



## Brenda D. Gavin

April 21, 1948 - March 17, 2016

Brenda Davidson Gavin, DVM, MBA

Brenda Davidson Gavin, DVM. MBA (67) of Philadelphia, PA died suddenly March 17, 2016. A nationally recognized venture capitalist and local business leader, Dr. Gavin nurtured many new life science companies and mentored an extraordinary number of both young and established colleagues. Struck down by a catastrophic cerebral hemorrhage, Dr. Gavin continued to help others to the end, providing gift-of-life donations to four organ recipients.

Ms. Gavin was born April 21, 1948 in Tahlequah, OK, the capital of the Cherokee Nation, of which she was a proud member. She grew up in Tulsa, OK and Seneca and Springfield, Missouri where her entrepreneurial father William Davidson, operated Oklahoma Tire and Supply (Otasco) stores and her mother, Erma, worked in the home and as an evening shift telephone operator.

Ms. Gavin first came to Philadelphia in 1970 after completing her Bachelor of Science degree at Baylor University. She worked as a University of Pennsylvania research assistant and then as a Philadelphia Department of Public Health sanitarian before leaving in 1972 for a year of travel with her first husband, Dr. Gregory Politi. Ms. Gavin divorced in 1977, after she had returned to her home state of Missouri to train in veterinary medicine. She was awarded her Doctor of Veterinary Medicine degree magna cum laude from the University of Missouri in 1977.

Dr. Gavin then joined the two-year Epidemic Intelligence Service program at the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta, GA, where she was a commissioned officer in the US Public Health Service. She worked with the CDC on the infectious disease outbreak originating at the 1976 American Legion convention in the Philadelphia Bellevue-Strafford hotel that became known as Legionnaire's disease. She later led the CDC team investigating a legionnaire's outbreak at the Indiana University Memorial Union that confirmed the previously uncertain source of this contagious bacterium to be from a building cooling tower.

Turning down offers from the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton Business School and School of Veterinary Medicine, she joined her future husband, Laurence J. Gavin, MD in Austin and San Antonio, TX where she earned her Master of Business Administration

degree at the University of Texas, San Antonio where her lifelong interest in the venture capital industry was first sparked. In 1981 she joined International Minerals and Chemical Corporation, Terre Haute, IN as manager of new product development and moved to Chicago in 1985 to manage IMC's venture capital investments and business development activities.

Dr. Gavin returned to Philadelphia in 1986 as director of business development for SmithKline Beecham Animal Health Products. In 1989 she was named vice-president of S.R. One, Limited, a bioscience venture capital subsidiary of GlaxoSmithKline, where she later served as President from 1999 to 2002. In 2000, Dr. Gavin also became a general partner in EuclidSR Partners Corporation, a \$250 million NY and PA venture capital fund focused on life sciences and information technology.

In 2002 Dr. Gavin co-founded Quaker Partners, a \$700 million venture capital firm based in Philadelphia that focused on healthcare and biotechnology development in the region, and she remained active with the firm at the time of her death. Dr. Gavin was one of the earliest and most prominent women in health sciences venture capital investing. During her career, Dr. Gavin worked with scientists and physicians to start many new companies and guided numerous new start-ups as a board member and investor. While recognized for her scientific understanding and business acumen, she is best known for the extraordinary breadth of her relationships and connections in the science and business worlds. On countless occasions she used her remarkable powers of recall to connect potential leaders with new companies, investors with new product ideas and young and seasoned colleagues with new opportunities, usually while simultaneously recollecting their last meal together, including where and what each had to eat and, at the same time, making plans for a follow-up breakfast meeting.

Dr. Gavin served as a board member and a leader of numerous community and professional organizations, including the National Venture Capital Association, Greater Philadelphia Venture Group, Ben Franklin Technology Partners and Development Authority, BioAdvance, Penn State Research Foundation, Monell Institute International Advisory Board, The Investment Advisory Board of the Harrington Discovery Institute (University Hospitals in Cleveland, OH) and the WHYH Health & Science Advisory Board. Her many official recognitions include the 2002 Greater Philadelphia Venture Group Blair Thompson Lifetime Venture Award, 2005 Alliance of Women Entrepreneurs Iris Newman Award, 2009 Early Stage East Sal Bucciari Venture Impact Award and the 2010 Pennsylvania Biotechnology Association Hubert Schoemaker Leadership Award.

Dr. Gavin married Laurence J. Gavin, MD, whom she met at the CDC, at her home in Philadelphia on a 1987 spring day that was so warm guests were advised to wear shorts. Their only child, twenty-seven year-old Zachary William Gavin, works locally at Accenture. When her son was diagnosed with a learning difference, Dr. Gavin focused her enormous energy and connections on educational advocacy, serving on the board of The

Crossroads School and, at one point, recruiting a world-renowned learning researcher to Philadelphia for a Delaware Valley Friends School education conference.

An accomplished cook and entrancing, opinioned conversationalist, Dr. Gavin (and her dishes) were welcome at countless social events and she loved to entertain, most recently organizing an annual fall open house for her new Society Hill neighborhood. She made unusual and memorable connections from all walks of life, often over meals, such as hosting a Thanksgiving dinner that included two principal musicians of the Philadelphia Orchestra and the Eagles offensive line coach. She was an active member and leader at the Overbrook Presbyterian Church, where for 30 years she treasured the organization's diverse membership and superlative music program. An avid reader, she was a member of a local book club of women colleagues and friends.

Dr. Gavin is survived by her husband of 29 years, Dr. Laurence J. Gavin, and son, Zachary W. Gavin, as well as her sister, Glenna Murdock and mother, Erma Davidson Trogdon, both of Loveland, Colorado and six nieces and nephews. She was predeceased by her father, William J. Davidson.

Memorial services will be held Saturday, March 26, at 11 am, with a reception to follow, at:

Overbrook Presbyterian Church

6376 City Avenue

Philadelphia, PA 19151

215-877-2744

<http://www.overbrookpresb.org/>

On Friday, March 25 between 6 and 8 pm, the family will be receiving any visitors who cannot attend the Saturday memorial service at:

Chadwick & McKinney Funeral Home

30 E. Athens Ave.

Ardmore, PA 19003

610-642-6303

<http://www.chadwickmckinney.com/>

In lieu of flowers, contributions may be made in Brenda's memory to the Overbrook Presbyterian Church, Delaware Valley Friends School or the Philadelphia Zoo. While Brenda enjoyed flowers, she treasured these organizations even more!

As you know, Brenda reveled in making and nurturing connections and she loved stories. We would love to hear your favorite Brenda memory or anecdote. If you would like to share, please use the funeral home's website or her Facebook site: In Memory of Brenda Gavin.

Zachary and I appreciate all your love, prayers and support, past and future, which will help fill the very large hole her untimely absence has left in our hearts.

Larry

# Events

---

**MAR** **The family will receive guests** 06:00PM - 08:00PM

**25**

---

Chadwick & McKinney Funeral Home  
30 East Athens Avenue, Ardmore, PA, US

**MAR** **Memorial Service** 11:00AM

**26**

---

Overbrook Presbyterian Church  
6376 City Avenue, Overbrook, PA, US

# Comments

---



“ How very sad for the family, and the world that Brenda has gone, she was a wonderful woman and a mentor to me. My deepest condolences and I will look for her angelic wisdom to remain with us now, She can help from the other side.  
Nola Masterson

**Nola Masterson** - April 05, 2016 at 11:43 AM

---



“ Larry and Zach--my thoughts are with you. I just learned the sad news from Brenda's sister Glenna. I was a vet school classmate of Brenda's and lived in her house on Ross Street, Columbia, MO, for 2 years. She was a role model and a good friend to me then and in the decades since. Brenda was intelligent, strong, kind, and just, a wonderful being. May she rest in peace.  
Peg Miller

**Margaret Miller** - April 03, 2016 at 03:31 PM

---



“ To the Gavin Family, I am so sorry for your loss. I remember meeting Mr. and Mrs. Gavin through Crossroads School. What a lovely family, that raised a fine young man. It was a pleasure to have taught Zach in middle school. Prayers to the entire family.

**Marge MacMillan** - April 01, 2016 at 03:50 PM

---



“ Brenda was one of my favorite people in the VC industry. What separated her most, however, was the fact that she made time for everyone who asked. She was always available for a meeting or coffee, even when she knew the meeting would yield little in return. I'm very sorry for the family's loss. Please know that everyone who knew her professionally has great memories of her energy and selflessness.

**Chad Norman** - March 28, 2016 at 04:53 PM

---



“ Larry and Zachary, I am so sorry. I loved Brenda very much and she was a steady positive influence from the time we first met in Terre Haute and she introduced me to the work I've done ever since.

Larry, I was just looking forward to introducing her to my grandson Eugene who is the age now my son (Eugene's father) was when we attended your wedding along 29 years ago.

I am writing this from New Zealand where I am camping in nature areas and visiting wild life sanctuaries ... taking Brenda with me as I go and perhaps as I've always done.

With love, Teri

**Teri Willey** - March 25, 2016 at 07:54 PM

---



“ Brenda was such an inspiring person. Always cheerful, always warm, she managed all her responsibilities with grace. She was never too busy to offer help, and we turned to her several times for leads for jobs or internships for our children. My children report she was also a wonderful Sunday School teacher. We shared experiences as parents of American University classmates, and she also recruited us as a host family for the African Leadership Academy. We enjoyed her hospitality at her home on several occasions, and also at the wonderful Vietnamese dinners she arranged after Messiah sing-ins. We will all greatly miss her, and send our deepest condolences to her family.

Elizabeth Cosgriff & Joe Piatt and family

**Elizabeth Cosgriff** - March 25, 2016 at 08:41 AM

---



“ Full Of Love Bouquet was purchased for the family of Brenda D. Gavin.



March 24, 2016 at 09:24 PM

---



“ I didn't know Brenda well but I wanted to express my appreciation for her. She selflessly gave her time to some MBA students from Utah working on a project for a life science start up. We were so grateful for her willingness to help us out. What she shared really helped so much. She didn't have to help us. She didn't know us. But she was willing to share her lifetime of knowledge and her time. She must have been just the most amazing person. I am so sorry for your loss.

**Heather** - March 24, 2016 at 11:25 AM

---



“ Anne Frank lit a candle in memory of Brenda D. Gavin



**Anne Frank** - March 23, 2016 at 09:35 PM

---



“ I'm so sad for the entire family. Larry, Zachary, Erma, Glenna, Jim, Megan & others. What a gift Brenda was to the world. I'm so very sorry for your loss. I'm so happy we were able to reconnect in 2011 after many many years (from high school). A sad time indeed. Love & prayers from both Howard & myself. Shirley Mudd

**shirley** - March 23, 2016 at 04:54 PM

---



“ To Larry and Zach - my former neighbors in Overbrook Farms,

I know you must be very sad to lose Brenda so suddenly. To me Brenda was a role model, friend, and mentor. I had the pleasure of serving as the Chairman of the DVVG after Brenda. Brenda was a wonderful Chairman and as a departing gift she gave all of her directors a copy of the Dr. Seuss book "Oh the Places you Will Go!" I was always encouraged to be a better venture capitalist, wife, and Mother because I knew Brenda to be excellent at all of her institutional roles. This fact gave me hope that someday, somehow, someway I too would learn how to be a better version of myself and I knew that I could look to how she invested, Mothered, partnered, loved for guidance. Brenda meant more to me than words could ever describe and I am so sorry for your loss.

With much love and fondness,

Tami Fratis formerly of 6435 Overbrook Avenue and TL Ventures

**Tami Fratis** - March 23, 2016 at 01:56 PM

---



“ It is with heavy hearts that we offer our sincere condolences to Larry, Zach, Glenna, Jim, Megan, Brenda's Mom and the Gavin Family.

We are grateful that Brenda & Larry visited us, last May at our home in New Hampshire. At that time, we had the opportunity to reminisce about our days when we met in Terre Haute, Indiana and our many memories that we created since that time. We would all like to leave a legacy as impressive as Brenda's, but she left it to us too soon because she had so much more to do.

Brenda made us feel that we are more wonderful than we think we are and we will hold that thought in our hearts as her special gift to us. We will miss her and remember her with gratitude for being our dear and supportive friend. Rest peacefully our beloved friend and may your family have comfort in remembering the love you shared with them.

Marsha & Ralph Single  
New London, NH

**Marsha & Ralph Single** - March 22, 2016 at 05:46 PM

---



“ I will never forget all the years Brenda hosted the Gavin clan at her home for Christmas and at the beach in the Outer Banks of North Carolina. She did it with grace and style and made it look easy at the same time. We had tons of fun ghost crabbing and many a laugh over the repeat summer attire that popped up in the group photo that my brother always set up. Whether it was a decorative Christmas popper at each place setting or a sand game for all to play she made you feel special and welcomed. Brenda was a gem of a lady and our family will never be the same without her.

Anne Frank - March 22, 2016 at 02:35 PM

---



“ I knew Brenda professionally. We met on the Ben Franklin Technology Development Authority Board and it didn't take long to recognize how bright and constructive Brenda was. I invited Brenda to join the Penn State Research Foundation Board and, lucky for us, she accepted. Brenda always brought her A game to the meetings. She had nothing to gain personally, and she wasn't an alum, but she wanted to help our scientists be successful. She provided invaluable guidance, and much needed reality checks. But always in the most positive of ways. When I joined the Smithsonian I invited Brenda to come and meet with some of our veterinarians from the National Zoo who thought they had IP ready for prime time. All I could offer in return was a behind the scenes tour at the Zoo. Of course, for Brenda the offer was too good to pass up, and she spent a day with me. Her advise to the vets was, as always, spot on. But what I remember about the day, was her pleasure in meeting the staff at the Zoo, her curiosity, and always her warmth and good will.

Deepest condolences to her family, about whom she spoke so lovingly, and her colleagues who she clearly treasured.

Eva J. Pell

Eva J. Pell - March 22, 2016 at 09:40 AM

---



“ Brenda always made you feel you were the most important thing in the world to her unless her dog was with you, in which case you were the second most important thing. Brenda always knew what I was talking about, usually more than I did myself. Brenda was a very caring and generous person and is surely in heaven now, probably bay side.

Don Frank - March 22, 2016 at 08:51 AM

---



“ Brenda was a very special person. A great friend and an tribute to the venture community. She will be missed.

Nicole Vitullo

**Nicole Vitullo** - March 22, 2016 at 08:31 AM

---



“ Brenda gave me a piece of advise I have tried to live by and repeated countless times. "The seven most important words in business: Never underestimate the importance of being liked." Brenda embodied this philosophy. Brenda was universally well liked and admired. Every conversation with Brenda offered a special insight. I will miss those insights.

Adam

**Adam Dakin** - March 21, 2016 at 10:38 PM

---



“ Larry and Zach, I am so sorry to hear about Brenda ' s passing. I remember her fondly from our days at Crossroads. What a lovely lady. My thoughts and prayers are with you both. Peace, Karen Martini

**Karen Martini** - March 21, 2016 at 07:16 PM

---



“ I met Brenda when we worked at Pitman-Moore together and we stayed in touch over the years. She was a great mentor for women at a time when there weren't many of those. She also was a kind, funny and generous friend who just made you feel special. My heart goes out to her family and to everyone who was lucky enough to be her friend.

Ellen Clough

**Ellen Clough** - March 21, 2016 at 04:38 PM

---



“ Footprints on the Heart:  
Some people come into our lives and quickly go  
Some people make our souls to dance  
They awaken us to new understanding  
With the passing whispering of their wisdom  
Some people make the sky more beautiful to gaze upon  
They stay in our lives for a while  
Leave foot prints in our hearts  
And we are never, ever the same

Pari and Dr. Rangan (Kibow Biotech Inc)

Dr. Rangan - March 21, 2016 at 03:56 PM

---



“ Dear Larry and Zach,  
My deepest sympathies. No words can ease your pain.

Rest in peace my friend – I miss you and will always remember your infectious optimism and smile.

In her loving memory...  
Mahmoud Mahmoudian

Mahmoud Mahmoudian - March 21, 2016 at 02:14 PM

---



“ Brenda was one of my closest friends at Baylor. We kept in touch over the years and I was overjoyed when Brenda and Katie McFarland(another great friend from Baylor) came to visit me in Texas several years ago. What a great time we had!! Brenda always had heart. She was one of the most brilliant, generous, kind and conscientious people I have ever known. My outstanding memory from Baylor days is her (and Katie, I think) "smuggling" their cat carcasses out of the lab, under over coats and bringing them back to the dorm to study for finals, as the rest of us groaned in revulsion! She was one of a kind, a great friend and I am much grieved by her passing.

Shelley Wells Judd

Shelley Wells Judd - March 21, 2016 at 12:08 PM

---



“ Brenda was a friend and mentor to many people throughout the Delaware Valley including Delaware Life Science community. I value the times we shared and her respect and compassion for others.

My sincere condolences to Brenda's extended family. Inwill miss her smile!

Chris Yochim

Chairman, Delaware BIO

**chris Yochim** - March 21, 2016 at 10:40 AM

---



“ I am very saddened by the tragic loss of Brenda and send my condolences to her family, many friends, and colleagues. Brenda was one of my longest and most admired friends. We were college roommates and our paths crossed several time over the years. Our friendship always picked up just where we left it. We shared a passion for science, drug development, and helping others. We often giggled about being woman pioneers in male dominated fields. I was called the hummingbird when I worked for Abbott. If I am that, then Brenda was a super hummingbird. When we got together things flew and got done. When we landed at Baylor together, people were startled at how fast we moved and talked. Brenda loved her family and friends. She contributed greatly to her profession and her community and I'm proud to have had the gift of such a great friend.

Kathy McFarland

**Kathy McFarland** - March 21, 2016 at 10:15 AM

---



“ Dear Larry and Zach,

What an honor it was to know Brenda. As you well know, her intellect and wit could put a roomful of men in their place in minutes.. Brenda came on to the board of NVCA at a critical transition time and worked tirelessly to right the ship. As the then new President she mentored and encouraged me, while calling me out when needed. Most importantly, she made it clear to me that family, not business was paramount. There are few venture capitalists I know who are on equal footing with Brenda. Her legacy is a great one. I am proud to say I knew her. She will be missed.

Regards,

Mark Heesen

Past President, NVCA

**Mark Heesen** - March 21, 2016 at 08:09 AM

---



“ Dear Larry and Zach, I'm so stunned by this sad news and remember wonderful times with Brenda as room mothers at The Crossroads School. She is all of the things your friends have written, smart, caring, thoughtful, faithful, funny, creative, innovative and she cared so much about Zach and about him receiving an education that fit his learning style. Zach, I know she is so proud of you. Brenda introduced the Willcoxes to the Outer Banks almost two decades ago and we've been going ever since, trying to replicate Brenda's style of hospitality by inviting friends and family to share times of fellowship and relaxation. Hers was a brilliant, inviting and relaxed model that reflected her successful desire to be a gracious host. Tom's and my thoughts and prayers are with you during this difficult time. I know that in the midst of sadness and grief, God's hand his holding you all. It is fitting that her service is on Easter Saturday as we are a resurrection people. Love and prayers for healing, peace and lots of happy memories, Courtenay and Tom Willcox

**courtenay willcox** - March 21, 2016 at 07:31 AM

---



“ Brenda was a venture colleague for 25 years. We served together on boards of Greater Philadelphia Venture Group and National Venture Capital Association. She was recognized leader and innovator in corporate and health care investing. Brenda was an effective adviser to entrepreneurs. Her practical feedback and referrals were respected and followed. She was a role model for women. Her friendship and wit will be sorely missed. Brenda left us much too soon. John Martinson, Edison Partners

**John Martinson** - March 20, 2016 at 09:40 PM

---



“ We met to think about the future of Overbook Church. The issue, as it so often is in the church today, was money and how to find more income to support the church, Many ideas were suggested, and then three young women, one of them Brenda Gavin, proposed we hold a dinner - a dinner celebrating the diversity of the congregation - a dinner they would call "The Taste of Overbook." What is more, they would charge \$20 or \$25 a person. I had never heard of a church dinner costing more than \$3! But, they did it - they brought it off because they had more faith than I, more hope. When the night came and people poured into the church I thought, "Thank God."

Today, I thank God for hope, for faith, for Brenda.

Dave McMillan

**David McMillan** - March 20, 2016 at 01:30 PM

---



“ How sad to learn of Brenda’s untimely passing. I was one of many beneficiaries of Brenda’s wisdom, kindness and insight since we first met in the 1980’s when she was with S.R. One and I with a start-up in Princeton. I am proud that she was a real friend over the years, someone who always took the time to listen and to be gracious and constructive in her comments. I never met anyone who didn’t have positive things to say about her for good reason. She was a lady, and a very special person.

My deepest sympathy to her family, who have lost a daughter, wife, mother and sister. May you have peace and wonderful memories. And also sympathy to her colleagues at Quaker Ventures who have lost a priceless resource, partner and friend.

I regret that I cannot attend the Memorial Service. I am traveling in Texas (!)

- John D. Rodwell

**John D. Rodwell** - March 20, 2016 at 12:47 PM

---



“ Brenda and I worked together at SK & F and later would see each other occasionally at meetings. She was exceptional and enjoyed working on projects that could make the world better. During the years, Brenda's leadership has resulted in formation of many successful companies in healthcare industry, which has benefited many more people that suffer from various health problems. Everyone that knew Brenda will miss her and our hearts go out to the Gavin family.

claude nash

**claude nash** - March 20, 2016 at 05:27 AM

---



“ Brenda and I met by chance in the summer of 1969 at LaGuardia airport waiting for our flights to Luxembourg. Coincidentally, we both were planning to spend the summer in Europe and both of us were stood up by our travel companions. The results were spending 24/7 together for 3 months and it remains one of the best memories of my life. Brenda had that rare combination of looks, brains, and a genuine thoughtfulness and concern for others. She had the gift of making you feel special. We have stayed in touch throughout the years and have seen each other when she traveled on business to RTP. To say that I will miss her is a huge understatement. She was a true blessing in my life and I will never forget her. May her family be granted peace and comfort during this difficult time.  
Love to Larry, Zach, Glenna, and Emma.  
Ann Brown

**ann brown** - March 19, 2016 at 08:58 PM

---



“ Brenda was one of the most dynamic and gracious women I have ever known. Her kindness, sense of humor, and concern for others were impressive. Words cannot express how much she will be missed. Nancy Gilhool

**Nancy Gilhool** - March 19, 2016 at 05:17 PM