



Mary Nell Hearn Kerr

June 22, 1943 - July 20, 2017

Mary Nell Hearn Kerr was born June 22, 1943 in Talladega, AL to William Clifford and Eva Nell Seay Hearn. She spent her early years in Brundidge, later living in Talladega and her parents' farm in Clay County, attending Central School and Talladega High School (1961). She was active in Double 9 Club and Marching Band. She graduated from Auburn in three years, and in 1964 began teaching in Talladega City.

In 1966, she moved to Vilseck, Germany to teach US soldiers' children. She traveled through Europe and the Middle East. She returned to teach in Talladega, and began a Masters in Early Childhood Education, commuting to Auburn with her mother.

In 1968 she taught at Fort Benning, GA and met Major James Thomas Kerr, Jr. In 1969, before he left for SE Asia, they were engaged. He returned in May, and they married in June 1970 at First Baptist Church, Talladega. While he was deployed, she taught for her mother, principal of Salter School.

They made their home in Tuscaloosa, where she continued teaching. Daughter Mary Frances was born in 1971. They moved to Birmingham, and then Marietta, GA. Mary Nell's lifelong friend, Helen Hines, introduced them to Marietta and First Presbyterian Church, which became their church home.

In 1974 Brendan James was born. Jim transitioned to Civil Service and the Army Reserve. William James was born in 1977. Mary Nell was active in the church as a Sunday School and VBS teacher, President of Women of the Church, a member of the Nominating Committee, and a deacon. She volunteered as a puppeteer/docent for the Cobb County Youth Museum and Meals on Wheels.

In 1980, she was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis (RA). Despite its cruelty, she never allowed it to affect her embrace of life, and interest in and care for others. In 1983, she resumed teaching at Teasley Elementary, where both sons were her students.

She was the center of her children's lives, and remained extremely close to her parents. Her children graduated from Wheeler High School. Her love of learning inspired them to pursue graduate education. In 1990, Jim deployed for the first Gulf War. In 1993, she went to Duke Hospital for her RA. The next year, she medically retired. Nevertheless, Mary Nell and Jim spent the next 15 years caring for her parents and an aunt in Alabama.

In 2003, she was delighted by the arrival of their first grandchild. She chose the name Yaya as it captured the loving, vibrant, independent spirit she nurtured her entire life -- a philosophy she passed on to her family. The joy of relationships with her children and grandchildren, sharing the farm, friends, family, genealogy and culture were central to her.

Her advanced RA and newly-diagnosed metastatic cancer claimed her prematurely on July 20, 2017. The last week of her life she was surrounded by her children and grandchildren. She is dearly missed.

She is survived by her husband, three children and their spouses, seven grandchildren: Eva and Addison in Colorado; Riley, Finn and Darby in Virginia; Blake and Ellis in Atlanta; and a brother, cousins, nieces & nephews -- many were like siblings or children to her.

In lieu of flowers, donations to MUST Ministries or the Arthritis Foundation would be gratefully received.

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