



Eleanor Th. Vadala

September 8, 1923 - July 19, 2023

Eleanor Th. Vadala, 99, of Bala Cynwyd, PA, passed away on July 19, 2023 in her home in Bala Cynwyd.

Eleanor was born in National Park, NJ on Sept. 8, 1923 to Anna Maria Vadala and James Francis Vadala. She would go on to graduate from John Bartram High School in Philadelphia in 1941, and earn a Bachelor of Science in nutrition from Juniata College in Huntingdon, PA in 1947.

Following her schooling, Eleanor would later become a chemist, engineer, astronomer, artist, balloonist, instructor, and more. Her post-college career began at the Franklin Institute in Philadelphia, where she developed her lifelong interest in astronomy and ballooning. Eleanor later joined the Rittenhouse Astronomy Society, for which she served as treasurer or secretary and subsequently as president.

In 1954, Eleanor took her first balloon flight, which would be the first of many throughout her life. Nearly a decade later, in 1963, she became the third woman in America to hold an FAA-issued Balloon Pilot Certificate. She was also one of the first female pilots to participate in ballooning internationally with her involvement with the Fédération Aéronautique Internationale in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

Eleanor worked as a materials engineer at the Naval Air Development Center, first in the Philadelphia Navy Yard, and then in Warminster, throughout the mid-20th century. There, she researched and developed synthetic laminated materials for aircraft applications. In 1967, in honor of their 50th anniversary, the Philadelphia Navy Yard asked Eleanor to organize a gas balloon launch — an event for which she served as pilot-in-command of La Coquette, the same balloon flown in the film "Around the World in 80 Days."

An early and dedicated member of the Balloon Club of America, Eleanor today is known as a trailblazing figure in ballooning history in the United States. She was inducted into the U.S. Ballooning Hall of Fame in 2019.

Eleanor is survived by her nephew, Earl Vadala, and his wife Helen; her niece Linda Vadala; her great nephews Matthew, Nicholas, and James Vadala, and their spouses; her great niece Sarah Vadala; and her great-great nephews, Gabriel and Vincent Vadala. She is preceded in death by her parents; her brother, Earl A. Vadala; and her husband, Edwin F. Bailey.

Visitation with the family is to be from 10 a.m. to 11 a.m. Thursday, July 27, at Narberth Presbyterian Church, 205 Grayling Ave., Narberth, PA 19172. A funeral service will begin at 11 AM. Eleanor will be interred at Sunset Memorial Park, 33 County Line Rd., Huntingdon Valley, PA 19006, in a private ceremony.

Memorial contributions may be made to the Franklin Institute, 222 N 20th St, Philadelphia, PA 19103 with the notation "In memory of Eleanor Vadala" on the memo line of your donation.

Previous Events

Funeral Service

JUL 27. 11:00 AM (ET)

Narberth Presbyterian Church
205 Grayling Avenue
Narberth, PA 19072