



Mary Lou Taylor Dunn

March 3, 1948 - February 27, 2021

Mary Lou Taylor Dunn, 72, of Searcy, Arkansas, passed into life eternal on February 27, 2021, after a lengthy illness.

Mary Lou was born on March 3, 1948, the youngest of three daughters born to Judge Elmo and Nancy Lee Taylor. She was raised in a household of keen minds, voracious readers, and strong, unabashed opinions. This environment also bred in her a love for family, Searcy, Gulf Shores, Alabama, good food, storytelling, and laughter, as well as the core belief that a lifelong nurturing of one's faith and education is the key to a fulfilling life.

While a senior at Searcy High School, Mary Lou went to volunteer at The Sunshine School, the school for developmentally disabled students in Searcy, at the urging, bordering on insistence, of her sister Mildred. Teaching special education and working with her students and their families became her lifelong calling.

She received her bachelor's degree in Education from Arkansas State Teachers College in 1971 and her master's in Special Education from Harding College in 1977

Mary Lou began her career in education teaching fourth, fifth, and sixth-grade special education at McRae Elementary, while also serving on the board of

directors of The Sunshine School. During this time she was also selected as Outstanding Young Educator and Professional Women's Woman of the Year.

She left McRae Elementary in 1978 to become the executive director of The Sunshine School. Under her guidance, The Sunshine School grew from a small school with a staff of 12 serving 32 students to the thriving school it is today, serving 75 students with a staff of 30.

By 1998, The Sunshine School was full and could accept no new students. Mary Lou and The Sunshine School board of directors envisioned a new \$1.6 million facility that opened in 2011 so that it could better serve students and their families.

Mary Lou and The Sunshine School community also sensed a need to serve developmentally disabled adults as well as children. Under her leadership, the White County Group Home opened in 1986; today it provides residential services for 15 adults. Mary Lou retired from The Sunshine School in 2018 after forty years of service as executive director.

Mary Lou served on the board of directors of Special Olympics Arkansas - Area 6 for many years. She worked with the Performing Arts Center on the Square, was a member of the Searcy Civitan club, was an active supporter of United Way in White County, and served as a women's social club sponsor at Harding University for many years.

Sociologists tell us that each of us can expect to significantly impact the lives of only six to ten people during our lifetime. This did not apply to Mary Lou. She was a daily demonstration of service, love, and commitment, and she lived a life of true significance. The impact she had on the thousands of students she served and their families is immeasurable, and all of those lives are better today for having known Mary Lou.

In her personal life, the beaches of Gulf Shores, Alabama, were Mary Lou's happy place. She visited Gulf Shores at least once (and often twice) each summer from 1950 through 2020.

Just like her parents and her sisters, she was fiercely (but not blindly) loyal to the Arkansas Razorbacks and to the Democratic Party. She enjoyed a lively discussion. Mary Lou's close friends and family members all knew that if you wanted to debate her on a topic, you would be well served to be knowledgeable on the said topic because the odds were good that she probably was.

She was preceded in death by her parents, Elmo and Nancy Lee Taylor; her sisters, Nancy Lee Sturm and Mildred Wilbourn; and her brother-in-law, Bill Sturm, Sr.

Mary Lou is survived by her lifelong friend, Sally Paine, of Searcy; her brother-in-law, Jim Wilbourn, of Searcy; by her nieces and nephews: Karen Mode of Little Rock, Arkansas; Becca Long of Perry, Georgia; Alan Wilbourn of Fayetteville, Arkansas; Dan Wilbourn of Searcy; Bill Sturm, Jr., of Kansas City, Missouri; Merrick Wilbourn of Durham, North Carolina; and Leslie Sinyard of Perry, Georgia; by her ten great-nieces and great-nephews, and by her great-great-niece and two great-great-nephews.

She is also survived by a legion of friends, former students and their families, and her church family at College Church of Christ in Searcy.

She is also survived by Molly and Millie, the latest in a long line of dogs she and Sally loved and nurtured. In one of her last text messages during the recent snowfall, Mary Lou reported that "Molly loves the snow. Milly, not so

much.”

Mary Lou had hoped to see the new Sunshine School building become debt-free in her lifetime. Memorials for the building fund may be made to The Sunshine School, PO Box 831, Searcy, AR 72145.

While she will be deeply missed, we are consoled by the sure and certain knowledge that a joyous and raucous reunion was held in Heaven last Saturday morning. St. Peter probably had to shush a few of our relatives.

There will be a Celebration of Life service at College Church of Christ in the Family Room on Sunday, March 14, 2021 at 4:00 pm for all that want to attend. Bring a lawn chair and have a hot dog with us as we celebrate.

Arrangements entrusted to Powell Funeral Home of Searcy. www.powellfuneralhome.net.

Previous Events

Celebration of Life Service

MAR **14**. 4:00 PM (CT)

The Sunshine School
901 Airport Loop
Searcy, AR 72143

Tribute Wall

MD

“ Margaret Davis lit a candle in memory of Mary Lou Taylor Dunn



Margaret Davis - March 03, 2021 at 10:05 AM

DK

“ MLD, we all love you so much! It breaks my heart to hear that you are gone. James Gregory adored you and Sally Paine as much as his family, Thank You, for all the things you have done for our special needs community, you and Sally

*James & Devon Stewart
Courtney, James Gregory, & McKenzie
Andrew & Donna Kimberling.*



Devon Kimberling-Stewart - March 02, 2021 at 05:55 PM

LB

“ So sad to hear of Mary Lou's passing!! I'm sure she will be missed by her many friends and family, especially those at Sunshine School! I have great memories of the 9 years that I was there, especially under Mary Lou's leadership! Lois Hinton Bartley

Lois Bartley - March 02, 2021 at 01:46 PM

CB

I carpoled with Mary Lou and Mary Jean Norman the year of 70 and 71. Enjoyed my time getting to know Mary Lou. She was a gifted lady.

Carolyn Bass - March 02, 2021 at 07:33 PM