



**Gemma Marquis Geisman 85**, peacefully passed away on Thursday, April 23, 2020. She was born in Van Buren, Maine on December 7, 1934 and was proud to be number 12 of 13 children born to William and Adele (Castonguay) Marquis.

Gemma married the love of her life Richard “Dick” Geisman on June 27, 1953 at St. Anne’s Catholic Church in Hartford, CT and they shared 54 wonderful years together before his passing on September 30, 2008. Gemma had plans to be a nun after graduation until Dick, a navy sailor, “crashed” a wedding she was attending. It must have been divine intervention as they were truly meant for each other.

Gemma was a loving mother to her four children and in spite of the fact that her second child, Mike, was born with a rare genetic brittle bone disease called Osteogenesis Imperfecta, she and Dick did everything they could to create a normal family life for all. Their home became the hub of the neighborhood, with wiffle ball games causing a permanent infield in the grass, homemade ice cream being cranked and shared with all, Christmas trees bigger than life, pulling taffy, making fudge, camping and many more activities that have become family traditions. Her children could always count on her to sweep away the boredom of a lazy summer day by writing a script for a summer play with them as the main characters and the neighborhood children as the audience. Gemma was the producer, director, set designer, costume designer, acting coach and marketing genius. Because of her love of reading there were many trips to the local library and piles of books coming home for the children to read.

Gemma was very creative and had a passion, not only for reading, but for writing stories. She is the published author of over 60 articles that have appeared in various magazines such as Redbook, Good Housekeeping, Lady’s Circle, Exceptional Parent, American Legion Magazine, Catholic Digest and many others. Her favorite topic was sharing the joys of growing up in a small town in Northern Maine in a large French-Canadian family in the “House on the Hill”.

Gemma’s writing led her to submit a Young Mother’s Story to Redbook Magazine in 1967 called “My Prison of Dreams” which was the story of how it felt to care for a breakable baby with Osteogenesis Imperfecta. The publication of this story

created a flood of mail from all over the country from parents in similar situations and it changed her life forever. Gemma worked together with a few of those parents and the doctors at the Shriners Hospital in Chicago, where Mike spent many days, and the result was the formation of the Osteogenesis Imperfecta Foundation which celebrates its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2020. Thousands of children worldwide, born with this rare disease, and their families have been helped over the years because of Gemma.

Some of Gemma's roles in the OI Foundation included serving as the Foundation's first Executive Director (1981-1987), serving on the Advisory Council and the Nominating Committee for many years. She also edited Breakthrough (the foundations newsletter) for 14 years, providing information, inspiration, role models and support to a growing readership. Gemma was awarded the Foundation's highest honor, the Thelma Clack Lifetime Volunteer of the Year Award in 2002. Gemma told the story of raising Mike and the formation of the OI Foundation in her book "From the Seeds of Sadness" which was published in 2009 and can be found on Amazon.

Gemma has impacted the lives of everyone who has known her and she will be greatly missed. She is survived by her children, Cathy Bowen of Goffstown, NH, Cindy Geisman (Jay Williams) of Bastrop, TX, and Richard "Rick" Geisman (Rose) of East Hartford, CT. Gemma has eight grandchildren, Jennifer Bowen, Emily (Bowen) Blossom, Ryan Bowen, Paula (Bowen) Huntley, Sean (Samantha), Trey and Corey Geisman and Gemma "Gem" Williams. She also has seven great-grandchildren, Jacob and Caleb Shepard, Marshall Bracey, Gavin and Corbin Huntley, who lovingly called her triple G (Great Grandma Geisman) and Carson and Camden Geisman. She is also survived by two siblings Peter Marquis (Angie) of Goffstown, NH and Robertine "Bobbie" Dryer (Chuck) of Portsmouth, NH and a brother-in-law Jim Geisman of Horton, MI along with many nieces and nephews who loved her dearly. Gemma is predeceased by her husband Dick and son Mike, her parents and ten siblings.

A Catholic mass and celebration of her life will be held later this year when it is safe once again to come together. Her ashes will be placed next to Dick in the Woodland Cemetery in Van Wert, Ohio. The family requests that in lieu of flowers, donations be made to The Gemma Geisman Funds at the Osteogenesis Imperfecta Foundation, 804 W Diamond Ave Suite 210. Gaithersburg MD 20878 or online at [www.oif.org](http://www.oif.org)