

## WITH DEEP SORROW

Obituary submissions are only accepted from family members. We will accept online Funeral obituaries or newspaper obituaries if family submissions are not received by the *Canal Record* deadlines. Obituary pictures may be emailed to [record@pancanalsociety.org](mailto:record@pancanalsociety.org) or mailed to the Panama Canal Society office. Emailed pictures must be submitted in a jpeg or tif format in 300 DPI or higher.



**Maria do Socorro Donato Allen**, of Tucson, Arizona, died at home on September 10, 2023, of Endometrial Cancer. She was 70 years old.

Maria was always confident in her ability to do whatever she set about to do. Sometimes, her friends would jokingly say that Maria's ego was as big as all of the outdoors. Maybe, but those who knew her best, those same friends, would say it was small compared to the biggest part of her, her heart. That heart was full of the joy of living, family, friends, travel, and bird watching. Yes, Maria was sure of her ability to succeed at whatever she put her hand to, but it was her response when a friend was in trouble that truly defined her. She would jump in, "with all fours," as she would say, whenever a friend needed help, and would then proceed to move heaven and earth to help in whatever way she could.

In the same way, she was "all in" with her love for her family and her enthusiasm for travel, especially traveling worldwide to see exotic birds in their natural habitats. These trips were often with a special group of friends, the Challenged Birders. Maria was a primary organizer of those trips, ensuring everyone had the best possible experience.

Maria said her life was made of many "lives." She was born in São Paulo, Brazil, and grew up in Rio de Janeiro. Always precocious and very curious, she read Marx, Freud, and others before she was 10. When she was about 16, she and a friend took an aptitude test for IBM computer classes and passed with flying colors! After taking the courses, they met all the requirements to work. And work they did at 16 or 17, becoming the youngest computer programmers in the country. That job led to her first significant life change. She met and fell in love with Gerald Allen (Jerry), and, at age 20, she was off to make a life in Washington, D.C., marrying Jerry on July 6, 1973.

Life in the nation's capital was beginning for Maria. She took classes at George Washington College and was working as a programmer on a project for the college when Jerry took a position working for the U.S. Government in the Panama Canal Zone. They went on another of Maria's life's adventures, this time to begin a long stay in the Republic of Panama. She finished a Business Degree at Florida State University. She got a job as a computer programmer, working for the Canal herself, ultimately as Chief of Computer Operations. Her much-beloved son, Eric Haight Allen, was born in 1980. In Panama, she discovered the fascinating world of birds and a love of jungle trips to see them. There were also many friends and adventures, including the passing over of the Canal to Panamanian authorities in 1999. After retiring from the former Canal Zone, Maria and Jerry moved to Tucson, Az., where they continued to travel the world, enjoy new friends, and keep up with friends from all over the

globe. They would make yearly summer trips to their place in Sun Valley, Idaho. A place they both loved, allowing them to escape the summer desert heat. In Tucson, Maria got the news of the birth of her granddaughter, Avery, who meant the world to her. Avery lives in Chicago, but they established a very close relationship.

Maria was predeceased by her husband of 48 years, Gerald Haight Allen. She is survived by her son, Eric Allen, and granddaughter, Avery Allen, of Chicago, Ill., and by her sister, Maria de Fátima Donato, and nephew, Victor Flavio, of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, as well as too many close family and friends to list here.



**Peter Wade Foster**, 94, died peacefully on September 8, 2023, in Palm Harbor, Florida. Peter was born on April 30, 1929, in Colon, Republic of Panama. He was the son of Vendrize and Naomi Foster. He was preceded in death by his two brothers, Elton and James Foster, and his wife of 63 years, Marjorie Harrington Foster.

He is survived by his daughters, June Foster Boeckel and Colette Foster Carlisle (Drake). He had four grandchildren - Beth Gailey (Bryan), John Trim (Cortney), Wade Carlisle (Jen), and Jacquelyn Thomas (Selwyn). He also had six great-grandchildren, Patrick (Anne), Megan, Jaxon, Penelope, Delaney, and Harper, and three great-great-grandchildren, Willow, Addysnn, and Mary Katherine. He is also survived by his sister-in-law Peggy Currier (Norman), brother-in-law Robert Harrington (Mary), and several beloved nieces and nephews.



Peter graduated from Cristobal High School in 1947 and married his high school sweetheart, Marjorie Harrington Foster, that same year. They were married for 63 years and raised their two daughters in the Canal Zone. Peter was an Atlantic sider at heart and spent most of his childhood and high school years on the Atlantic side. Peter was in the Navy Reserve briefly before working for the Panama Canal Company as an apprentice. Eventually, he became a communication specialist and was promoted to Head of the Communication (Telephone) Exchange. Peter worked for the Panama Canal Commission for 35 years.

After retiring, Peter and Marjorie moved to Florida, where they had an amazing, well-deserved retirement life. They traveled extensively, and he enjoyed planning many cruises for friends and family. He was involved in the Panama Canal

Society for many years, serving on the Executive Board and volunteering. Peter served as Reunion coordinator and President of the society from 1985 to 1986.

Peter was the consummate gentleman and made sure all the ladies in his party got to dance at society functions. He taught his daughters how to dance and the importance of family. His family was his greatest treasure, and his daughters could do no wrong. He was also an excellent cook and was known for his awesome waffles and banana foster. He always loved spending time with his grandchildren and telling them about Canal Zone life.

He leaves behind a wonderful legacy that his family proudly honors. While our hearts are broken, and his shoes will never be filled, we find comfort in knowing Peter and Marjorie are dancing on the clouds of heaven, reconnecting with their many friends and family members, and watching over us until we meet again. He was a member of the Panama Canal Society.



Pedro Miguel, then a while later in Diablo, then in a 4-family in Balboa Flats and Tavernilla Street, and then to a duplex on Croton Street. The family had a post-graduation party under their Croton house for Charles' graduation.

We knew Charles usually by Charlie, and he picked up the name Chuck in the US. He began his education at Balboa High School in the Canal Zone in Panama. Charlie graduated with the class of 1958. He attended Canal Zone Junior College (1959-1960), where he played football and had several meetings with his older brother, Gerry, who played for a rival post-school team, the Athletic Club. To their credit, it never ended in fisticuffs.

On July 16, 1966, Chuck married the love of his life, Leslie Ann Gibbard, with whom he was fortunate to share 57 wonderful years of love and companionship. Their love story was an inspiration to all who knew them. Charles and Leslie became parents of twin boys Robert and David and then their lovely daughter Jennifer. They're all happily married and productive members of their respective communities.

Chuck dedicated himself to the aviation industry, working firelessly at Flying Tiger Line from 1963 to 1989. His career took a transformative turn with the merger of Federal Express in 1989, where he served with distinction until his retirement in 2011. He began as a scheduler but swiftly ascended to positions of leadership, taking charge of marketing, finances, planning, and ultimately serving as a director.

While Chuck was undoubtedly successful in his career, his family was always his top priority. He cherished his time with his wife, children, and grandchildren. Chuck was an active and engaged father and grandfather, even volunteering to coach and referee soccer games. He found joy in playing golf, relaxing at the beach, and deep-sea fishing, often creating cherished memories with his loved ones. He was a member of the Panama Canal Society.

Chuck will be remembered by all who knew him as a sweet, kind individual who exemplified the true essence of a gentleman. His Lutheran faith provided him with a strong moral compass that guided his actions and interactions with others.

Chuck was not just a family man; he also had a special place in his heart for his pets. He loved his dog, Bella, and his cat, Jessi, who brought him joy and comfort.

Chuck is survived by his loving wife, Leslie Laatz; his devoted sons, Robert Laatz (Kristen) and David Laatz (Debbi); his caring daughter, Jennifer Koch (Brian); and his adoring grandchildren, Sara Laatz, Christopher Laatz, Dylan Laatz, Gabriella Laatz, and Natalie Laatz. He is also survived by his brother, Gerry Laatz (BHS'57) (Howie BHS'58), and nephews, J. Laatz (Sunshine) and Ray Laatz (Emese).



**Hollie Gibson Dodson**, 65, passed away on February 3, 2023, at Clear Lake Hospital in Houston, Texas. She was born on September 20, 1957, at Gorgas Hospital, Ancon, Canal Zone, to Bob and Marie Gibson. Hollie was a 4th generation Zonian and Roosevelt Medal descendant and a graduate of Balboa High School class of 1975.

Hollie was preceded in death by her father, Charles Robert (Bob) Gibson, Sr.; mother, Marie Wright Gibson; and brother, Mark Wayne.

She is survived by her daughter, Jessica Dodson, and grandson, Sur Zollicoffer; sister, Melody Forrest (husband Paul); brother, Charles Robert "Bobby" Gibson (wife

Lorraine); sister, Joy Conger (husband Albert); cousins; and several nieces and nephews.

Panama and her many Zonian friends and family held an extra special place in her heart, and she always thought of it as home. Hollie was a kindhearted person and never met a stranger. A Celebration of Life for Hollie will be held on February 3, 2024, in Houston, Texas.



Charles "Chuck" Laatz, a beloved husband, father, grandfather, brother, and friend, passed away peacefully at his home in Indian Trail, North Carolina, in September 2023 at the age of 82, just shy of his 83rd birthday. He was born in Yuma, Arizona, to the late Robert and Adele Priest Laatz.

The Laatzes came to Panama in about 1941. Mr. Laatz was an engineer on Madden Dam, and their first living quarters were in the 12-family in Gamboa,



**Mary Joseph Lang** was born in Denver, Colorado, on April 22, 1933, during a blizzard and died on July 31, 2023, after celebrating her 90th Birthday with her four children.

Mary Jo grew up in the Panama Canal Zone. She had a degree in Painting from American University and was a practicing artist her entire life. Mary Jo met her future husband, William (Bill) Adams Lang, who also grew up in the Canal Zone when she was traveling by ship and bound for Washington, D. C. They were married in New Orleans, La., where her father had extensive family ties. They settled in Falls Church, Virginia, and had four children.

After 12 years, they settled in Portland, Oregon, where Mary Jo became a business and art teacher. She received her Masters in Family Counseling from St. Martin's College in Lacey, Washington. She worked as a counselor in a drug rehab facility while continuing her work as an artist. Mary Jo and Bill enjoyed taking all their children and grandchildren on frequent cruises. Shortly after celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary, her beloved husband Bill died.

Mary Jo was passionate about life and well-traveled. She was a lifelong avid reader and very knowledgeable about history, art and design, literature, psychology, and religion. Her passion was learning, and she adored flowers. Mary Jo was very wise.

She is survived by her children, Walter Joseph Lang, Thomas Andrew Lang, William Christopher Lang, and Catherine Mina Alexander; by eight grandchildren; five great-grandchildren; and by her brother, Joseph Cole. She will be missed by everyone who knew her. She was a member of the Panama Canal Society.



**E. Corbin McGriff, Jr., Ph.D., P.E.**, originally from the Panama Canal Zone (Republic of Panama) and founder of the first environmental engineering and analytical consulting firm in Mississippi, passed away at St. Dominic Hospital in September 2023.

He leaves his wife of 25 years, Faye Caldwell McGriff; his son, Everett Corbin McGriff, III (Trey); his daughter, Melissa Shannon (McGriff) Johnston and son-in-law, Stephen Johnston; grandchildren, Mary Hunter Johnston Vise, Bennett Johnston, Isabelle Johnston, and Charlie Johnston; as well as stepdaughters, Angela Byers and husband Dr. Paul Byers; stepdaughter, Lori Byrd; brother, Gene McGriff (Saundra) of Dothan, Alabama and many great-grandchildren, nieces and nephews.

He is preceded in death by his par-



ents, Everett Corbin McGriff and Muriel Etta (Moore) McGriff; sister, Geri (McGriff) Davis; BHS'57, who was a gifted artist; and grandson, Callaghan Byrd Byers.

Corbin was born in Gorgas Hospital, Ancon, Canal Zone, in December 1940 to Everett Corbin McGriff and Muriel Etta (Moore) McGriff. And as part of a Navy family, he spent his formative years living on various naval station locations, including Newport, Rhode Island; Norfolk, Virginia; Annapolis, Maryland; and Cocoli, Canal Zone, in Panama. In the Canal Zone, Corbin played shortstop for Lincoln Life Little League and Fastlich League Ocelots. He was a member of the 1956 CZ VFW teenage tournament team representing the Canal Zone in Hershey, Penn. After graduating from Balboa High School in 1958, Corbin joined the Navy and served as a radar man 3rd Class on the destroyer U.S. *Arnold J. Isbell*.

After the Navy, he enrolled at Auburn University with full veteran benefits. He graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering and a Master of Science in Environmental Engineering and Fluid Mechanics. Immediately following graduation, he accepted a position as Assistant Professor of Civil Engineering at the Citadel, Charleston, South Carolina, and taught environmental engineering and fluid mechanics for two years. He accepted a full fellowship to study for his doctorate at the University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas. Upon graduation, Dr. McGriff accepted a position as assistant professor of civil engineering at Mississippi State University, where he taught and conducted research for three years.

He left MSU and relocated to Jackson, Mississippi, where he started Environmental Protection Systems, Inc. (EPS), the first environmental engineering and analytical firm in Mississippi. He sold EPS in 1987 and moved to Atlanta as president and chief executive officer to run the company, which had grown to 200 professionals and ten offices. After returning to Jackson in 1990, Dr. McGriff started his second environmental consulting business, Hazclean Environmental Consultants, Inc., and Argus Environmental Consultants, Inc. in 2019. He sold Argus Analytical, Inc. in 2011 and Hazclean Environmental Consultants, Inc. in 2019. Dr. McGriff was a professional engineer registered in multiple states and was recognized as an environmental engineering expert throughout the region.

Corbin enjoyed being an entrepreneur developing and selling environmental engineering and analytical businesses in addition to traveling and frequenting fine dining restaurants. He was a great supporter of the arts in Jackson, including the International Ballet Competition and the Mississippi Symphony Orchestra. He was a member of the Panama Canal Society.



**Virginia "Ginny" McWilliams** was born June 15, 1937, in Panama, Republic of Panama, to Captain David M. McLaren of Dedham, Massachusetts, and Elsie E. (Werrey) McLaren of Southampton, England. Virginia's father served as a Ship's Pilot on the Panama Canal in the Canal Zone. Virginia "Ginny" and

her two older sisters, Edith and Phyllis, grew up in Balboa, Panama, and attended Canal Zone Government schools until the passing of their father. At that time, Virginia and her mother moved to Orlando, Florida.

Ginny graduated from William R Boone High School, Orlando, Fla., in 1954. She attended the University of North Alabama in Florence, Alabama, graduating with a degree in Education. She obtained a Master's Degree in Education in 1971.

Virginia and John McWilliams were college sweethearts and married on May 31, 1957. In 1964, they settled into what became their lifelong home in Tuscumbia, Alabama. Virginia initially taught at a Head Start program that served low-income families, preparing preschool children for elementary school. The majority of Virginia's teaching career was spent educating fifth graders at R. E. Thompson Elementary School. She retired in 1995 after 30 years of dedicated service to generations of children. Long after retiring, Virginia enjoyed being approached around Tuscumbia by adults saying, "Do you remember me? You taught me in fifth grade. You were my favorite teacher!"

Ginny was a member of Tuscumbia First Methodist Church, where she sang in the choir and served on several committees. She was a dedicated member of the ladies' prayer group and served in the kitchen over the years for many events. Ginny also enjoyed cooking, sewing, and crafting for most of her life. She knitted lovely afghans and sewed many beautiful clothes for her young granddaughters. Jesus welcomed Virginia to her eternal home on September 20, 2023.

Virginia was the devoted mother of Beth (McWilliams) van Waveren (Pete), Jo (McWilliams) Hagan (Allen), and Lee McWilliams (Michelle). She was the proud grandmother of Beth and Pete's daughters, Skylar van Waveren (Barrett Hudson) and Carly van Waveren; Jo and Allen's daughters, Jessica Hagan (Nathan Stanton) and Allison Hagan; and Lee and Michelle's daughters, Tori Schoultz, and Hali Schoultz. She was a member of the Panama Canal Society.



**John Edward Morris**, 81, of Salem, was called home on Thursday, September 28, 2023. He is once again dancing with his beloved wife Marie, affectionately known to him, her family, and childhood friends as "Peanut."

John was born in the Panama Canal Zone to the late James J. Morris and Ida E. Morris. In addition to his parents, he was predeceased by his two older brothers, Jim Morris and Ken Morris.

John was a devoted family man, always putting his family first. Voted "Most Popular" in his class, he attended Balboa High School, where he met and eventually married Marie. John came to the States to attend the University of Colorado and earned a degree in accounting. Upon graduation, he moved to Roanoke with his family and started a long and successful career. He was employed with Roanoke Electric Steel, where he was ultimately named Vice-President of Finance; he

retired in 2003 with 30-plus years of faithful service.

John was a long-time member of Roanoke Country Club and a former president. He loved golf, his three cats, the New York Yankees, and his Colorado Buffaloes. He was known for his infectious smile that could light up a room and his magnetic personality and kindness. He had a wealth of friends, most of whom he had known most of his life either from his days in Panama, his long career at Roanoke Electric, or his time at Roanoke Country Club. John was a member of the Panama Canal Society.

He is survived by his daughters, Brandi Pesetti and Stephanie Williams (Jay), as well as his grandchildren, Leah Suzanne Williams, Kara Marie Higgins (Drew), Sydney Ellen Pesetti, Reid Morris Williams, and John Spencer Pesetti. A Celebration of Life was held at Oakey's in Salem on November 4, 2023.



**Mary Jo Toth**, age 54, died on October 2, 2023, in Lansing, Michigan.

Mary Jo was preceded in death by her mother, Joanne Kay Toth. Mary Jo is survived by her father, Rev. John (Nancy) Toth, sister Barb (Tim) Lowe and brother Ken (Robyn) Toth, nieces Laura (Jeff) Schlicker, Rylie Toth, and Kelsy Toth, stepsiblings Tony (Sue) Berry, Matt (Susie) Berry, Wendy (Mark) Oliynk, stepnieces and nephews Jordan Berry, Jessica Berry, Alyssa (Riley) Svec, Zachary (Sarah) Berry, Alicia Berry and Jacob Hall, and numerous aunts, uncles, and cousins.

Mary Jo was born in the Panama Canal Zone and spent her childhood in Dimondale, Michigan, riding her bike, falling off, and breaking bones. As a teenager, she worked for Hartley in the shipping department and eventually began writing manuals for the IT help desk. She continued her education at Alma College, graduating with her Bachelor of Science, which led to her career in software training. She enjoyed traveling for Jostens Learning and Pearson Learning training and educating teams at the brink of technology in education. She touched so many lives during her time as an IT Specialist for Varnum law firm and the Michigan Attorney General's office, and her co-workers will miss her dearly.

Anyone who knew Mary Jo knew that she LOVED Disney. Her Disney collection spanned her house from kitchen knobs to shower curtain hooks to the sound the toaster made when it popped and started singing Mickey Mouse March, or It's a Small World. Everything was Disney. If you turned on a light, then the light switch had a Disney cover, and the chandelier or lampshade that was turned on had a Disney character in the design. Do you have theme Disney character bathrooms? Mary Jo had Winnie the Pooh, Mickey Mouse, and Little Mermaid-theme bathrooms that made visiting her house a full Disney experience. Her love for Disney started when she saw The Little Mermaid in the theater with her mom, Joanne, and since then, she has been a frequent visitor of Walt Disney World, Disneyland, and Disneyland Paris. One of her dream vacations was to visit Tokyo Disney Resort,

Shanghai Disneyland, and Hong Kong Disneyland so she could say she had been to all six Disney parks.

In addition to her Disney collection, she loved NASCAR, reading and reviewing books, traveling, gardening, feeding the birds and the rabbits in her backyard, and shopping. Even though she didn't have children of her own, she spoiled her nieces, Laura, Rylie, and Kelsy, like they were her own kids. She took them shopping for every birthday and loved taking their pictures at every family event to fill the annual Toth family calendar that she made for each Christmas. She loved her routine and the life she had built.

Mary Jo also loved giving to others. Whether it was a coupon to use for their next Bath & Body purchase, advice for

their next vacation to Disney, or IT help when their computer wasn't cooperating. Mary Jo was always ready and willing to help. She loved bringing extra laundry detergent, snacks, toilet paper, and food from her garden to the family's houses when she visited. Mary Jo was great at gift-giving. She had a talent for knowing what people needed and being there for them before they could ask for help. She always volunteered to be the driver and always found a parking spot closest to the door. She continuously donated her extra shoes and clothes, and she always showed up with loving support when you needed her.

She will be greatly missed by her family, friends, and co-workers, who are deeply saddened by this unexpected loss.