



# Irene Frances Srubas

MAY 12, 1933 - SEP 9, 2025



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## Irene Frances Srubas

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**W**ho among you has a picture of their pregnant mother doing a handstand on the sandy beaches of Lake Michigan? We do.

And, while we may be without photographic evidence, we've seen Irene Frances Srubas do one-handed handstands, back flips off diving boards, and a variety of other gymnastic stunts. She could juggle while balancing a rake or broom on her chin.

Irene died Tuesday, Sept. 9, at age 92 at the Elijah House in Oshkosh.

So, she was an acrobat? A gymnast? She was a lot of things: wife, mother of seven children, friend, gardener, athlete, artist. She taught phy-ed at St. Patrick Parish grade school in Menasha and helped teach English to Southeast Asian immigrants at Fox Valley Technical College. She was the family's reigning chess champion. Fiercely competitive always. When she and our father played golf, she was unbeatable.

When she joined a bowling league, she carried a 212 average. And she regularly beat all the women and many of the men on the local tennis scene. She loved, loved, loved tennis, a sport she played until age 75, when a new medication she was on started making her too dizzy to remain the killer competitor she needed to be. She had no interest in just batting the ball around recreationally, so she gave it up completely, but with profound regret for most of her remaining years.

Another skill she was proud of into old age – mostly because it made her children jealous: she could whistle loud enough to hail a cab without use of fingers. It's how she used to call us kids in for supper; it could be heard throughout the neighborhood.

More than anything, she'll be remembered for her humor. She was often a wit but always a clown, and even in her final years, with her memory failing, she left a trail of nursing home employees



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giggling and loving her for her silliness.

Born Irene Kowalewski on May 12, 1933, she was one of three children. Mistreated and then abandoned by an alcoholic father, raised in extreme poverty by a chronically ill mother, Irene had a childhood that seems straight out of “Angela’s Ashes.” She and her two younger brothers were in and out of institutional care in southside Chicago, and she often found herself the primary caregiver for herself, her brothers, and their mother.

But with her early years teetering constantly between childhood and adulthood, she took the plunge into fulltime adulthood on May 21, 1949, when she embarked upon what would become a 54-year marriage to Stephen Srubas. Together they took care of his aged, widowed immigrant mother for those first few years as they embarked on building a family of their own, which grew to seven children – five of whom were born by the time she was 21.

They started in Chicago and ended up in Menasha.

Irene was already entering middle age when she achieved a couple of the measures of success more typically earned in one’s teen years: She got her general equivalency diploma and a driver’s license. Those were also the years she took up the hobby of raising canaries and began working outside the home, teaching phy-ed, later working in an electronics assembly line, and, later still, helping English Language Learners at the Appleton technical college.

After Steve’s death in 2003, Irene maintained an active social life, a formidable serve, and a wicked backhand for a good many years. She also maintained a ferocious zest for life for her remaining two decades until the nadir of her memory loss.

Irene is survived by two sons, two daughters, seven grandchildren, and five great-grandchildren. All of them are grateful for the care given her in her declining years, particularly by Preceptor Home Health and Hospice.

Celebration of life services for Irene will be a private family event as per her preference.



## **Memories only last if you share them**

Join us in honoring Irene by contributing to a collection of shared memories.



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