



Jean Elizabeth (Becker) Behrens

January 22, 1935 - July 2, 2020

Jean Elizabeth (Becker) Behrens was born in Albany, NY on January 22, 1935 to Albert and Martha (Plapp) Becker. She was younger sister and lifelong friend to the late Ruth Hood, sister-in-law to Kalmon Hood, and niece to the late Matilda “Tilly” Plapp. Jean was pre-deceased by six months by Alfred, her dear husband of nearly 63 years, and is survived by her sister-in-law and comrade in dry wit, mischief and understatement, Maryann (Doehrmann) Tetrick and by her brother-in-law’s wife Barbara (Piepho) Behrens. She leaves a son, Mark, and daughter-in-law, Marigene, of New York, a daughter, Gina, of the Charlotte area, and three generations of beloved nieces and nephews.

Jean is remembered in many ways. She loved simple things: Aunt Eileen’s sticky buns and cherry pie; backyard croquet competitions with the Hood family; life on the farm with Onkel Karl, Tante Lenchen and her cousins; her father’s Sauerbraten and homemade Kloesse; perfectly browned butter cookies; digging in the dirt; Hank Williams, Heintje and Nana Mouskouri; German Christmas carols; phoning her sister each morning; her children’s visits home. She never complained, always worked hard, and avoided doctors and multi-lane roadways whenever possible. She recalled with amazement her drive from New Jersey to Toronto with her Aunt Tilly and the family dog, and her road trip with her daughter two hours up the New York State Thruway to see Kris Kristofferson and his band. Jean was both timid and adventurous. Often the only difference was the availability of a “partner in crime.”

A quiet woman of distinct beauty and classic style, she was the iconic wife and mother of what is called the “Silent Generation.” Her influence, however, reverberates. Always a textbook introvert, Jean developed select, close relationships in her immediate sphere. On Victoria Park in Toronto, neighbors George and Eileen Letson became lifelong cherished friends. Eileen changed the Behrens family’s life forever by introducing Jean to Adelle Davis’ world of nutrition, which became central to Jean’s way of living. In addition to the Letsons, more rambunctious visitors, like stray farm dogs and the neighboring three little dark eyed Kuzmenko boys whom Fred called “the mafia” were kitchen regulars in those early days of marriage and motherhood. She always remembered, with pride and

exhaustion, tending and canning from the huge family garden, and experiencing the headache of a lifetime on the day she and Fred put their recently built house on Big John's truck to move it 20 miles north to Gormley, Ontario after high-rise developers bought out their piece of farmland. Their new location became their paradise. The spring-fed pond was the perfect skating rink and swimming hole. Fred captured the essence of Jean in one of his many family photos of that era. She is perched with the grace of a mid-century movie star beside the froggy pond waters where her kids happily swim.

Married to an up and coming 1950's VW executive, Jean applied her homemaking talents as Fred's partner in his career endeavors, serving fine German cuisine and earning a reputation for her exquisite baking. The early years in Ontario were marked also by "Kaffee" with the Werner Behrends family, Horst and Sigrid Peter, and Weber families, as Volkswagen relationships were a significant feature of early family life. "Oma" and "Opa" Becker lived nearby, and Jean would often load the children into her blue Beetle, "Myrtle the Turtle," for a trip to their house, never at a speed sufficient to satisfy her pre-school aged son who encouraged her, "Go faster, Mummie, go faster!"

Jean's warm heart was evident to those who met her, and the various moves provided numerous opportunities to develop unlikely friendships as well. Libro, the contractor, remembered in family lore as "Killemaquick," Willi Schmidt, the lifelong family painter across miles and countries, "Chichmich," and others could count Jeanie as their friend.

Shortly before Jean's passing, longtime friend Ann Neudoerffer wrote of "sweet girl Jean," "She was my first and best friend when we arrived in Woodcliff Lake. She was an aunt for our children and a person who showed up when she knew you needed some help. I can't count all the coffee stops at her breakfast table when I needed a good friend and confidante. She was a devoted partner and wonderful mother and gracious hostess. Her cake making skills were marvelous... Tell Jean she was always my example to emulate, and I am holding her hand in friendship and love."

Through the years, Jean's hospitable nature was evident as she opened the family home to English language learners (Edita!), international students in traveling musical troupes, and to her children's friends who were welcome at the dinner table or just for a heart to heart during the pangs of growing up. Jean always had a protective impulse towards the underdog and for the outcast. Along the way, she supported her children, serving as all-season driver and all around ally in their short term and long-term interests. For the sake of her children, she overcame her discomfort with left hand turns and even her social disease as she attended every sporting event and school activity. She was the heart of the home as Fred traveled significantly for business.

In North Carolina, Jean and Fred became friends, protectors, and ready surrogate parents and “grandparents” to their backdoor neighbors, the Swehla/Griffin family, visiting horse and ostrich farms, pumpkin patches, and even sharing the secrets of composting. In her final years, she frequented the backdoor bench and the garden where the local rascallions still gather. She was often seen there, and is rightly remembered among her neighbors for her warm and gentle spirit.

In addition to her classic sense of interior design and fashion, Jean passionately followed current political events, and read actively in the world of nutritional science. She was intrigued by Biblical prophecy, and leaned towards kindness and humility in her preachers of choice. She cared faithfully for her mother, her Aunt Tilly, and for her husband during their later years. She could have been successful in one—or several—of any careers, but her greatest joy was always her family, for whom she worked to make a home. She is remembered especially for holiday celebrations, as she took great pleasure in decorating and hosting family meals that included her sister’s family (the Hoods), the Feilers, the Letsons, and for many years, her mother and aunt, among others.

Jean was also the family gardener and groundskeeper. She and Fred designed, planted and tended pristine landscaping in each of their homes. Summer barbeques on the patio with the Neudoerffers, Warmbolds or Feilers are memorable, and were beautified by hanging planters of lush impatiens and begonia borders. No leaf would dare land in her gardens. Except of course in New Jersey, where leaves were family life until late November. As Fred manned the John Deere with his self-made grass and leaf vacuum, Jean had the kids lift each shrub branch to retrieve and extract every late season stray.

Jean’s early childhood was uneventful until WWII. Her family, suddenly dragged into world events, was relocated from their Albany home to an internment camp in the desert town of Crystal City, Texas, along with other German and Japanese American families. Her family was then deported to Europe for the waning months of the war, where they ultimately spent seven years on a farm with beloved cousins before emigrating again, this time to Canada. Jean’s thinking was forever informed by these years of loss, family reunion and new loss, even as her Josbach years were some of her favorite. Upon arriving in Toronto as a teenager, Jean had a salvation experience at the storied People’s Church. This too was a defining experience, which makes even her passing from this life an opportunity for great anticipation of new Life and of reunion without separation.

With Jean, we again “Turn our eyes upon Jesus and look full in His wonderful face, where the things of earth grow strangely dim, in the light of His glory and grace.” Jean has finally

found a home she will never lose, and a family reunion never to be disrupted by war or by the more pedestrian vicissitudes of daily life. Jean leaves an enduring legacy. To be loved by Jean was to receive the rare gift of being in the company of someone who “got us.”

We grieve a great loss, for Jeanie has always been a home-base for our hearts. We are grateful that we can call her mama, sister-in-law, aunt, or friend; we are who we are because of her timeless, understated and consistent generosity, and particular love toward each of us.

We are grateful for each person and family mentioned as well as for many many others (Kathy, Maxine, Jane, Anne, Pat, Mary, Suzanne, Derwin, Maureen, Diane, Zahara, Schuyler, Michael, Melanie, Shamika, Emma, Gillian, Peggy, Betty... the list is long...), for you are so much a part of our life story because of your love for Jean. And Jean was so much of who she was because of you. Thank you.

In lieu of flowers please make Memorial contributions to <https://www.operationsmile.org/> , a cause for which Jean had great compassion.

Cemetery

Events

Forest Lawn East Cemetery
3700 Forest Lawn Drive
Matthews, NC, 28104

JUL 11 Visitation 02:00PM - 02:45PM

Heritage Funeral Home, Weddington/Matthews
3700 Forest Lawn Drive, Matthews, NC, US, 28104

JUL 11 Service 02:45PM

Heritage Funeral Home, Weddington/Matthews
3700 Forest Lawn Drive, Matthews, NC, US, 28104

Comments



“ An external video has been added.



Heritage Funeral and Cremation Services - July 10, 2020 at 04:42 PM



“ This is beautiful! Thank you, Robert and team!

Gina B - July 10, 2020 at 07:07 PM



“ A webcast video has been added.



Heritage Funeral and Cremation Services - July 09, 2020 at 04:33 PM



“ Dear Dogwood Classical Academy: Thank you for your kindness to remember our family at this time. You are a blessing!

Gina B - July 10, 2020 at 09:06 AM



“ Please feel welcome to visit the following link to access a photo tribute to Jean via Dropbox:

https://www.dropbox.com/sh/vn3gtz4u74a8dys/AACl8_xw6JU3kSkQbnjh2hkra?dl=0

Gina B - July 10, 2020 at 05:17 PM



“ there has been only black space for about the last 7-8 minutes or more

vicki Hedley - July 11, 2020 at 02:15 PM



“ Hi Vicki, I hear that the situation was sorted out. I hope? Thank you for joining us today.

Gina B - July 11, 2020 at 09:36 PM



“ Dear Gena , Donna and extended family,
I am just reading this for the first time. My heart aches for each of you. I only met Jean a few times, but Know she was loved by her family. ..especially daughter Gena , and Ruth her sister. It does bring joy to know she and Ruth are together and seeing their Savior.
Our heartfelt sympathy and love,
Bill and Betty Hough

Betty Hough - July 11, 2020 at 02:36 PM



“ Betty, I have been thinking about you! Thank you for your kind comments and your expression of love. We are grateful. Blessings to you and Bill.

Gina B - July 11, 2020 at 09:34 PM



“ Gina, Mark, Marigene and family...You have all been in my thoughts and prayers and I'm thankful I was able to view this video after the fact as I was unable to yesterday. Gina and Mark your Mom would be so very proud of the beautiful words you shared about her. I know how very much you will miss her but hold fast to all your wonderful memories and let the prayers of those who love you see you though the difficult days. Im so thankful I was able to spend a few minutes with all of you at your Aunt Ruth's funeral. That was so special for me as I remember all of you from your times in Red Hook...and the few special occasions in NC through the years. Continued prayer from here.

With love and sympathy,
Joan Swift

Joan Swift - July 12, 2020 at 05:12 PM



“ Thank you, Joan. It was delightful to see you as well! Thank you for your prayers. And thank you for watching. Much love, 2M's and G

Gina B - July 14, 2020 at 06:22 AM



“ Dear Gina, Mark and Marigene, what a wonderful tribute to your wonderful mom, my heart goes out to you all~ With love, Gil

Gil Hedley - July 15, 2020 at 11:36 PM



“ Thank you, Gil. Much love to your family.

Gina B - July 16, 2020 at 09:59 AM