



Mrs. Barbara Cassat Keleher

August 12, 1918 - January 13, 2012

BARBARA CASSAT KELEHER died Friday, January 13, 2012 after a short illness. She was born Barbara Nell Cassat in Tsinan, China, on August 12, 1918, to Presbyterian missionary parents, Paul Clifford and Rowena Wilson Cassat, and she spent the first five years of her life in China.

Barbara graduated from high school in Poughkeepsie, New York, where her father was the comptroller for Vassar College. She attended Agnes Scott College and transferred to the University of Iowa where she was the first female cheerleader for the Hawkeyes and a member of Alpha Chi Omega sorority. After earning her B.S. Degree in Nursing in 1940, she continued to work at the University of Iowa Hospitals as an obstetrical nurse, and there she met Michael Francis Keleher, M.D. They were married on May 17, 1941.

From 1942 to 1945, while her husband served as a Navy surgeon assigned to the 4th Marine Battalion in the Pacific Theater of WWII, Barbara lived in Springfield, Ohio, with their first daughter. She worked as a nurse and dietitian in daycare centers for the war effort factory workers. In 1945 the family returned to Iowa City where her husband resumed his surgical residency, and they welcomed three more daughters.

In the summer of 1949, the young family moved to Asheville, North

Carolina, where Dr. Keleher set up his surgical practice, and by the midnineteen-fifties another daughter and son were born. They lived in the same north Asheville house for more than fifty years, although it was rebuilt in 1958 after a New Year's Day fire destroyed it. During the past eleven years, Barbara made her home at Deerfield Episcopal Retirement Community in south Asheville.

Barbara's life was always one of quiet service to her family, her community and her church. For sixty years, she was an active member of the First Presbyterian Church, where she was ordained an Elder in 1978. While living at Deerfield, she enjoyed a close relationship with the members of the St. Giles community.

As a devoted mother of six children and advocate of public education, Barbara served as PTA President of almost every school they attended. During 1966-67, the Keleher family hosted Brinda Chinnappa, an AFS exchange student from India. Both families exchanged visits throughout the years and remain in close contact to this day.

Barbara's contributions to the arts community of Asheville are well known. She was a strong supporter of the Asheville Art Museum in its infancy as it moved from Charlotte Street to Pearson Drive to the Civic Center lower level. Barbara served on the Museum's board on and off from 1972 through 1995, and as chair, she worked tirelessly toward the permanent location of today's Art Museum on Pack Square.

Barbara and Mike spent many years getting to know emerging artists and their work and developed an eclectic collection of regional crafts, particularly Studio Glass. Many of these works help define glass in Western North Carolina. The collection was recently donated to the Asheville Art

Museum, and will be included in the upcoming Fire on the Mountain, a celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Studio Glass Movement and the glass artists of Western North Carolina.

As the first woman elected to the Asheville City Council (1969), Barbara Keleher helped usher in a spirit of bipartisanship culminating in Asheville's being selected an All-American City in 1970. She believed that "nothing is insolvable if people work together." Perhaps that was why she was asked to serve on so many boards: Office of Economic Opportunity, Civic Center Commission, Asheville-Buncombe Charter Commission, American Red Cross, Buncombe County Medical Auxiliary, and Southern Highland Craft Guild's Advisory Council on which she served from the mid-80s until 1991.

In 1974, Barbara was appointed to the Board of the 1st Union National Bank and served for twelve years. From 1980-86, she served on the Kate B. Reynolds Health Care Trust in Winston Salem. In 1981 she was the Chair of the Admissions Committee of the United Way in Asheville. She also served many years on the Library Board of Warren Wilson College.

Barbara and Mike loved to travel and study, and in the course of four decades visited numerous countries on five continents. For several months in 1984, they worked as relief medical personnel in a remote mission hospital in Zaire.

For recreation, Barbara enjoyed playing bridge, sharing her love of reading with her AAUW book group, and in her younger days, playing tennis. However, for true relaxation, the Carolina beaches always held a special place in Barbara's heart. The Pawleys Island summer vacations when the children were young eventually transitioned into the Oak Island "Cousins Beach" annual reunions, and because of them, the next generation bonded

as a close-knit group.

Barbara's steadfast spirit of service continued after moving with Mike to Deerfield Retirement Community in early 2000. She was elected to the first Deerfield Resident Council, and five years later was selected to be President of the Council. She served the community at a time that major strategic decisions were being made about the future growth of the community. Barbara had a way of making everyone feel special, and this contributed to a strong, cohesive and vibrant residential community.

The Keleher family is grateful for their parents' foresight in choosing Deerfield for their final years, and to the entire Deerfield staff who worked to make those years meaningful. Particular gratitude goes to all of the members of the Health Care team.

In 2001, Barbara was preceded in death by her beloved husband of sixty years, Michael F. Keleher, M.D. Her parents, infant sister, Jean Cassat, and her brother, David Cassat, also preceded her in death.

Barbara is survived by her six children: Susan Evans and husband Neal of Asheville; Megan Hack and husband Ti of Gordonsville, VA; Kate Murphy and husband Shawn of Seattle, WA; Jamie Walter and husband Skip of Bainbridge Island, WA; Kim Scroggs and husband Andy of Merritt Island, FL; Mike Keleher and wife Jennifer of the Newfound Community of Leicester; and AFS daughter, Brinda Chinnappa Somaya and husband Anand of Mumbai, India. Barbara also is survived by her sister, Anne Nash and husband Pete of Punta Gorda, FL.

Barbara has twelve grandchildren: Rachel Evans Burgett (John), Abraham Evans (Cameron), Lydia Evans Sfeir (Matt), Alex Hack (Alexandra), Wilson Hack, Tyler Murphy, Elizabeth Walter Shelly (David), Maggie Walter

Anthony (Brian), John Walter, Drew Scroggs (Carine), Michael Scroggs (fiancée Chelsea) and Michael Francis Keleher. She delighted in her ten great-grandchildren, and her many cousins, nieces, nephews and dear friends.

Memorial contributions may be made to the Keleher Endowment Fund of the Community Foundation of WNC (P.O. Box 1888, Asheville, NC 28802) or to the Deerfield Residency Fund (1617 Hendersonville Road, Asheville, NC 28803).

The family will receive friends from 2:00 - 4:00 PM on Tuesday, January 17 in the Blue Ridge Room at Deerfield.

A Memorial Service will be held at 2:00 PM on Wednesday, January 18 at St. Giles Chapel on the Deerfield Retirement Campus. Private burial services will be held at Lewis Memorial Park.

Previous Events

Visitation

JAN 17. 2:00 PM - 4:00 PM (ET)

Blue Ridge Room at Deerfield Episcopal Retirement Community
1617 Hendersonville Road
Asheville, NC 28803

Service

JAN 18. 2:00 PM (ET)

St. Giles Chapel of Deerfield Episcopal Retirement Community
1617 Hendersonville Road
Asheville, NC 28803
<http://www.deerfieldwnc.org/st-giles-chapel>

Tribute Wall



“ *Mrs. Barbara Cassat Keleher*

October 07, 2023 at 11:15 AM



“ *Susan,
I was so sorry to hear of the loss of your mother. I will cherish the stories you shared of her adventures while we worked together. May those memories comfort you and your family in the years to come. My prayers are with your family.
My deepest sympathy - Tracy Boyer*

Tracy Boyer - February 01, 2012 at 08:58 AM



“ *Susan, your mother lived a very fulfilling life! You have my deepest sympathy and are in my thoughts and prayers.*

Mary Ruth Garren - January 28, 2012 at 01:50 PM



“ *susan. my deepest condolences....you are a wonderful refection of your mother
again.....i am so sorry*

roy a. stewart classmate of susan - January 26, 2012 at 09:42 PM



“ *Our condolences to the family. We have fond memories of Barbara from tje ealy days of Tanglewood.
Hazel and John Robinson*

John and Hazel Robinson - January 19, 2012 at 03:41 PM

SB

“ Dear Susan & Neal,
Through my many conversations with you, Susan, it was evident that your mother lived an active and fulfilling life. After reading her obituary, I am further impressed by her life of service and dedication to the community. She should be an inspiration to us all! My thoughts are with you and your family during this difficult time.
Sara Biga

Sara Biga - January 18, 2012 at 09:41 AM

FM

“ I met and so fondly remember Barbara as the super volunteer for the nonprofit organizations in which we came into contact. I also knew her through her daughter Susan and husband Neal Evans. She was a beautiful and kind person and so loved. She will be missed by so many. Our sympathy to the family.

Fern and Russel McCrimmon

Fern McCrimmon - January 17, 2012 at 06:52 PM

SM

“ The Maitlands will so miss your mom. She was a precious neighbor at Deerfield. Mom and Dad loved having her so close. I loved seeing your mom when she would visit. She was a lovely lady and very special. We were so hopeful the last time we saw her that she would recover and be able to go back to her apartment. We have enjoyed meeting all the grown Keleher children over the years at Deerfield. God bless your mom and your family. Susie Maitland

Susie Maitland - January 17, 2012 at 04:14 PM

DD

“*Jamie - what a wonderful person your mom was. She never failed to greet me whenever we ran into each other at unexpected places and was always so gracious and kind. I remember so fondly the period when you were an intern at the NCDC, the good talks while driving to and from work. My love and sympathy to both you and Skip as well as to the rest of the family.*

Dick Davis

Dick Davis - January 17, 2012 at 03:25 PM

JC

“*I appreciate so much all the support, caring and love Barbara gave to artists and Art. She was a great patron and a very lovely lady.*
Judith Cheney

Judith Cheney - January 17, 2012 at 12:31 PM

RP

“*I only met Barbara twice-- I knew her because she was a dear friend of my mother, Merna Foss Pelczar. They were nurses together in Iowa, and remained friends for life--Barbara's vitality, kindness, and love of her family were remarkable. Her visit to my mother in Maryland, about six years ago, meant so much to my mom.*
Condolences to her family from ours. Rita Pelczar

Rita Pelczar - January 17, 2012 at 07:44 AM

LP

“ Dear Mike, Jennifer, Michael, and your entire family,
We are deeply saddened for you all, as you are grieving the loss of
such an incredible mother and woman. Her spirit and love will live
on in you all, and hope that her memory will be eternal in your
hearts and all that knew her.
Love always, Arthur, Laurie, Evan and Sara

Laurie Pappas - January 16, 2012 at 03:57 PM

LB

“ Dear Susan, Megan, Kate, Jamie, Kim and Mike,

What a beautiful obituary you wrote to honor your incredible mother! There is not enough space here to recount all the special memories I have of her while we were growing up...my very first sleep-over was on your sleeping porch in bunk beds with Jamie and your mother tucked me just like a real Keleher ; standing beside her in the Parr's kitchen with Mike in her arms while we watched the house burning on New Years' Day and seeing her strength in the middle of this unthinkable tragedy; giving us all our first polio vaccinations at Grace School; "cooks night off every Sunday night with cinnamon toast and cereal; watching the Beatles in your family room as you had the only color TV on the block; driving us to David Millard and Lee Edwards in the mornings and getting us off on the right foot with her good natured encouragement and patience; watching her play great tennis at the old ACC; learning to enjoy nature at its best with her at Pawley's Island Swinney Cottages and at the farm in the mountains; learning to sew on the dining room table; reveling in her utter joy and surprise at receiving a mink coat from your father one Christmas; seeing how well she organized large dinners every night, managed mounds of laundry and got everybody to activities without missing a beat: all this without cell phones or blackberries! She was constantly growing intellectually and was a major role model in my life. It did not surprise me at all that she was voted to be the head of the Resident's Council at Deerfield after only being there for a few years. That's the kind of leadership she gave to everyone and people recognized her gift for this immediately. She will never be forgotten and she will always be revered in my heart and memory. We are blessed to have been in her life!

*All my love and big warm hugs to each of you precious Kelehers,
Lynne Duckworth Breed*



Lynne Duckworth Breed - January 16, 2012 at 12:36 PM

JA

“ Dear Susan, Megan, Kate, Jamie, Kim, and Mike: we mourn the loss of such an uncommonly gifted and good-hearted woman. Knowing her was one of the blessings of our lives. Please accept our prayers and condolences.

Semper Fidelis and love, Joe and Gale Alexander

Joe and Gale Alexander - January 16, 2012 at 11:34 AM

PA

“ Aunt Barbara was a wonderful, compassionate, gentle, lovely lady. May we find peace in her memories and comfort in the love of our friends and family.

With all our love, Pris and Paul Adler

Priscilla Nash Adler - January 16, 2012 at 10:24 AM

JC

“ Heartfelt sympathy for the family. Praying for comfort for all during this time. Anything I can do is just a phone call away.

Jan Curtis

Jan Curtis - January 15, 2012 at 09:59 PM

JB

“ Kate, I'm so sorry to hear of your mother's passing. My thoughts and prayers are with you all.

Joanna Beck

Joanna Beck - January 15, 2012 at 09:53 PM

NR

“ Our deepest sympathy and prayers to the Keleher family. Mrs. Keleher served our community in so many ways and she leaves a lasting legacy for us all. She lived a great life of lasting impact. Please let us know what we can do for you, never hesitate to give us a call. Our love to all the family at this difficult time!

Nathan Ramsey - January 15, 2012 at 09:06 PM

CB

“ Mrs. Kelleher was magnificent, kind and giving woman. My condolences and love to the Keleher family.

Chris Burnette - January 15, 2012 at 12:51 PM

BH

“ Susan, I am sorry to hear about your mother and remember meeting her at Richmond Hill. My thoughts are with you today.
Bland

Bland Holland - January 15, 2012 at 07:00 AM

JF

Mike, Jennifer, Michael....and all the family...

We are so sorry for the loss of this amazing woman! She was an inspiration to so many women who were able to succeed because of the trail she blazed for us! She never stopped giving or contributing to her family, her faith, and her community. What a role model for all of us! And what a great smile.....I may not be able to make the services but please know that you are in our thoughts and prayers. Clint sends his sympathies to Michael. Please keep us posted on his great accomplishments for our country. We are thinking of you during this difficult time but please know that it was a life so incredibly well lived!!!

Julie (Cogburn) Fields, Clint Cogburn.....and all our Family

Julie (Cogburn) Fields - January 15, 2012 at 05:13 PM