



## Barbara Gatwood Thompson

November 24, 1923 - November 9, 2025

At the age of 101, and in the presence of family, Barbara Gatwood Thompson peacefully and triumphantly finished her race Sunday evening, November 9, 2025 at Providence Assisted Living in Searcy, Arkansas. She was preceded in death by her loving husband, Vance Maynard Thompson, Jr., and all five of her siblings: Robin Gatwood of Hickory, NC; Dean Gatwood of Louisville, KY; John Gatwood of Nashville, TN; Elden Gatwood of Pittsburgh, PA; and Mary Gatwood of Nashville, TN. She is survived by her three children — Vance Maynard Thompson III, Elden Jan Thompson, and Barbara Greer Thompson Llewellyn — along with twelve grandchildren and twenty-two great-grandchildren.

Born on November 24, 1923, in Nashville, TN, to Elden J. Gatwood, a musician and teacher, and Margaret Barbara DeLay Gatwood, an artist and devoted homemaker, she entered a world attended by melody, a home that echoed with a soundscape that would shape the rest of her life.

The fourth of six children, all talented musicians, she had a loving relationship with her parents—adoring her father—and genuinely enjoyed a deep friendship with her siblings, particularly her sister, Mary. Barbara graduated from the Peabody Demonstration School, before attending Peabody College on scholarship. Her time at Peabody was marked by academic success and faithful service. As a Senior, she received the prestigious Algernon Sydney

Sullivan Award—a selective honor given to college students who quietly but intentionally lead through compassion, kindness, and unselfish service to others. She concluded her studies with a Bachelor of Arts in English, where, at the commencement ceremony, she played cello, accompanied by her father—a golden moment she treasured all of her life.

Following college were “the war” years, during which Barbara volunteered at a local veterans’ hospital, and as a conditioning instructor at Ward-Belmont College, along with playing cello in the Nashville Symphony.

But the great turning of her life happened in 1945 when she married Vance Maynard Thompson Jr.—a Vanderbilt grad and Naval Air Force pilot with a confidence and steadiness she fell in love with during college. Their honeymoon years played out in Pensacola, FL during the final days of the war before they solidly planted roots in Memphis, TN.

Once settled, Barbara resumed her musical career, playing cello for thirty-nine years with the Memphis Symphony, while also providing music for local churches, communion services, and annual performances of Messiah and other seasonal works. She served as a den mother for her two Boy Scouts, and was actively involved in the Memphis Garden Club and the Memphis Music Club. And it was her daughter, Greer, that had the unique blessing of sharing not only her mother’s love of music, but a full season performing alongside her in the Memphis Symphony before her retirement. Memphis was home. It’s where she and Maynard raised their family, cultivated lasting friendships, and anchored themselves in Christ for more than fifty years in the grace-filled rhythms of Second Presbyterian Church.

In later life, Barbara faithfully visited friends confined to nursing homes or limited by illness. She prayed nightly for her growing family, calling each one by name. She marked birthdays with thoughtful gifts — always beautifully wrapped, always on time. At Christmas, she transformed her home into a

wonderland of music and song, gifts and memories—a place where love and joy felt entirely at home.

She possessed a grateful and uncomplaining spirit, choosing thanksgiving over bitterness, prayer over worry, kindness over self-pity, and Jesus always at the center of her life. Even in decline, her humor was always intact, and her joy never ceasing. One of her favorite lines was, “Getting old isn’t for chickens!” Or “Fewer and fewer of my body parts are showing up for roll call.”

We already miss her wit, her warmth, her gentleness, and her wisdom. Yet we remain profoundly grateful for her legacy of love and faith, which set a standard difficult to match but worthy of every effort. By the testimony of her long life, she showed us the beautiful and lasting fruit that love can bear. “Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.” — 1 Corinthians 13:7–8

Funeral services, celebrating Barbara's life, will be held on Friday, November 28, 2025 at 3:00 p.m. at Valley Baptist Church, 3328 AR-36, Searcy, AR 72143, approximately 2 miles west of Powell Funeral Home. A catered lunch will be served at Valley Baptist Church at 1:30 p.m. If planning to attend the luncheon, please RSVP in the comment section of Mrs. Thompson's obituary page.

**Attire:**

We invite you to wear bright and joyful colors as we celebrate Mimi's life -- both on this side of heaven, as a life well-lived, and her eternal life on the other side, which we cannot now see.

Although we grieve, we are grateful that we do not grieve as those without hope since we know that Jesus has overcome death and Barbara's physical

death is not the end of her story.

We celebrate with her as she dances in heaven and enjoys the most beautiful music she's ever heard!

"But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him." - 1 Thes.4:13 & 14

"Life is Eternal"

I am standing upon the seashore

A ship at my side spreads her white sails to the morning breeze and starts for the blue ocean. She is an object of beauty and strength and I stand and watch her until at length she hangs like a speck of a white cloud just where the seas and sky come down to mingle with each other. Then some one at my side says, "There! She's gone."

Gone where? Gone from my sight-that is all.

She is just as large in mast and hull and spar as she was when she left my side, and just as able to bear her load of living freight to the place of destination.

Her diminished size is in me, not in her;

and just at the moment when some one at my side says, "There! She's gone," there are other eyes watching her coming, and other voices ready to take up the glad shout, "There she comes!"

Arrangements are entrusted to Powell Funeral Home of Searcy. [www.powellfuneralhome.net](http://www.powellfuneralhome.net).



# Previous Events

## Funeral Service

NOV **28**. 3:00 PM (CT)

Valley Baptist Church  
3328 W. Beebe-Capps  
3328 W. Hwy 36  
Searcy, AR 72143

# Tribute Wall

“ Mrs. Margaret Barbara “Mimi” Gatwood Thompson

*Today, I am here to honor and celebrate the beautiful life of Mrs. Margaret Barbara Gatwood Thompson, My beloved Mimi & friend , A devoted Christian, she loved the Lord Jesus Christ with a deep and unwavering passion. Her faith was not just something she spoke about; it overflowed from her spirit, shaping the way she lived, loved, and walked through this world, and through this life . I will never forget her last prayer. It was short and so very sweet, yet it revealed the depths of her heart. In that simple prayer lived a lifetime of devotion, gratitude, and trust in her Savior. It was Mimi’s heart of a mother pure, humble, and full of grace. One of our greatest achievements together during our journey of friendship was the fact that , Mimi and I read through the entire New Testament together. Well—I read, and she listened. Her macular degenerative eye disease may have dimmed her physical sight, but it never , ever could her spirit or her love for life , Her humor could light a room, and her kindness could calm a storm. She was a true inspiration to me , a testament of how endurance , determination and dedication pays off, I never got to hear Mimi play the cello , but I did receive the gift of seeing and hearing her play the piano., I can still hear her playing even now!*

*She loved her family deeply—all of them. And I was honored when she adopted me as one of her own, a gift I will cherish forever. She often shared stories of her childhood growing up in a family of musicians. She would tell me how they all practiced their instruments at the same time and laugh, saying, “Oh, I know the neighbors couldn’t wait until we children learned those chords!” Music was woven into the very fabric of her life.*

*Mimi played her beloved cello for many years in both the Nashville Orchestra and the Memphis Symphony Orchestra. She loved that instrument, and I believe one of her favorite pieces to perform was Messiah. I looked like a star struck child looking intently at her listening to her every word , her story telling was like hearing a fairy tale, As much as she loved music—and she truly did—she loved her children with an even greater passion and dedication, on our long walks down memory lane, or perhaps down Cherry Street where*

*she lived for so many years, she flooded and filled my heart with stories, reflections, memories and the warmth of a life deeply loved and richly lived .*

*I could share memories of Mimi all day long. She left an imprint on my heart unlike anyone before her. I loved her, and she loved me. Our journey on this earth together has come to its close, but what a journey it was.*

*In her final days, I witnessed something I will never forget—a peaceful, gentle, tender transition from this life to the next. She truly owned Psalm 23. She claimed it, she lived it, and in her last days, God Himself made sure she experienced every single word. “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”*

*Mimi has dwelled, and now Mimi rests. In the loving arms of her Savior, whom she served so faithfully.*

*Well done, dear Mimi. You ran your race with grace, with laughter, love , joy with determination dedication you ran it well and finished it well ...*

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**little Barbara** - November 27, 2025 at 01:15 AM



“ *Sweetest Sunrise Bouquet was purchased for the family of Barbara Gatwood Thompson.*



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November 24, 2025 at 01:36 PM

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“ It is not difficult to give tribute to a woman who was an epitome of love to her family & friends. But it seems impossible to share just one memory, when there are thousands from a lifetime of love... which one do I choose? I will share just an aroma of sweet fragrance of her from the most recent & most frail days before her victorious departure for home with Jesus. Yes, she was a woman of faith -- both knowing Jesus as her Lord & Saviour, & being known by Him, as His precious child. Though she read through the Bible with my Dad, she did not accumulate a large deposit of Scripture memory verses. But of the ones she had, she made great use, referring to them in the 30+ poems she wrote in her nineties, & reciting one in particular at night before going to bed. The last time we were both able to speak together by phone, just days before her home- going, (keep in mind that she could barely speak at all & it was quite an effort for her to try to form even a few words, I asked her if she wanted to say the 23rd Psalm together as we had done many times before, very much aware that she would probably only be able to be listening. I started, "The Lord is my Shepherd...". To my utter amazement, she began to mouth isolated words. I slowed down to accommodate her labored pace. I kept going very slowly. She managed to get a phrase out. I tried to keep it going, but found myself choked up at hearing her soft & broken efforts continue to get a bit stronger. I wanted to hear her struggling voice & found myself the listener, as she continued ... barely getting the words formed & audible, " Surely goodness... mercy will follow me... 'all my days' (is the way she said it) ...& I will dwell... in the house... of the Lord, forever!" Tears were streaming down my face. I was so proud of her -- both her legacy of loving the Lord & His Word that much, & of loving us! With literally some of her last breaths, & definitely, last words on this side of heaven, she was comforted & comforting others with His Word! Her body was frail, but her spirit was lion-like. Whether I live to the point of frailty or not, I hope to be like her. She has set a great example for me... for all of us!

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Greer Llewellyn - November 16, 2025 at 12:53 PM

SB

“ I was one of Ms Barbara's caregivers in her last five months, when I started I wasn't sure she would ever except me. She'd decide to go for a walk and didn't intend on me going, so I slipped out a few steps behind her and follow her because I needed to be sure she was ok and didn't fall or anything. One day she caught me coming out the door behind her, she asked, " what are you doing?" I said, oh I thought I'd join you, do you mind? She said " Oh, no that will be fine." That was when I felt accepted. I trailed along and off we went for our walk. She loved walks and could out walk me no doubt, no matter how hot it was. Very nice lady, always thankful always full of grace and always seemed to want to be a good hostess. I will always remember her & the delightful stories she told and how full of love those tales of her life and the joy that shone on her face when she spoke of her kids and grandchildren. She told me time & again how blessed her life was and she meant it. Hugs to her beautiful family, I see where your warmth and grace came from -  
Sherry Barnett

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Sherry Barnett - November 14, 2025 at 10:01 PM

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*Thank you, Sherry. We are so grateful to God for bringing you into her life at just the right time to help care for her. Your thoughtful, handsewn & practical gifts, like the hanging holder for the zinc oxide cream that needed to be applied frequently, kept nearby, but out of the way, was the perfect solution! -- so reflective of your personal & problem-solving approach to care-giving. Thank you for making her life during the hardest part of her journey, more safe, more comfortable & present-in-the-moment when I, as her daughter, & other family members could not be there. You are a blessing! And, I say this on my mom's behalf, both publicly gratefully to Barb, & Annette & Kera & Amber, & to the staff at Providence, & those from Hospice, who cared for her so well, especially this past year of her life on this side of heaven -- THANK YOU! Each of you brought something special & unique. A very deep & singular thanks to Barb is deserved, for the above & beyond duty, consistent care & love that you brought to her life this whole past year, reading the Bible to her daily, singing praise songs with her when she could join in & even when she no longer could sing, sitting by her side long hours, making sure the schedule of care she needed was being kept day-in & day-out, communicating with the family so that we could continue to make adjustments to her care, as needed & also capture those special moments when she was awake during those last few weeks, & so much more! You became like another daughter to her. God definitely gave us a wonderful blessing when He sent you! -- a very special thank you!!*

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**Greer Llewellyn** - November 16, 2025 at 11:36 AM