



Ellen Van Valkenburgh

OCT 8, 1934 - OCT 16, 2024



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Ellen van Valkenburgh, known for her devotion to her family and friends and her commitment to others, passed away peacefully on October 16, 2024 at her home in Frederick, Maryland. Just prior to her death, she celebrated her 90th birthday surrounded by family and friends.

Ellen was born in Farmville, Virginia in 1934, the daughter of Erman Ellis Thomas and Evelyn Carter Smith Thomas. Ellen graduated from Suffolk High School in Suffolk, Virginia, where she met her future husband, Wood van Valkenburgh. After graduating from Longwood College, Ellen and Wood married and moved to Maryland, where Wood began his career as a Navy physician at Bethesda Naval Hospital. Ellen worked as a Medical Technologist before starting her family. She and Wood would move several more times before returning with their two children to Maryland permanently in 1972, where Ellen worked as a realtor for the AC Houghton company. She was tragically widowed at the age of 44 and despite the challenges she faced, thrived. She returned to school at Montgomery College for computer studies and worked for several DC area companies before starting her own successful business as a Manufacturer's Representative.

Ellen was a classical music aficionado and dedicated choral singer. She sang with many Washington area choral groups over the years including the choir at Christ Episcopal Church in Rockville, the Cathedral Choral Society, Masterworks chorus, the University of Maryland Chorus and the National Philharmonic Chorale. Ellen and Wood raised their children in a musical household, and one of Ellen's greatest joys was listening to her children and grandchildren perform.

Ellen's commitment to her community was wide-ranging. She helped others throughout her adult life, starting with Navy Relief as a young officer's wife. She was an active volunteer through her parish of Christ Episcopal Church, Rockville, and assisted local organizations by supporting everything from homeless shelters to food banks. She loved languages and mentored ESL students through the county library system. Ellen was a longtime volunteer at the Strathmore Music Center, where she led volunteer efforts for the National Philharmonic Chorale. Each



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December for many years, she arranged a holiday charity concert of the National Philharmonic Singers, held at Christ Church in Rockville, which raised many thousands of dollars for the non-profit Rockville Community Reach.

Ellen traveled widely throughout Europe with choral groups, with her friends and family, and to meetings of the International Ecumenical Conference. She was especially fond of visiting the UK and France. In 2019, Ellen and her two children, along with their spouses, took a month long trip through the National Parks of the West.

Nothing was more important to Ellen than her family. She traveled frequently to visit her grandchildren when they lived across the US and in Europe, and she loved to host family holiday gatherings in her beautiful Potomac home. Her loving devotion to her children and grandchildren defined her life. She was close to her two sisters and their husbands, as well as her husband's cousins and many nieces and nephews. Ellen had a talent for making friends wherever she went. She forged friendships all over the globe and she dearly treasured each of her friends.

Ellen is survived by her daughter, Elizabeth van Valkenburgh (John) Purcell, her son Paul van Valkenburgh (Sheri Khanna), two grandchildren, Robert Wood Griffith Purcell (Katie Guyot) and Ellen Carter Purcell (Ned Sieverts); two sisters, MaryJane Thomas (Mickey) Stokes of Powhatan, Virginia and Evelyn Thomas (John) Johnson of Charlotte, North Carolina, as well as many dear cousins, nieces, and nephews.

The community is invited to a memorial service followed by a reception to be held at Christ Episcopal Church, 109 S. Washington Street, Rockville, Maryland on Saturday, January 4th, 2025 at 11 a.m. A family graveside service will be held in Suffolk, Virginia at a later date. Memorial Donations may be made to Rockville Community Reach, 1010 Grandin Avenue, #A1, Rockville, MD 20851.



Tribute Wall

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Lisa Rom posted:

There are many different memories of my friend Ellen. And I will always hear her lilting southern voice welcoming me to chorus practices, her beautiful home and on the trips we shared both with the University of Maryland Chorus and the National Philharmonic Chorale. Ellen gifted her love of music to me, including learning and listening CDs--especially Bach, as I struggled with "too many notes". We loved sitting next to each other, sometimes reprimanded for engaging in non-musical conversations trying to catch up with family photos and friends. She was always helpful, concerned, and happy even when she was having difficulties with health and home. Our exchanges with baking--loving (and missing) her wonderful southern pull-apart rolls she gave to me, Greg and my mom during the holidays. She gladly gave herself to all of us. We celebrate this beautiful, gracious, grateful lady on January 4th. I will with all my heart. Lisa Romano

December 27 at 7:53 AM



S. Janet Miranda posted:

Miss your wonderful friendship, beautiful voice and kind heart dear Ellen. Janet

November 13 at 10:48 AM



Memories only last if you share them

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



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