned on Keane's real life as a mother of five. She shared with her husband a humorous outlook and devotion to common family life which inspired Bil to draw his cartoons. She said, "When Bil and I met, laughing was a wonderful part of our togetherness. It is our life."

Known to her friends and family as Thel, Keane also worked full-time as her husband's business and financial manager. "Thel's the most kissable editor I've ever met," was Bil's oft-quoted quip. Bil credited much of his success to Thel's business acumen, which allowed Bil to pursue his creativity without concern for the working details. Through Thel's efforts Bil became one of the first syndicated newspaper cartoonists to win back all rights to his own creation.

Thel Keane died at Barton House, an Alzheimer's assisted-living facility near the family home in Paradise Valley, Arizona, where she had been under care for three years.

Although Keane became the model for a comic icon of Americana, she was a proud Australian. The daughter of a banana grower, Keane was born Thelma Carne in Gympie, Queensland in 1926. In her early years, her family home was a large 4-room canvas tent in the Amamoor Forest Reserve where her father worked in a re-forestation project. During high school years, she lived with relatives in Gympie and commuted home on weekends.

During World War II, Keane met her future husband, Bil, in the war bond office in Brisbane, Australia. They worked at desks side-by-side - she was an accounting secretary and he was a promotional artist for the United States Army. Married in 1948, she moved to the United States to Bil's hometown of Philadelphia.

Living in the suburb of Roslyn, Pennsylvania, she had five children between 1949 and 1958. The family moved in 1959 to Paradise Valley which at that time was a remote unpopulated area on the desert outskirts of Phoenix. Thel Keane said that she never really cared where the family lived as long as they lived together happily. Thel and Bil both maintained offices in their family home. For the next 46 years, while the town of Paradise Valley grew into a suburban metropolis, and while her children grew up and began families of their own, Thel and her husband continued to work side-by-side in their family home.

Thel Keane is survived by husband, Bil; and her five children: Gayle of Napa, CA; Neal of Northridge, CA; Glen of Santa Clarita, CA; Christopher of Dragør, Denmark; and Jeff of Laguna Hills, CA; and her sister, Tess Horne of Brisbane, Australia; and nine grandchildren.

*Arrangements are being made through
Messinger Mortuary in Scottsdale, Arizona
for a memorial service to be held at
10:00a.m. Saturday, May 31st at
The Franciscan Renewal Center,
5802 E. Lincoln Drive, Paradise Valley, AZ.*

*Memorial donations can be made to
the Sun Health Research Institute
in Sun City, Arizona or the
local Alzheimer's Association.*