



Bess Lee Melvin

October 6, 2022

It is with sad and heavy hearts that we announce the passing of Bess Lee Melvin of Norfolk, Virginia. Bess packed a lot of life into her 89 years and her smile, beauty and exuberant personality made her truly unforgettable. She was born on January 25, 1933, to the late Betty Will Bartholomew Melvin and Clifton Purrington Melvin in the city of Norfolk, Virginia. She is preceded in death by two sisters, Geneva Littman and Betty Ann Wallace, and one brother, Clifton P. Melvin, Jr. She is survived by her sister, Mary Frances Hartley; nephew, Peter Hartley; nieces, Lisa Darger, Melissa Wallace, and Stacy Wallace; great niece, Ann Rene' and great nephews Eli, Phillip and Aaron as well as her long-time friend, Jesse Andrews.

Bess went to be with the Lord Jesus Christ her savior on October 6, 2022, knowing that she had lived life to the fullest and had been blessed beyond all measure. A multi-faceted woman, Bess was different things to different people. She was Aunt Bess to her nieces and nephews, a fellow airman to those who served with her in the United States Air Force, a teacher and friend for her students at Maury High School, where she taught English for many years. Her friends were with her in Hawaii when she walked across 10' of hot coals, cheered her on as she was crowned Miss Virginia Beach in 1956, and laughed with her each Halloween as she transformed into the "Bag Lady of Ghent." Bess was kind and generous with her time and money, as well as her skills as a massage therapist. She supported various charities like Lee's Friends and her church, Tabernacle United Methodist, on Sandbridge Road. An independent spirit, Bess was a strong voice in the community, standing for equality, defending herself and others against unfairness, prejudice and injustice. It is a hard task to describe a rare woman like Bess, so it seems most fitting to let the lyrics of one of her favorite songs, Wildflowers by Dolly Parton, do it for her.

...the hills were alive with wildflowers, And I was as wild, even wilder than they, for at least I could run, they just died in the sun., And I refused to just wither in place...just a wild mountain rose, needing freedom to grow, so I ran fearing not where I'd go, when a flower grows wild, it can always survive, wildflowers don't care where they grow...

A memorial service to celebrate the life of Bess Melvin will be held Saturday, November 12th, 11:00am at The Tabernacle United Methodist Church, 1265 Sandbridge Rd Virginia Beach, VA 23456 with Pastor Christa Springstead officiating. We welcome all of her friends to attend and look forward to the shared memories and stories.

Bess requested that memorial contributions be made to Lee's Friends. Bess was a devoted volunteer with Lee's Friends for many years.

Previous Events

Funeral Service

NOV 12. 11:00 AM (ET)

Tabernacle United Methodist Church
1265 Sandbridge Road
Virginia Beach, VA 23456

Tribute Wall



“ Sarah Ward lit a candle in memory of Bess Lee Melvin



Sarah Ward - November 10, 2022 at 11:17 AM

EG

“ In 1988 I knocked on “Sister Mess’s” door to join a yoga class in her living room. As we shared introductions around the circle, I mentioned that my great Aunt Elizabeth (for whom I am named) had taught English at Maury High School. Amazement and tears came to Bess’s eyes as she took my hand, and led me to a large photo of my Aunt Elizabeth hanging on her living room wall. Aunt Elizabeth had passed several years prior but I learned that my Aunt was the elder in a sisterhood of three extraordinary women, including “Sister Catherine” and Sister Bess. Subsequent to this fortuitous meeting, Sister Catherine and Sister Bess invited me to become the third to replace my Aunt Elizabeth and for many years thereafter (until Sister Catherine’s death), we met at Olive Garden to laugh, tell stories of our lives, and simply love one another. 😊

elizabeth gay - October 17, 2022 at 05:57 AM

LT

“ I loved Bess’s infectious laugh.. She was a student of mine and later assisted me in teaching some Craniosacral classes.. I ran into her at a concert recently. James Earl Stanley.. I will truly miss her!

Linda Tingle - October 15, 2022 at 04:25 PM

SK

“ It is so delightful to read these memories of Bess. It is clear Bess made the world a better place just by being Bess and sharing that Bess with others. Her legacy will live on through the memories and inspiration she left with others.

Susan Keeney - October 15, 2022 at 08:29 AM

SH

She was from Knotts Island and a cousin on the Land side!!!

Sarah Holland - October 17, 2022 at 09:07 PM

KC

“ I've known Bess for the past few years as she was a member of the Bank where I work. She shared so many wonderful memories of her life and all the things she had done. I heard the most about her career as a teacher and how proud she was that she kept up with alot of her students. I will surely miss my friend and am so glad that I was able to know such an amazing woman who gave so much joy, guidance and love to others.

Kimberly C Crowder - October 11, 2022 at 04:08 PM

SO

“ In loving memory of Bess Lee Melvin, So dearly loved. So sadly missed. God bless. Bess you really made a big difference to so many lives. I was blessed to have reconnected after so many years. You my dear friend will never be forgotten. Your student and friend from Maury High School.



SANDRA OBRIEN - October 11, 2022 at 02:45 PM

JS

“ Bess was one of the kindest most caring ladies I have ever met. I feel so fortunate to have shared lunches and many phone calls with her these past few years. I loved her humor and stories about her very interesting and eventful past. I'm amazed by how much of herself she gave to others to help them with their own life struggles. My only regret is not having her as a teacher in my years at Maury High. Rest in Peace Bess and may you enjoy all your new and old friends there in Heaven. ❤️

John Steadman - October 11, 2022 at 01:56 PM

SP

Dear Bess (she would call herself Mess), farewell. I hope the ride was an easy one. Our friendship goes back in time to so many years ago I have lost count. You are charm and elegance , love and compassion. I wish I could have given you even half as much as you gave me. You called me "sis" and I felt like you were the sibling I never had. You were always there with a smile, a hug, or a sharp reprimand. I remember so many girl talks where you pulled me from deep sorrow to uproarious laughter. Only you could understand the many curve balls that life could throw. You are a gentle soul and a stalwart friend. I remember the defense class we took together and almost knocked each other out; The tireless hours you spent helping your students become responsible people, you never gave up, not even on one of them. Those years we taught together were hard ones and somehow we both survived. There was the trip we took to S. Carolina to sooth and comfort our dying friend— we laughed and we cried and we remembered. There is a book to be written to recount the many stories of your life on Earth and then a sequel you can add to from aloft. We will meet again and our embrace will sum up all that came before. Be at peace my friend; you've more than earned it. So long for now. My love goes to you for eternity.

Sarah Ward Petroske - November 10, 2022 at 10:54 AM

PP

“ Many years at Maury were some of the best years of my life. Bess was a big part of those memories. She will be greatly missed. To her family, she was funny, smart, and thoughtful, and loving. All her suffering through the years is over, and now she is in a better place. Love, Pat Panzik

Patricia Panzik - October 11, 2022 at 10:34 AM

JW

“ Bess, a beautiful person and oh so smart. We car pooled to then Division of William & Mary. Bess also Quail hunted with me near Pungo. She was a light for so many, rest in peace!!! Well done Bess

Jay Wood - October 10, 2022 at 12:22 PM

CD

“ Bess and I were high school classmates. We made contact again when a student she taught at Maury High School was a student in the Practical Nursing Program where i taught in Norfolk. In more recent years we have been friends on Facebook. I truly have lost a good friend.

Corinne Falconer Dorsey - October 10, 2022 at 10:21 AM

NW

“ I met Bess in the late 1970s when she was taking a break from teaching and working as a paper hanger. I was a housepainter so we teamed up and did some jobs together. It was through her that I gained access to ply my trade in affluent Norfolk neighborhoods. I will be forever grateful to her for that. She was a nice, down-to-earth, and very friendly person. May she rest in peace.

Nelson White - October 09, 2022 at 08:11 PM

GS

Bessie-I will always remember you as one of my grandmother's favorite girls in the choir at Tabernacle Church. You had such a beautiful singing voice. Your sister Betty Ann was one of my dear friends. Rest In Peace. My grandmother was Ava Carroll who played the organ at Tabernacle for many years.

Gloria Stellwag - October 10, 2022 at 03:46 PM

SM

“ I met Bess when we were students at Oceana High, we have stayed in touch over the years. She was thoughtful, beautiful and kind. I will miss our talks.
Sibyl White Merkle

Sibyl White Merkle - October 09, 2022 at 03:19 PM

ML

“ I have known Bess Melvin since I was a teen age student at Maury High School in 1961. When I received my first contract to teach English at Lake Taylor High School, Bess was my department chairperson. In other words, I have known Bess most of my life. We were both born on January 25th and made it a point to always wish our twin a happy birthday. After retirement, both Bess and I still kept in touch talking about everything under the sun including our various illnesses. Bess Melvin was a smart, sweet woman, whom I will really miss, especially on our birthdays. Rest Bess, you deserve it.

Mabel Larrimore - October 08, 2022 at 01:51 PM

SW

“ A lifetime friend of her students and a dedicated member of the Maury High School community. She will be in our heart's for all time..
Rest In Peace Bess..

Skip Wright - October 08, 2022 at 12:45 PM