



Mary Louise Williams

June 5, 1928 - December 21, 2021

Mary Louise Williams was born in Pasadena, California, on June 5, 1928, and passed away on December 21, 2021, at the age of 93. Mary Lou spent 43 years in Palos Verdes raising a family of children and animals, then she enjoyed the last 23 years of her life in Norco, California. Loving animals as much as she did, it was natural that she spent her last decades of life in a town with more horses than people.

Mary Lou was an animal lover, a wife, a mother, a grandmother, an aunt, a sister, and a friend. She was the daughter of Rufus Edward Stearns of Sandusky, Ohio, and Mary Virginia Gardner Stearns of Watsonville, California. She graduated from Chadwick boarding school in Palos Verdes in 1946 and went on to study Russian literature at Reed College, the alma mater of both her brother and her sister, in Portland, Oregon. While at Reed, she met and fell in love with her husband, Bill Williams, who was visiting from Colorado University in Boulder. In college, she loved skiing, square dancing, breaking the rules (a lifetime hobby), standing up for her ideals, and singing.

After college, Mary Lou lived in San Francisco for a bit until her mother lured her back to Pasadena with the promise of horses. Her suitor, Bill, had moved to Los Angeles to work as an engineer in the aerospace industry. Upon her move south, he capitalized on her proximity and began courting her in earnest

until they married in 1956. Together they spent 40 years in Palos Verdes, California, having the occasional martini or feud while raising four children.

Mary Lou did one hell of an ape imitation. She didn't suffer fools ("room temperature IQ" was a favorite). But her defining characteristic was her abiding love of animals. Her childhood was filled with them - a clowder of cats, Springer spaniels, a goose named Caesar Agoosetus, and a rotation of Arabian horses.

As a mother, she hosted a series of reptiles: two tortoises, a handful of skinks, tarantulas, king snakes, at least one scorpion, a baby rattlesnake named Cuddles, dozens of alligator lizards, a rosy boa and a six-foot-long Burmese python. She once brought home a pony, procured at an auction, in a VW bus. Her hobbies were dog grooming, whelping, stud service, competing in any and all dog and horse events, including shows, agility, carriage driving, Schutzhund, and rescuing. Hardly a day went by when she wasn't involved in saving some kind of animal or occasionally a house plant that someone put on the curb. Her empty nest solution in her 60's was, ironically, birds. One whole room of the house was occupied by finches. For the past 20 years, she's driven her mini horse in the Norco Parade.

She had other passions - she was a skilled pianist, guitar player, and strong soprano. She filled her home with classical music. She worked as a Thumb Taxi driver, chauffeuring the occasional naked stalker in the 70's, a newspaper delivery person, a dog groomer, and a medical transcriber. She also was an early adopter of breastfeeding, organic food delivery, and yoga. When her husband died in 1996, she moved to Norco and amassed a menagerie including dogs, cats, chickens, BLM burros, donkeys, horses,

geese, ducks, goats, llamas, and one steer.

Mary Lou refused to let age slow her down. When she was 70 and recently widowed, she gave herself the birthday present of doing something she'd always wanted to do. She hopped on a mule and rode it to the bottom of the Grand Canyon. When she was 88, she hopped on a plane and took her first trip to Europe to sing in Corona's Circle City Chorale's Eastern European performance tour, singing in Prague, Budapest, and Vienna. When she was 91, she was peering out at the hill behind her house at a giant rock in the distance painted like a Jack-o-Lantern, known as Pumpkin Rock. She wondered out loud, "I'd like to hike up there someday." And the next day, she did just that. This nonagenarian hiked 1.7 miles up a mountain, with grandchildren in tow carrying her chair for rests.

Mary Lou loved sitting on the front porch watching the world go by, critiquing horseback riders, describing cars, and waiting for the mail. Her most recent hobbies were correcting the behavior of her animals and looking for her purse.

Mary Lou was preceded in death by her rocket scientist husband, Billy Burgett Williams (1929-1996), her athletic sister, Charlotte Ann Stearns Whitehead (1923-2005), and her generous brother, John Rufus Stearns (1931-2010). Mary Lou leaves behind four children, Laurie (Chip) Smith, Sandra (Gary) Phanning, Russell (Robbin) Williams, Susie (Adam) Hoffman, three nieces, three nephews, seven grandchildren, two great grandchildren and Josie the dog.

Services will be held at noon on February 19th, 2022, at the American Legion in Norco.

In lieu of flowers, donations are gratefully accepted to organizations that Mary Lou supported: Planned Parenthood, the ACLU, or the Humane Society.

<https://wetransfer.com/downloads/512127c6703f8792386fec98f75aabec20220218221214/17a1f71b7e437d978d2e34e847f782ed20220218221253/717cb0>

Previous Events

Celebration of Life

FEB **19** (PT)

American Legion Post 328
3888 Old Hamner Road
Norco, CA 92860

Tribute Wall

“ *Eulogy for Mom, delivered 19 February, 2022 (PART 1 of 5)*

Hello, friends. Hello, family.

For those of you whom I haven't yet met, my name is Susie, Mary Lou's youngest daughter.

I want to thank you all very much for being here. I know that some traveled far and some rearranged plans, and I want you to know that it means very much to us that you have all made time to honor Mary Lou today. I am so grateful to you, her Norco community, for caring for her, each in your own way, to make these last two decades of her life adventurous and full of love.

I'm going to tell you a few stories that illustrate Mary Lou, some you may know, some may be new. And some are controversial, so hold onto your cowboy hats, folks!

Mary Lou's grandfather was a preacher. In the late 1800's there's an article in the Missouri newspaper with a story of him preaching in exchange for a barrel of whiskey. He came to California soon after to start churches. They didn't have a lot of money. His youngest daughter, my grandmother, grew up poor and made it her life's mission to marry rich and raise her kids with money (and without religion.) She was successful on both counts.

Mary Lou, my mom, was a devout atheist. The only religious words she ever uttered were to her animals when they were trying to get away with something, she'd say sternly, "GOD SEES YOU," and they would slink away. I know my siblings remember that line well. Despite my godless upbringing, in the past few years I've found great comfort and community in my church, so I would ask you to join me in a little prayer to ask that, wherever Mary Lou is right now, she hears our words and feels our love.

[PAUSE for silent reflection]

First off, I want to share that the dress I'm wearing was Mom's. I

saw her wearing it in a video of a large Christmas present unwrapping chaos at my grandmother's in 1962. She's in the background, dancing with her kids. It's a gorgeous moment, and I wanted to bring that young dancing mom into this space here today, hence the dress.

First, the basics: Mary Lou was a west coast gal, through and through. She was born in 1928 in Pasadena. She went to boarding school for high school at Chadwick in Palos Verdes, then she went on to study Russian literature for 4 years at Reed in Portland, where she met Bill Williams, my dad.

Now I could stand up here and regale you with stories of how tenacious, how intelligent, how curious my mom was.

But I have to come clean first.

For much of our 53 years together, I loved her to bits.

And I also came up short. I didn't really absorb how amazing she was.

I could tell you the words, I could describe her, I heard other people go on about her, but it didn't really penetrate my soul.

My sight was clouded by my expectations of what a mom 'should' be - clean, prompt, doting... cheerful.

She dabbled in these traits, she sometimes aspired to them, but they weren't really her bag. I'm pretty sure you guys know what I mean. The woman saved everything - she saw a use for all things... as kids we couldn't have friends over because there was nowhere to sit. I think it got worse when she had more kids, which, by the way, she earnestly tried to prevent, but the woman was fertile! 4 kids, 3 kinds of birth control failed her. No doubt she loved us all, but housecleaning with all those kids just wasn't in the cards for her. My focus on the 'lacks' like these prevented me from seeing how spectacular she was... until she died. Something magical happened as I went through all her old photos and notes and journal writing - I was downright dazzled by her.

I also was suddenly hit by how often she DID remember to pick me up at school for example. I was so busy tabulating the things she missed, that I couldn't see the avalanche of things she did, things

she was.

She was wry, witty, sardonic, irreverent, driven, and daring. And a little wicked. She lived life on her own terms.

TO BE CONTINUED...

susanjenniferwilliams - February 23, 2022 at 08:41 PM

“ Eulogy for Mom, delivered 19 February, 2022 (PART 2 of 5)

(cont.)

So my hope today is that we can all notice our expectations of our parents, our kids, our spouses, and perhaps let go a little... so we can see the abundance of gifts they already have, so we can see their true beauty.

Enough of my preaching (it's in my blood!) now to Mom...

I only knew her for 53 of her 93 years. She had a whole life before me that I'm just now uncovering, going through all her old letters and photos. When I had remarked to my dad about how amazing it was to be married to the same person for 40 years, he laughed and said, "She wasn't the same person for 40 years. Neither was I!" Like all of us, Mary Lou was human. She had scores of winning attributes... and just a few things that drove some of us nuts. But a few things were clear:

She LOVED rescuing things, be they plants or animals.

She was a horse enthusiast.

She was a rebel.

Then she was a rebel mom.

Then after those kids left the house, she went back to her first love and filled her yard with animals, moving here, of course, to Horsetown, USA.

But like I said, I only knew her for half her life and I only knew the sides she showed me.

One of my favorite things from my dad's funeral, 25 years ago, was hearing from his friends, hearing stories and sides of him that I never knew.

Today I'm looking forward to hearing from each of you, the Mary Lou you knew.

It is a gift.

But right now, here's what I can tell from my perspective.

She did one hell of an ape imitation, and she didn't suffer fools ("room temperature IQ" was a favorite) but her defining characteristic was her abiding love of animals. Her childhood was filled with them - cats, springer spaniels, a goose named Caesar Agoosetus, and Arabian horses.

When Mary Lou was a little girl of 11, her parents came up to San Francisco to attend the 1939 World's Fair on Treasure Island. Upon arrival at the fair, she silently peeled off from her family and went looking for the horses. En route, she was distracted by a wombat and followed it until she got lost. When I asked her, "Did you get in trouble?" She replied, "Oh, I was always in trouble because I just went off and did whatever I wanted." I'm sure many of you here know what I mean.

As a mother, she hosted a series of reptiles: 2 tortoises, a handful of skinks, tarantulas, king snakes, at least one scorpion, a baby rattlesnake named Cuddles, perhaps dozens of alligator lizards, a rosy boa and a burmese python. She once put a pony procured at an auction into a VW bus - more about this later, from Russell, who was actually there to witness (and ride) said pony.

Her hobbies were all animal-related – dog grooming, whelping, stud service, competing in any and all dog and horse events, including shows, agility, carriage driving, and Schutzhund. She loved to compete and, of course, she loved to win, especially with her American Kennel Club champion shih tzu, Sean Fun Gin Wei Sing.

Hardly a day went by when she wasn't involved in rescuing some kind of animal, and occasionally a house plant that someone put on the curb. Her empty nest solution in her 60's was, ironically, birds. One whole room of the house was occupied by finches.

And then, of course, when my dad died, she came to this animal paradise and filled her home and, now yard, with animals. After a

few years of topping out her animal collection, we, her kids, started refusing to enable her habit. However, my darling husband, one of her biggest fans, surprised her one birthday by giving her 5 carefully selected chicks are varying pedigrees.

[Sylvester the turkey & maggot story deleted] I'm actually going to skip this next story because you're eating. If you want to hear it, find me later. But it is truly disgusting.

susanjenniferwilliams - February 23, 2022 at 08:41 PM

“ Eulogy for Mom, delivered 19 February, 2022 (PART 3 of 5)

(cont.)

My mom was a passionate seeker and doer. In the late 50's and early 60's, she threw herself into parenting, taking classes and reading books and following her own intuition and wisdom, along with that of Dr. Spock and Adele Davis.

She was committed to raising human beings who were intelligent, sensitive, and healthy. She filled our upbringing with reading and music and she always fed us organic food. When she read that liver helped brain function, she would ceremoniously serve us liver on the morning we had big tests at school. And, this was before my time, my sisters can tell you about when she used to pop calf brains and fruit juice into the blender, then freeze that into popsicles. She was doing yoga in the 70's, biofeedback in the 80's, and meditation and Buddhism in the 90's. She was always taking classes and exploring ways to improve herself.

She had other passions - she was a skilled pianist, guitar player, and strong soprano, and she filled her home with classical music. She has worked as a Thumb Taxi driver (picking up streakers because you know, no pockets for your keys...), a newspaper delivery person, a dog groomer, and a medical transcriber.

She gave money to all kinds of organizations, but when she had to restrain herself, she said, "I'll just give money to Planned Parenthood, because population control can solve all the other problems of this world," giving women power over the size of their families and offering women other options that her ancestors, scores of whom had up to a dozen children and then died.

Her radical streak was inspired by her close friendship with Reed philosophy professor and Air Force veteran Stanley Moore, investigated by anti-communists during the McCarthy era.

She quietly and persistently stood up for her ideals, even in (or especially in) the face of opposition. She swam upstream on a variety of issues, from breastfeeding in the 60's (when doctors were advising formula) and organic food to population control - in people

and animals to education and politics. I once remember walking out of the grocery store with her, I was around 7, and we were stopped by a woman asking for signatures to support a ballot initiative. My mom didn't support it and declined to sign. As she walked away, the woman with the clipboard screeched, "There goes a Jane Fonda supporter!" I was ready to run from the yelling woman but I looked up and saw my mom pump her fist in the air, clutching my hand and walking with purpose to the car.

Ultimately, she taught us that the solution to a problem was never more hatred.

WORDS

Mary Lou was highly adept at crossword puzzles, obliterating them in pen throughout all 9 decades of her life. She loved languages. She majored in Russian in college for a spell, and her journals were peppered with French and Spanish phrases.

One afternoon in my 20's we were spending time together and I brought her this novel I'd been reading for my book club. On practically every page was a word I didn't know, not just didn't know, but never heard uttered, and couldn't figure out the meaning from the context or the root. I'd started making a list of them on a piece of paper that I slipped into the back of the book. I handed that list over to her to see if she knew any of them, and she just rattled off the definitions one by one as I just stared at her, dumbfounded. The woman was well-read.

Of course her favorite books were about animals, she read James Harriott's series (All Creatures Great and Small, etc) multiple times, and was a big fan of Dick Francis's horse books.

(to be continued...)

“ Eulogy for Mom, delivered 19 February, 2022 (PART 4 of 5)

(cont.)

By the time she was 82, everyone her age who was close to her was dead - her husband, her big sister and her little brother. But she kept plugging away.

When she was 85, she gave herself the birthday present of doing something she'd always wanted to do. She hopped on a mule and rode it to the bottom of the Grand Canyon.

When she was 88, she hopped on a plane and took her first trip to Europe to sing in Riverside's Circle City Chorale's eastern european performance tour, singing in Prague, Budapest, and Vienna.

When she was 91, she was peering out at the hill behind her house where sat a giant rock painted like a Jack-o-Lantern, known as Pumpkin Rock. She wondered out loud, "I'd like to hike up there someday." And the next day, we did just that. Hiked 1.7 miles, with grandchildren in tow carrying her chair for rests, with an elevation gain of 380 feet.

She lived on goats milk and Chipotle. And I mean that quite literally.

In 2012 when Mom was visiting San Francisco at age 83, she had a few too many salty-rimmed margaritas (probably just two - she was a lightweight) and had a heart attack. Completely unaware of what was happening (I thought she just had indigestion) I put her on a plane back home to Norco, where she promptly called the doctor and went straight from the airport to the emergency room. She had open heart surgery and was recovering in a rehab facility when her heart stopped. Despite DNR orders, the staff brought her back from death. When she described that experience, she said, "It felt like I had all these thick elastic straps on my body, holding me down, and then one by one, 'ping!' 'ping!' 'ping!' they began snapping off, and I felt so light. It was the most incredible feeling." And then they brought her back to life.

But what a beautiful description of death. I like to think that's what she felt the morning of December 21st, the winter solstice, when

she finally went home.

Many of you will likely know what I mean when I say Mary Lou was liberal with a scowl. Would we call it side-eye? It was designed to be subtle. She used it when you committed the sin of bad grammar. She used it when she thought you were being obtuse and not getting her what she clearly wanted but didn't ask for. She used it when you offered her cream in her coffee. She used it when you hadn't heard of the famous composer or writer or philosopher she referenced. She used when you even hinted at throwing away food (if there were ever leftovers, all of her friends have probably heard, "The chickens will love that!"). She used it when she wanted to do something other than what you were proposing. As I mentioned, she used it when you misused the English language, although it would then morph into a victorious glow as she corrected you.

(to be continued...)

susanjenniferwilliams - February 23, 2022 at 08:40 PM

“ Eulogy for Mom, delivered 19 February, 2022 (PART 5 of 5)

(cont.)

In closing, I want to reiterate that now I see how many times she REMEMBERED to pick me up from piano and gymnastics, and that she got me into piano and gymnastics in the first place. (Also, I now I DO THAT TOO! Just this week I forgot to take my kid to their orthodontist appointment! Now I get it, Mom.) I think we can all choose to focus on what we're not getting, or where others fall short, or where we ourselves fall short, it's human. But we can also choose to see all our blessings, in ourselves and those around us. Every day. Now mom's light shines through to me like never before.

I look at all these old pictures that I'd never seen until now, and I keep saying, "God, she was so pretty." and I look at all the strength she mustered to keep doing what she loved, singing, caring for animals, and I keep thinking, "God, she was determined!" I see it now.

Our human default is to notice all the faults. Of our parents. Our partners. Our kids. But we can also choose to notice the myriad things they're doing right. We can forgive them and ourselves for our shortcomings and notice all the stuff they're doing right. And my mom did A LOT right. Didn't she?

In her honor, I encourage everyone to go out there today and accept those unsavory bits in ourselves and our families and then turn our focus on all the good around you. Once you start looking, you'll see... there is so much!

Life is rich. My dad used to like to quote Zorba the Greek when talking about family, saying, "Wife, children, house--everything. The full catastrophe!" with a smile on his face.

As I said, Mary Lou herself was an atheist, worshiping only the 4-legged creatures she cared for, but her grandfather, as I mentioned, was a minister who came to California from Missouri in the 1890's.

In honor of him and his granddaughter, I want to end with a verse from John 1, after he talks about the light in all of us. "9 Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister[b] is still in the darkness.10 Anyone who loves their brother and sister[c] lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble."

So let's all leave this room living in the light.

Finally, I just want to thank you, Mom, for giving birth to me, for nursing me and changing my diapers, for singing to me so much, for so many hours spent reading to me, and for working so hard to give me freedom and independence to fly. Thank you for teaching me empathy and for showing by example how to go against the flow.

Thank you.

AT END OF SERVICE, SING:

*Lord make Me an instrument of Your peace
Where there is hatred let me sow love.
Where there is injury, pardon.
Where there is doubt, faith.
Where there is despair, hope.
Where there is darkness, light.
Where there is sadness, joy.
O Divine master grant that I may
Not so much seek to be consoled as to console
To be understood, as to understand.
To be loved. as to love
For it's in giving that we receive
And it's in pardoning that we are pardoned
And it's in dying that we are born
To eternal life.
Amen*

susanjenniferwilliams - February 23, 2022 at 08:39 PM

SU

“ *From friends, Christopher and Mary Louise Muller*

She was a dear person and we will miss her. When she used to come see us, she always had such interesting stories to tell and she was fun to be around. Her love for her animals was a sustaining factor in her life and she had an innate goodness that animals recognized. One time when she was here, the neighbor's dog came over and was immediately attracted to Mary Lou; she just stood there, leaning against her and looking up at her, knowing that this was a friend. Very sweet.

We were very touched that she passed in such an easy way with her dog by her side - what more could you ask for as a way to die? We have been very fortunate in having people like you and your mom in our lives, it has been a true blessing for us and being able to give service is quite pure grace.

susanjenniferwilliams - January 28, 2022 at 03:31 PM

SU

“ From Mark Williams, nephew:

I'm not sure of the year, but your mom had come over to ABQ for a visit by plane. She stayed for a couple days at Dad's and upon leaving he asked me to drive her to the airport. As I recall she traveled lite, and I thought that was cool for a woman, (since I could put everything I owned in the back of a 1966 Dodge pickup I got from an Air Force surplus sale \$400!).

She climbed into that space capsule and we spent about 20 minutes driving to Albuquerque International. She had a soothing voice and seemed very comfortable in that rattle trap. There was way too much to catch-up on so think we talked about the price of gasoline and how many pawn shops there were on the way.

We parked and I walked with her through the tunnel that went to her departure gate. About halfway through the tunnel, there was a glassed in display case with a bunch of Indian jewelry and dresses and drawings and crap I never noticed before. She stopped there and for the next 20 minutes examined everything in that case. I was starting to worry that this might cause her to miss the flight. She must have sensed my angst, put her arm through mine, like, just slow down Mark. I looked down for some reason with a sigh, and she had on riding boots that looked almost like mine! I tugged a bit and we broke contact with the Indians, made our way to the gate, She said thank you for coming with her to the airport, and she was off.

susanjenniferwilliams - January 28, 2022 at 03:31 PM