



Madeline Eliot Miller

September 29, 1944 - September 1, 2022

Madeline Eliot Miller of Philadelphia, PA, died at age 77 on Thursday, September 1st from encephalitis brought on by West Nile virus. She was a sublime mother, grandmother, spouse, aunt, friend, neighbor, teacher, gardener, and citizen. Her death was a tragic shock to all who knew her indomitable spirit, boundless warmth, and ebullient love of life.

Madeline was born in Norfolk, Virginia to Grady Francis Miller and Zelda Jones Miller. She attended Maury High School and earned a BA in English from Randolph-Macon Woman's College, where she discovered a sustaining community and a passion for learning. From there, she attended Simmons College, earning a master's degree in Library Sciences. While working at Harvard's Widener Library, she became a life-long feminist, ran her local chapter of NOW, and worked to try to pass the ERA in Massachusetts. The story goes that after offering suggestions on one of her then-husband's papers for Harvard Business School, he told her "If you're so smart, why don't you go to Harvard Business School?" She applied the next year, and was among the first wave of women to attend. In one class, a professor commanded the female students to serve their male peers donuts. She said it was one of the great regrets of her life that she got up and did it. She later told her daughter, "I was so young. I should have told him to go to hell."

That was as salty as Madeline ever got. She was a very polite iconoclast, and always self-deprecating. She described herself as “a hard worker,” instead of a powerhouse, though everyone who knew her saw it differently. After graduating with her MBA in 1970, she became a trailblazer for women in business. She landed senior positions at The Boston Company, where she won an award for leadership, and at Merrill Lynch in New York City. She was an enthusiastic mentor of other women, and found many admirers in the business world. But she always followed her own star, and in 1990 she left business to attend Bank Street College, where she earned her third master’s degree, this time in Early Childhood Education. She moved to Philadelphia and became a kindergarten teacher which was, without a doubt, the job of her heart. She loved her students, and especially enjoyed helping them learn to read. Her classroom was filled with butterflies, bunnies, and many hugs.

She has an adoring daughter, whom she named after herself, Madeline Miller. She raised her as a single mother with a village of wonderful friends and family, frequent trips to the library, and a menagerie of cats, chinchillas and hermit crabs. She was a fierce supporter of her daughter’s passions, and was so proud when she became a published (and, she would insist we add, a New York Times Bestselling) author. After her divorce from her first husband, she married Harold Gordon Leggett, her companion in many adventures and the love of her life. She was also an extraordinary grandmother to her two granddaughters, whom she cherished deeply. She spent hours reading to them, laughing with them, and teaching them to love bugs, dirt, flowers, books, and themselves.

Madeline delighted in the world. She had a beautiful, infectious laugh, and found great joy in daily life: her community, daffodils, poetry, cats, large travel mugs of tea, bamboo, hiking, worms, ferns, her ancestral home in LaCrosse Virginia, theater and the orchestra. Her energy was legendary. Aside from her busy personal and professional life, she served as the the first woman of the board of Randolph-Macon Woman's College, as well on the boards of The Shipley School, St Peter's School in Philadelphia, Thomas Jefferson's Poplar Forest, and The Society Hill Civic Association. She was a brilliant and unstoppable gardener and weeded the city of Philadelphia in her spare time. She had a strong moral compass, and a bedrock belief in doing what was right. She was a passionate advocate for education, social and reproductive justice, the environment, and each person's duty to make the world a better place. She volunteered in dozens of organizations, from libraries to schools to soup kitchens. She routinely cleaned the counters in public bathrooms and swept every street she ever lived on. She loved buying books for the children in her life.

Of her many gifts, perhaps her greatest was her capacity for connection. She made life-long friends wherever she went. She leaves behind a large group of family and friends who were like family, all of whom mourn her loss deeply. These include her daughter, Madeline, her son-in-law Nathaniel, her enchanting grand-daughters, Vera and Freya, her beloved second husband, Harold Gordon Leggett, as well as her dear sister, Elsie Holliday, her three treasured nieces, Joanna Stewart Felts, Mary Beth Stewart Dixon, and Kimberly Stewart, and their families.

She passed away with her daughter at her side, listening to her favorite song, Simon and Garfunkel's 59th Street Bridge Song (Feelin' Groovy). In honor of her life, support libraries, equality, and the environment. Celebrate children, hold each other close, and plant beauty in the world. We love you, Madeline. We will never stop missing you, remembering how you lit up our lives, or being grateful we knew you

Tribute Wall

TE

“ I worked in the La Crosse VA Town office from 1981 until my retirement in 2017. I have so many fond memories of Madeline’s visits to the office. She loved the house/property here in La Crosse. She kept me up to date on those granddaughters too. May she now Rest In Peace. So sorry for your loss. Tina Evans

Tina Evans - September 16, 2022 at 03:15 PM

CJ

“ I have know Madeline since before she married Gordon. The meetings we had were always up lifting. Then when she married Gordon the meetings continued to be such fun. She was always positive. She will be truly missed..

CARL J OFRIA JR - September 15, 2022 at 03:51 PM

MN

“ From Madeline’s Virginia cousins.

We are shocked and heartbroken to learn this sad news.

For “Young Madeline” - your Lynchburg Miller cousins send our love and deepest sympathies. Your mother was so proud of you in every possible way.

My mother absolutely adored your mother and it gives me some joy to think that my mom was waiting for her with open arms and they are laughing together once again.

We mourn with you.

Bill and Margaret Angela (Nelson) Phillips

Margaret Nelson - September 07, 2022 at 09:27 PM