



Gwenda Ewell LedBetter

February 1, 1930 - July 24, 2025

Gwenda Ewell LedBetter, 95, of Asheville, departed this world for the next on Thursday, July 24, 2025 while being cared for at Brooks-Howell Home.

Born in 1930, in Cape Charles, Virginia, a short walk from the Chesapeake Bay, she was the only child of George and Marie Ewell. George was a truck driver for the Standard Oil company and Marie created and taught at Wee Wisdom Kindergarten.

Gwenda's lifelong love for reading and story was inspired by her first grade teacher. The family moved to Onancock, Virginia where she graduated from high school. Gwenda's singing and performing career, which had been influenced by Shirley Temple, began to take shape resulting in invitations to perform with U.S. Navy jazz bands.

She then went on to attend Queens College in Charlotte, NC, studying music and majoring in Elementary Education. After graduating, she began teaching elementary school in Winston-Salem, NC, while also performing in summer stock theater. This is where she met her future husband, John W. LedBetter who was attending Bowman-Gray Medical School. Gwenda and John were married in 1953 and embarked on the early years of marriage including moves to Michigan, Texas and back to Michigan. Gwenda continued to sing and perform on occasions in the different communities in which they lived.

Daughter Becky was born in Texas and son Bob in Michigan. The family moved to Asheville in 1959 where daughter Carol was born.

During the mid-sixties, Gwenda became involved in Asheville Community Theater. She held the leading role in several musical productions such as *The King and I*, *South Pacific* and the dramatic role in *The Last of Mrs. Lincoln*. She also served as musical director for several Tanglewood Children's Theater productions, as well as directing youth choirs at First Presbyterian Church.

In addition to raising her family and pursuing her love of the performing arts, Gwenda contributed to the community as a volunteer with Meals on Wheels, the Civic Arts Council for Urban Redevelopment and church ministry. Her civic volunteering eventually led her to telling stories to children at Pack Memorial Library which became the catalyst for her career as a Professional Storyteller. She was soon invited to share stories on WLOS-TV in a Saturday morning segment titled *Tales From the Red Rocker*. Early associations with Richard Chase of *The Grandfather Tales* and Appalachian teller Ray Hicks, along with her fascination with folk music and arts, helped to propel Gwenda on this new career path. You might hear her reciting "Gallymanders! Gallymanders! All my gold and silver is gone!" (from *Grandfather Tales*)

Gwenda then began to travel around the country as she was hired by schools, churches and other organizations to share her storytelling talent. She was invited to tell several times at the International Storytelling Festival in Jonesborough, Tennessee.

Gwenda's repertoire grew as she incorporated her curious nature to learn and share stories from other cultures along with her own original stories and poetry. These original stories reveal her maturity as a writer, ultimately resulting in the production of two "one-woman" plays. Her contributions to the

art of storytelling were acknowledged in the honor of receiving The Oracle and Lifetime Achievement Awards.

Gwenda is survived by her daughter, Rebecca LedBetter of Mills River, NC; son, Robert LedBetter (Celia Caldwell), of Missoula, Montana; and daughter, Carol Holder (James), of Spartanburg, SC. Gwenda is also survived by her five grandchildren: Kimberly Patterson of Augusta, GA, Katherine Rise(Cole) of Daniel Island, SC, Kendra Caldwell (Jamie Soderling) of Missoula, Montana, Daniel Holder of Spartanburg, SC, Molly Hall (Tyler) of Charleston, SC, as well as two great grandchildren, Jackson May and Navy Rise.

Gwenda is preceded in death by her husband, Dr. John W. LedBetter.

The family would like to express heartfelt thanks to the staff of Arbor Terrace and Brooks-Howell as well as the many, many friends who offered loving support for Gwenda over the years.

Gwenda had a passionate curiosity and love for the world we live in— family, friends, music, art, poetry, reading, stories, hiking, trees, birds, wildflowers, dragonflies, the ocean, and good food! She never met a stranger and made a point of asking their names and life stories!

The world is a much better place because Gwenda was here. She will be greatly missed.

A Celebration of Life Service will be held at 11:00 am on Saturday, September 13, at First Presbyterian Church in Asheville, NC with a reception following. The service will be streamed on-line with a link that can be found on the church website: fpcasheville.org

In lieu of flowers, please consider making a donation to one of the following:

The International Storytelling Center

100 Main Street

Jonesborough, TN 37659

www.storytellingcenter.net

Blue Ridge Audubon Society

P O Box 18711

Asheville, NC 28814

Asheville Greenworks

2 Sulphur Springs Road

Asheville, NC 28806

ashevillegreenworks.org

BeLoved Asheville

32 Old Charlotte Hwy

Asheville, NC 28803

www.belovedasheville.com

Previous Events

Celebration of Life Service

SEP **13**. 11:00 AM (ET)

First Presbyterian Church Asheville
40 Church Street
Asheville, NC 28801

Tribute Wall



“ *Morris Funeral & Cremation Care created a Tribute Video in memory of Gwenda Ewell LedBetter*



Morris Funeral Home - August 03, 2025 at 11:13 AM

ES

“ *Ed Stivender and the Courthouse Steppers purchased the Florist Choice Bouquet for the family of Gwenda Ewell LedBetter.*



Ed Stivender and the Courthouse Steppers - September 10, 2025 at 12:01 PM

RH

“ *Remembering Gwen from Asheville Community Theatre days and from her storytelling talents. She was a gifted performer and a true lady whom I shared the ACT stage with when she played the starring role in The Last of Mrs. Lincoln. I played the role of her son and I was always in awe of her theatrical skills and talents. My condolences to her family and friends during this difficult time. The region has lost a true legend!*

Richard Hurley - August 26, 2025 at 09:37 PM

CH

Thank you Richard! I remember that play so well!

Carol Holder - September 20, 2025 at 08:56 PM

NA

I stumbled across this while searching for her recording of Molly Whoppie for my grandson. My mother-in-law (Asheville) bought the basset for my kids back in the 80's and it was the favorite for many years!

nancy - February 07 at 08:14 PM

NA

Cassette

nancy - February 07 at 08:14 PM

DP

“ *Deborah P. planted a grove of 3 [Memorial Trees](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Gwenda Ewell LedBetter.*

Deborah P. - August 09, 2025 at 09:24 AM

BC

“ *Becky, Bob, Carol, and families: We have enjoyed this photo of Gwenda in dress rehearsals for The King and I for many years. She was talented, beautiful, generous, and kind. Wishing you all peace.*
-Becky Brasington Clark



Becky Brasington Clark - August 08, 2025 at 09:15 AM

CH

Thanks so much Becky!

Carol Holder - September 20, 2025 at 08:58 PM

NE

“ *Nicholas A Eskridge purchased the Arrive in Style for the family of Gwenda Ewell LedBetter.*



Nicholas A Eskridge - August 07, 2025 at 11:03 AM

SA

“ *Gwenda and I became friends, almost family, through a song shortly after her husband John succumbed to Alzheimer's or dementia.*

We corresponded and visited through out the rest of her life. We will miss the sparkle in her eyes and her good company 👍.

Scott S Ainslie - August 03, 2025 at 12:58 AM

CH

Thanks so much Scott! You were a dear friend to her!

Carol Holder - September 20, 2025 at 08:58 PM

ML

“ *I used to love her Rum cakes she used to make for Christmas. I loved her kindness and patience. Very strong woman. I'm going to miss her, as well as her Rum cakes. I hope she rest in peace... 🙏*

Marlen Ledbetter - August 02, 2025 at 01:53 PM

NE

“ Remember the times when we were in “the King and I “ at ACT theatre in Asheville.
What would ACT have been without your mom.
Hope to see you soon.
Nicholas

Nicholas A Eskridge - August 02, 2025 at 12:50 PM

AB

“ Becky, your mom was a delightful lady and I remember many fun times at your house as we were growing up together! I know you will all miss her greatly! She was so active and had so many varied interests!! Sending love to you and your family

Ann Bolinger - August 02, 2025 at 09:24 AM

KR

“ I did not know Ms. LedBetter personally, but I became very fond of her through the stories her daughter, Carol, shared with me over the past several years. I think of her as an amazing storyteller with an inspiring spirit full of love, kindness, creativity, and curiosity; all of the traits I see she has passed on to my special friend. Even though I never met Ms. LedBetter, she always brought joy to my heart hearing Carol talk about her mother. May she rest in peace and her lovely spirit always be felt. Sending love to Carol and all who hold a special place in their hearts for Ms. LedBetter.

Kristen - July 31, 2025 at 07:58 PM

KE

I have fond memories of Gwen from my childhood. My parents, Ed and Ruth Easter, were dear friends of hers. My dad often directed or collaborated with her on ACT and Tanglewood plays, and my mom actually created Tales From the Red Rocker when mom was the head of the Children's Library and recruited Gwen to be the storyteller. They were all close friends for many years. Gwenda's singing, acting and storytelling talents blessed many people in Asheville, including me.
Rev. Karen Easter-Bayne

Karen Easter-Bayne - August 01, 2025 at 02:32 PM

LB

Becky your parents were absolutely amazing people. I remember your Mom coming to Clear Creek and doing some of her storytelling! She was such a pleasure to talk to and absolutely loved what she did. I had the pleasure of working with your father when I worked in Asheville for the Muscular Dystrophy Association and he volunteered his wealth of knowledge for our patients with muscular dystrophy in the 80's. They both have left such great legacies and will truly be missed. Praying for your precious family.
Lynn Brooks

Lynn Brooks - August 04, 2025 at 03:58 PM