



Joan Helena Walker

March 29, 1947 - July 6, 2025

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Joan Helena Walker, née Czochanski, formerly Wiskowski, passed away peacefully on July 6, 2025, at the age of 78. A trailblazing corporate executive; loving wife, sister, mother, and aunt; and compassionate advocate for social justice, Joan left an indelible mark on everyone whose life she touched.

Born in Jersey City, New Jersey, to Joseph and Helena Czochanski, Joan credited her parents for instilling in her a steadfast determination and keen intelligence. These traits led her through a remarkable life from early days in social work, to state government, and finally Fortune 500 executive suites.

Joan earned a bachelor's degree in sociology from Douglass College at Rutgers University and a master's degree in sociology from Rutgers University, launching a career that began with her calling as a social worker. In addition to visiting clients in their homes, she was particularly proud of her work with incarcerated individuals in New Jersey State Prisons. Her exceptional leadership abilities soon propelled her through New Jersey state government, where she rose to become Director of Motor Vehicles.

Transitioning to the private sector, Joan built a distinguished career spanning

advertising, public relations, telecommunications, and insurance. She served as Senior Vice President of Corporate Communications at Ameritech, Senior Vice President of Global Public Affairs at Pharmacia, Executive Vice President of Corporate Communications for Qwest Communications International, and ultimately Senior Vice President of Corporate Relations and acting Chief Marketing Officer for Allstate Insurance Company, where she was a valued member of the senior management team.

Throughout her career, Joan remained passionate about social issues, women's rights, and creating opportunities for others. Her commitment to the communities she worked and lived in was evident through her extensive board involvement, including her role as Board Chair of the Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum in Chicago from 2018 to 2020, and her service on the boards of prestigious organizations including the Art Institute of Chicago, Brookfield Zoo, the Chicago Children's Museum, Prentice Women's Hospital Northwestern Memorial, the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University, the Arthur W. Page Society, and the Ad Council.

Despite her professional achievements, Joan's greatest pride and joy came from her large, loving family. As the eldest of six siblings, she embraced her position as advisor, cheerleader, and guide. She hosted countless family holidays and celebrations, filling her home with warmth, laughter, and her legendary cooking. As a young adult, she delighted in taking her three youngest siblings on camping adventures, creating memories that would last lifetimes, and stories that became family lore.

Joan was a dedicated mother to her children, David and Christina, whom she shared with her first husband, Tom Wiskowski. She worked tirelessly to provide them with every opportunity and was their biggest champion, seeing nothing but greatness and potential in them both.

Joan loved travelling and experiencing the best of what other cultures had to offer. She approached each trip with curiosity, eager to experience and learn. Together with her late husband George, she explored the world, though she always returned with special fondness to Paris, her favorite destination. Joan delighted in being in nature and exploring the natural world. Whether taking in the vastness of the Rockies, listening to the waves crash on the pacific coast, or wandering quietly through one of her favorite local gardens, she found great peace and happiness in her time outdoors.

Joan was a voracious consumer of news and current affairs. She read multiple newspapers every day and engaged in one-sided arguments with the cable news anchors. Bringing her sharp intellect and well-researched opinions to spirited discussions about politics and world events, her friends and family knew they could count on her for thoughtful, informed perspectives on the issues of the day. She always knew what would be most interesting to the people in her life and was quick to share an article or story that made her think of them.

There was never a time in her life when Joan didn't have a family dog (or two) holding the position of her best friend. She shared her meals and her seats with her four-legged family members and deeply valued the pure and unconditional bond she shared with them.

Joan's legacy lives on through her children, David and Christina, and their wives, Mersedeh and Margareta; her beloved siblings Carol, Rita, John, Ann, and Jay, and their spouses Hyun ("Shawn"), John, and Allie; and many cherished nieces, nephews, great-nieces, and great-nephews. Despite living on opposite coasts from most of her family, she was always up-to-date on the latest milestones and events for everyone. Once she mastered video chatting, she was even happier to "attend" holidays and celebrations, sharing in the

constant laughter and excitement.

She was preceded in death by her parents, Joseph and Helena; her second husband, George; and her brothers-in-law, Walter and Micky.

Joan Helena Walker lived a life of purpose, achievement, and above all, love. Her exceptional generosity, sharp mind, and talent for making everyone in her presence feel welcome, seen, and valued will be remembered by all who knew her. She leaves behind a world made better by her presence and a family forever grateful for the extraordinary woman who shaped their lives with such grace, wisdom, and devotion.

A private funeral mass was held at St. Nicholas Catholic Church in Laguna Woods, CA, for immediate family, and a private memorial was held in Haverford, PA.

In lieu of flowers, the family asks for donations to be made in Joan's name to the Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum of the Chicago Academy of Sciences (<https://naturemuseum.org/donate>) and to Douglass Residential College at Rutgers University (<https://give.rutgersfoundation.org/schools-colleges/?prefn1=refinementschool&prefv1=DRC&start=0&sz=12>)