

Mary Frances Lynn Cheatham

We are gathered this afternoon to bear witness to our faith in the resurrection, the resurrection of all who are buried in Jesus Christ our Lord and the resurrection of Mary Frances Lynn Cheatham. Mary Frances died on Tuesday after an extended period of declining health. She was 83.

Mary Frances Lynn was born December 26, 1926, at Haymarket, Virginia, on Snow Hill Farm, the 800 acre farm first granted to her father's family in Colonial times. She was the second daughter and middle child of five children. During the depression her father lost the farm, and for a time the children were scattered among the extended family. Mary Frances lived with her grandmother before her mother secured a job with the IRS in Richmond and was able to reunite Mary Frances with her siblings. Eventually her father got a job with Thalheimer's Department Store and the family settled in the Highland Park neighborhood of northside Richmond. Mary Frances attended Highland Park Elementary and Chandler Junior High School and with her family she was active in the Mizpah Presbyterian Church that was practically next door to her house. She graduated from John Marshall High School in 1944. She then took nurses training at Stuart Circle Hospital, which led to a position as the store nurse at Thalheimer's.

While in high school Mary Frances' brother Henry sought a date with a girl whose parents insisted it be a double date. Henry prevailed upon his friend Joe Cheatham to help him out by going on a blind date with his younger sister Mary Frances. I don't know how Henry's date turned out, but it worked beautifully for Joe and Mary Frances. They dated for five years, and after Joe returned home from service in World War II, they married in her mother's home on April 3, 1948. They shared nearly 62 wonderful years of marriage, and had three children, Joseph III, Debra, and Elizabeth.

For their first couple of years of marriage, Joe and Mary Frances lived with her parents and assisted with the care of her grandmother Lynn. They moved to Sandston in 1954, before settling here in Bon Air in 1962.

While her children were young, Mary Frances devoted herself to hearth and home. She was active in Boy and Girl Scouts and church activities. When her second child entered college, she returned to nursing to insure each of their three children could receive university educations.

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When Joe retired from NCR in 1987, Mary Frances joined him – as she joked with her wry sense of humor, she wasn't going to work so he could lounge around the house. The two embarked on a month long vacation to California, camping along the way.

Mary Frances enjoyed gardening and working in their yard. A daughter remembers “she burned many a family meal while attending to her flowers.” She won prizes from her garden club for her floral arrangements.

Mary Frances was a direct descendent of Pocahontas and John Rolfe, and through him related to many prominent Englishmen, including Sir Thomas More. She was a DAR and “FFV” as well. None of which you are likely to know, as Mary Frances was down to earth, plain spoken, and in no way pretentious.

Mary Frances' faith was central to her life and family. She was a lifelong Presbyterian, and in cherished Presbyterian tradition, she and Joe were very attached to their back row seats for Sunday worship. After her health impeded her regular participation in Sunday worship, she was nurtured by the homebound communion ministry of the elders of the church.

Mary Frances Cheatham is survived by her husband of over 61 years, Joseph A. Cheatham; two daughters, Debra Hooker and her husband, Raymond, of Durham, N.C., and Elizabeth Wild and her husband, Ulrich, of Los Angeles, Calif.; one son, Joseph A. Cheatham III and his wife, Reba; nine grandchildren and one great-grandchild; a brother, Henry F. Lynn of Fredericksburg, Va.; and a sister, Caroline Davis of Roanoke. Having gathered for our mutual support and to receive the comfort of the scriptures, let us worship God.

R. Charles Grant
Pastor
Bon Air Presbyterian Church
Richmond, Virginia
March 27, 2010