

# Children's Ministry Pioneer Winnie Marie Rorheim Dies at Age 97

Winnie Marie Rorheim, the wife and partner in children's ministry of Awana Co-Founder Art Rorheim, died on Dec. 21, 2015 at 2 a.m. in Rockford, Illinois. She was 97.

Winnie served alongside her husband as he pioneered the children's mid-week program Awana, which today is a global ministry that reaches approximately 2.9 million children and youth in 100-plus countries with the message of Christ.

"We knew God called us to this ministry together," Art Rorheim said. "I could never have done anything without her. Whatever she was asked to do, she did with excellence and a humble spirit. And she did a wonderful job of nurturing our children and running our home."

The daughter of Carl and Kate Hofmann, Winnie was born on March 8, 1918 in Chicago. Her parents divorced when she was a child, and she had to care for her two younger sisters while her mother worked long hours to support the family.

In the midst of this difficult childhood, Winnie attended a youth club meeting at the Chicago Gospel Tabernacle in 1932, and her life forever changed. The first night she visited, she trusted Jesus Christ as her Savior.

She later became a leader in the girls' clubs at another Chicago church, the North Side Gospel Center, and there met Art, her future husband. They married in 1939.

In the early years of their marriage, Art Rorheim had a lucrative job in a machine shop. Then in 1943, he went into ministry fulltime as youth director at the North Side Gospel

Center, where he ran a club that became the precursor of Awana. Although the club grew, the family's income plummeted from \$150 to \$40 a week.

"I took care of the money," Winnie said. "One day I told Art, 'We aren't going to make it.'"

The Rorheims converted part of their home into apartments to pay the bills, so God provided – a recurring theme throughout their ministry. In 1950, Art Rorheim and Lance Latham founded the Awana Youth Association as a national organization to aid churches in beginning their own clubs.

"I knew God had called Art to have a part in beginning Awana," Winnie said. "As his wife, I, too, wanted to share God's calling."

Over the years, she quietly served behind the scenes as an Awana volunteer and employee. She made neckerchiefs for children's uniforms, helped run a program for wives of leaders at Camp Awana, and directed food preparation for promotional banquets.

Like her husband, she had no special preparation for a life in ministry. "Just get out there and do things for God," she would advise. "He will use you. He always provides what you need."

Winnie came to work at the Awana home office in 1962 and served in a variety of capacities for nearly 40 years, including a long stint in the payroll department.

"Winnie not only enabled Art to serve as he did, but also made an eternal impact through her own ministry," Awana President/CEO Jack Eggar said. "No individual is more responsible for the success of Awana than Art Rorheim, and much of that is due to Winnie's support."

She is survived by her husband, Art, two adult children, four

granddaughters, 10 great-grandchildren and two great-great grandchildren.

A memorial service will be held at North Love Baptist Church, 5301 East Riverside Boulevard, Rockford, Illinois, on Saturday, Jan. 2, 2016. Visitation will be from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m., and the service will be held from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

In lieu of flowers, memorial gifts may be donated to the Awana Winnie Rorheim Memorial Fund at .