

**Gilliat, Mary Jane (Watts) October 26, 1939—February 17, 2021**



Mary Jane (Watts) Gilliat died Feb. 17, 2021, at her home in Gaithersburg, Md. Her death was peaceful with her daughter Carrie and husband Bob at her side. She was 81 and would have been 82 in October.

Mary Jane was born Oct. 26, 1939, in Denver, Colo., where she was raised by her mother Ruth Winn. She considered the Boyds, friends from church, her second family and enjoyed being with them during weeks when her mother's job became too demanding for her to devote her full attention to her young daughter. An only child, Mary Jane claimed the three Boyd sons as her older brothers.

After graduating from Denver East High School in June 1957, Mary Jane boarded the Rock Island Rocket that fall and headed for Grinnell, where she found her home in newly renovated Mears Cottage / Hall. She appreciated Grinnell for many reasons, among which were its diverse student body; high academic standards; and a challenging, supportive faculty. With a major (and later degree) in English-journalism, she was proof editor of the *Scarlet and Black* and vice president of Theta Sigma Phi / Women in Communications. Preparing to become a teacher, she was also a member of the Student - Iowa State Education Association. Mary Jane's summer vacation experiences were a continuation of her academic interests in journalism and education. She was a counselor at Snow Hill Camp in the Pennsylvania Pocono Mountains (1959), and she attended the Theta Sigma Phi national conventions in both 1960 and 1961.

Mary Jane began her professional career in 1961 at Cherry Creek High School in suburban Denver, where she taught English and journalism and was the adviser to the student yearbook staff. In 1962 she was awarded a fellowship from *The Wall Street Journal* to attend a summer Newspaper Fund Seminar at the University of Minnesota -- an interesting experience with other teachers from various parts of the country.

In 1965 Mary Jane moved to Washington, D.C., where she worked in the Programming Office of the Latin American Division of the Agency for International Development. Soon after she moved to the D.C. area, she met her future husband Bob, an assistant general counsel in the Department of Defense, whom she married Dec. 17, 1967. When her first child Mark was born in 1969, Mary Jane moved her career to her home, recognizing the importance of raising him and three years later, also his sister Carrie. She continued to volunteer in her church and community -- at the preschool in an inner city D.C. church, at a retirement community, and as a GRASP volunteer for Grinnell (1998-2011). She was also active in the League of Women Voters.

Mary Jane's daughter Carrie described her mother as "always there for her children, husband, and friends. She genuinely cared for others, and she was always there for everyone else." I can

attest to that with many examples but one specific example here. One year when I took my student editors to D.C. for the National Scholastic Press Association convention, we arrived a day early to take advantage of Mary Jane's offer of a D.C. tour. It was an excellent tour, one that we all enjoyed. The next day, however, one of my editors was sick with a virus, not able to manage a day at the convention. Mary Jane stayed with her all day so that I could be with the others at the convention sessions. "Always there for everyone else."

In 2007 Mary Jane and Bob moved from their Kensington, Md., home to Asbury Methodist Village, a large retirement home in Gaithersburg. During the 14 years she lived at Asbury, Mary Jane volunteered and participated in the many activities offered, the classes, and cultural events both on and off campus. Her daughter's family lived close enough that she could spend more time with her granddaughters -- baking, cooking, and doing a multitude of crafts with them.

Mary Jane is survived by her husband Robert L. Gilliat, who now lives in an assisted living home in Olney, Md.; her son Mark Gilliat, of Falls Church, Va.; her daughter and son-in-law Carrie and James Baker, and her granddaughters Hailey and Brooke Baker, of Gaithersburg, Md.

A memorial service for Mary Jane will be later this year at Foundry United Methodist Church in Washington, D.C., where Mary Jane and her family were longtime active members.

As Mary Jane and I were taught by our journalism professor Herbert Prescott, reporters end their stories with a "-30-" as a sign of completion. Thus, I end this story with a "30" and a tear.

*Marilyn Kelsey*